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Not in the Hot Seat: The Impact of Broadcasting on Women

THE IMPACT of broadcasting on Irish women has been transformative on some occasions. In the early 1970s media campaigns were crucial to the successes of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM). A core tactic of the movement was to gain national media coverage for controversial campaign events, best exemplified by the contraceptive train to Belfast. Another key moment for women's liberation happened in March 1971 when the IWLM produced an episode of Raidió Teilifís Éireann's *The Late Late Show* in which it debated its manifesto for change. On the show, while introducing members of the IWLM, the program's presenter Gay Byrne referred to a "sentence in a report from the RTÉ authority that says 'Marian Finucane will never take *The Late Late Show* chair.'" Byrne saw the sentence as "supposed to be significant of the way that women are done down." Live on air, he vacated his chair to allow Finucane to present the IWLM's program. The episode was controversial and triggered weeks of debate on women's issues in the letters pages of all of the national print media. The role of the media in women's liberation was even specifically discussed on *The Late Late Show* by Lelia Doolan, a television producer who presented the IWLM's views on the "education or miseducation of girls and on social conditioning with particular reference to the media" (Levine 180). Sadly, more than forty years later, much of what Doolan said about the media and Irish women still holds true, and to date no female has since occupied *The Late Late Show* presenter's chair.

Women in Irish media are still not treated equally in terms of on-air representation or their participation as media workers. The 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which examined data from a total of 108 countries, observed a 1:3 female-to-male ratio as the proportion of women to men as subjects of Irish news (Ross

and Carter 1155). Women are also a minority of employees in the print and broadcast media (National Union of Journalists). The International Women's Media Foundation's *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* notes that internationally, women constitute only 33 percent of the full-time journalism workforce and that they hold 27 percent of top management positions, 35 percent of senior professional positions, and 33 percent of reporter positions (Byerly 9). In Ireland only 12 percent of all decision-makers in Irish media are female (European Institute for Gender Equality [hereafter EIGE] 26). Ironically, this inequality in both representation and participation is underpinned by a popular myth of the Irish Celtic Tiger that rapid economic growth benefited Irish women as much as men and heralded a postfeminist era of equality for Irish women. As Ging notes, "Much recent debate about gender in Ireland is underpinned, both implicitly and explicitly, by the assumption that equality is a *fait accompli* and that feminism's work is done" (53).

When it comes to the role of Irish women in broadcasting, the postfeminist cover story of gender equality makes it difficult to argue that Irish women have not achieved fair and equal representation in Irish media. But the idea of a postfeminist Ireland is belied by evidence to the contrary—as will be detailed in this article—that documents the enduring inequality suffered by Irish women in the media. Because of the prevalence of postfeminist discourse, women's underrepresentation in Irish media is quite commonly misunderstood. It is accounted for in neoliberal terms as a choice not to participate, or as a result of women's lack of confidence, rather than as a social or systemic problem (Women On Air). Similarly, there is little if any public understanding that there are structural barriers to women's entry into and retention in the broadcast industry. Public understanding holds that the glass ceiling has been well and truly shattered, that discrimination is a thing of the past, and that any odd persisting cases of inequality in the media workplace can be fixed with a little "leaning in" (Sandberg 8). Unfortunately for women, the predominant situation in contemporary Ireland is that broadcasting actively recreates, reinforces, and underpins the gender inequality evident in politics, industry, professions, and income in the wider society (Central Statistics Office [hereafter CSO] 10–11; Ferriter 204). Women are not represented equally on air or on screen in Irish broadcasting, nor do

they participate on equal terms in radio or television work. The final outcome of this situation is that broadcasting reproduces the patriarchal structures that are evident in other dimensions of Irish society, while all the time offering the cover story that women have never had it so good in media participation.

WOMEN (NOT) ON AIR

Research on the representation of women in media has focused on the questions of invisibility, stereotypes, and gender frames. The main strands of the international literature on women's depictions in media reveal firstly that women are numerically underrepresented across all media platforms in comparison to men (Ross and Carter 1148). Secondly, men are more likely than women to be presented as expert sources (Norris 14), and so their views are presented as more important and legitimate (Ross and Carter 1148). As Ross puts it, "If what we see and read and hear are men's voices, men's perspectives, men's news, then women continue to be framed as passive observers rather than active citizens" (467). Thirdly, women professionals working within the area of politics are visually—sometimes even explicitly—gendered and typecast in complex ways as part of party campaigns where the emphasis on gender is initiated by the party campaigns rather than being a result of media agenda-setting (Devere and Davies 65). Fourthly, women tend to be typecast around the sorts of topics that they discuss in the media. Huddy and Terkildsen found that women are assumed to be sensitive and warm and so more competent in dealing with education, health, and poverty rather than with the economy or defense (121). In addition, women politicians are connected to domestic issues (Heldmen et al. 315) and the private rather than public sphere (Lee 208–9).

In Ireland each of these four patterns is in evidence. Women are consistently underrepresented in broadcast output, as Ross and Carter found in their analysis of the proportion of women subject to coverage in Irish news. Furthermore, Ross notes that issues and topics traditionally seen to be particularly relevant to women tend to be pushed to the margins of the news in Ireland. In that way men's views and voices are privileged over women's, contributing to the ongoing secondary status of women's participation as citizens. Women in Irish

media generally tend to be more likely to be framed “as victim[s] . . . of various crimes and events . . . , [and] women were three times more likely than men to be described in terms of their family status (e.g., mother, wife, daughter), either as part of their personal biographical detail . . . or else they were invited to speak precisely because of their relationship to the main (male) news subject” (Ross and Carter 1155). Despite some improvement since the publication of the 1995 GMMP, the 2010 project showed that in Ireland “women’s voices, experiences, and expertise continue to be regarded by news industries as less important than those of men” (Ross and Carter 1148).

A similar lack of balance and equality is evident in a 2013 national radio-monitoring project conducted in cooperation with the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) and supported by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). In a country where radio enjoys an 87 percent listenership nationally (BAI), women’s participation rate in news programs on radio was only 33 percent, with men participating at a rate of 67 percent. The age cohort in which women dominated on air was in the younger, thirteen- to eighteen-years category, where their participation rate was 88 percent. Women’s presence was closest to parity in the nineteen- to thirty-four-years cohort at 45 percent, but in the thirty-five- to forty-nine-years cohort women’s representation on air declined to 32 percent and in the fifty- to sixty-four-years cohort it fell further to 21 percent. Only in age cohorts above sixty-five years did representation rise again, to 35 percent. In the category of on-air staff voices, women came closest to parity as program presenters, with women dominating slightly at a ratio of 51:49. Women’s participation was lowest in sports presenting, a topic in which female voices constituted a mere 5 percent of the total, and female reporters made up only 39 percent of the overall staff of reporters. With regard to program participants, women came closest to parity of participation in the category of “ordinary person,” where they were 46 percent of the total; however, among experts females constituted only 22 percent. Women were least represented in the category of “celebrity or VIP,” in which female participation in programming that featured key players in the arenas of sport, arts, and culture registered a mere 17 percent. In news and current affairs women were only 37 percent of news subjects, and female politicians had a participation rate of 26 percent. In short, women are systemati-

cally underrepresented by both commercial and public-service radio stations at a national level (Women On Air).

MISS REPRESENTATIONS

It is not only quantitative underrepresentation that characterizes the place of women in Irish media. Women are also qualitatively misrepresented in Irish television output. For instance, in my article “It’s a Man’s World,” I explore the manner in which women appeared (or disappeared) within the intersection of Irish politics and media during television coverage of the 2011 general election. I note that the roles and status allocated to women in the election coverage on the national broadcaster RTÉ’s flagship current-affairs series *Prime Time* are both quantitatively and qualitatively different from that given to men. With regard to marginalization, the ratio of women’s presence relative to men was 1:3. Across a total of eleven episodes devoted to the election, women’s voices were heard for only 20 percent of airtime. If the voices of female staff presenters were deducted from that total, women’s voices were heard for only 10 percent of airtime (510). Similarly, the visual sequences used in prerecorded reports on *Prime Time* were strongly gendered, with the program’s reports predominantly featuring images of men. Visually, women politicians were included for the most part only in group shots, usually escorting the male party leader at a photo call. Even where ample opportunity existed to feature women, such as in prerecorded reports about the public and voting, the pattern was one of privileging male presence, with women noticeable only by their absence (512–13). This pattern mirrored a tendency noted by researchers elsewhere for political parties to deploy female politicians in a gendered visual manner (Lundell and Ekström 895).

The entire depiction of women’s engagement with politics on *Prime Time* during the general-election coverage was one that absented and restricted them by failing to represent them as experts, as political news sources, or as effective political agents. This gendered pattern was repeated both in the selection of topics for discussion by women on *Prime Time* and in the roles or status allocated to women when they spoke about particular topics (O’Brien, “Man’s World” 515–17). As Mazzoleni and Schulz note, “In addition to conferring

status upon actors by giving them attention, the media also assign political relevance and importance to social problems by selecting and emphasizing certain issues and neglecting others” (251). Just as most women journalists were located in the “soft side of news” (North 1), on *Prime Time* many women were included in the discussion of caring topics such as health, unemployment, and education. Here the discussion revolved around the impact of policy on the well-being of people or groups in society. Women were less frequently present for discussion of hard or technical topics, such as economics or politics, where the focus was on specialized knowledge.

The presentation of women as engaging with politics around caring issues constituted a particularly double-edged sword for the women in question. As Ross notes, the media often appear to be operating double standards when considering women politicians, almost “as if they expect ‘better’ standards of behaviour, higher moral values, more honesty, integrity, loyalty” (“Women Framed” 63). This double standard was operationalized in *Prime Time* through the specific expectation that women address the nation’s needs around social care and educational infrastructure, but within a political system where that was increasingly an impossible task because of the austerity regime adopted by the state. Women in their carer/political capacity were thus assigned standards that were impossible to meet, even as they were simultaneously excluded from the hard debates about the political structures that had brought the country into a crisis that undermined care and social protection. In short, the case of *Prime Time* presents a scenario in which women still lag behind in terms of their access to participation in media output. There is a structural and systematic blockage when it comes to women’s participation in media and in political programming in particular. Irish women were systematically excluded from the depiction and discussion of politics that occurred in *Prime Time*, which amounts to an expulsion of women not just from media but as active participants in the political world itself (O’Brien, “Man’s World” 505). This point is important to note because the media do not simply add a framing or stereotyping layer to the complex question of women’s interactions with politics, culture, and society; rather, the broadcast media fundamentally create and constitute that engagement through the institutionalization of particular gendered norms for women. The

manner in which women appear or disappear within the Irish public discourse is central to understanding the nature of contemporary society for Irish women.

WOMEN AT (MEDIA) WORK

One solution to the shortcomings regarding the quantitative and qualitative misrepresentation of women in the media that is frequently offered as a corrective is the promotion of women in the industry and the encouragement of their progress in obtaining key decision-making roles (EIGE 2). However, the status of women within both the media and the broader workforce in Ireland is not in itself unproblematic. Historically, formal paid work has been something of an exclusionary zone for Irish women. The 1937 Constitution recognized the special role of women in the home, leading to a model that predominantly emphasized the male breadwinner in working life, albeit facilitated and enabled by unpaid female domestic labor. Until 1972, legislation banned civil servants from participating in state employment after marriage. This model of the primacy of male work still finds expression in contemporary Ireland, where “various social-welfare payments, home-care tax credits, a household-based tax system, and universal child benefit” support women caring for the home (Kirby and Murphy 50). Although the workforce was increasingly feminized during the Celtic Tiger period, women nonetheless still earned less than men, were occupationally segregated, and suffered from a dearth of state-sponsored childcare. Work-participation rates remained lower than the European Union average, and the class divisions among women workers expanded (Kennedy 97). With the collapse of the Celtic Tiger following a male-dominated banking, fiscal, economic, social, and reputational crisis (NESC ix), the status of women workers in austerity Ireland was not improved. Women bore the brunt of cuts in public services, on which they disproportionately relied, and remained at higher risk of consistent poverty than men (Kirby and Murphy 104).

Against that overarching backdrop it is unsurprising that women’s participation in the media labor market is also unequal. Relative to other European states, Ireland’s record on gender equality in media work is poor. The communications industry in Ireland employs ap-

proximately 70,000 people, but women comprise only 30 percent of that workforce (Eurostat), a proportion that lags behind the European average of 44 percent female employment in programming and broadcasting (EIGE 16). Educational and industry statistics show that more women than men enter the media industry and that women are better qualified academically, but they earn less on average per year than men in equivalent jobs (EIGE 2). Predictably, women tend not to get to the very top levels of management or to achieve key decision-making roles in media industries: “In the public-media sector women occupy only twenty-two percent of strategic decision-making positions in the EU-27. In the private sector the percentage is even lower, with women occupying only twelve percent of strategic decision-making positions” (EIGE 2). Irish women constitute only 12 percent of decision-makers at all levels of decision-making (not just the strategic) in media organizations, compared with a European average of 32 percent (EIGE 31). In addition, women have a disproportionately higher chance of exiting the industry in midcareer (Guerrier et al. 494). In Irish broadcasting there is a significant lack of women in senior management positions. One of the reasons that women do not achieve high-status decision-making roles in Irish media is that they experience a workplace that is fundamentally gendered, which in turn makes their survival, never mind their progress in the industry, more challenging and vexed than that of their male colleagues.

ROLES, ROUTINES, AND CULTURE AT WORK

The gendering of roles and routines as well as the work culture of media production tends to disadvantage women, even though the industry broadly claims to be gender-neutral. For women working in television, cultural interpretations of what is considered feminine or masculine influence how roles are allocated. In a qualitative study of twenty women screen workers conducted by the author, most respondents agreed that television was still a very male-dominated industry (O’Brien, “Producing Television”). There was unanimous consensus among all the women interviewed that females prevailed in low-status administrative work, whereas “men are more likely to be in managerial positions” (Respondent H). Gendering of roles was

a definite barrier to women accessing senior roles. One screen director admitted that gender had been “a huge impediment” to her career (Respondent B). The effect of this bifurcation of roles is that the absence of women from senior positions may highlight for women their limited mobility and reinforce their lower status, which “helps to shape the meaning and significance women attached to being female in that organisation” (Ely 205).

Some women explicitly linked the domination of decision-making roles by men with the structural blockages on women accessing traditionally masculine roles in production. One female director explained how masculinity and risk were subtly combined in the gendered perspectives of program commissioners that determined the status of roles that women achieved: “I think it becomes about recruiting in your own image, so it’s *he* looks trustworthy because *he* looks like me . . . so I know I can trust *him*” (Respondent B). Gender identity impacts the allocation of roles, governing both the type of work and the level at which women can expect to participate in media production. This gendering of roles also reproduces itself because gender becomes a primary force shaping and maintaining work structures. This is not to argue that radio and television production operate across a clear, gendered binary that invariably reproduces male privilege. Rather, gendering of roles can be understood as a subtle structural production practice that operates within an industry, with the effect of reproducing traditional ideas about women’s roles in work, capabilities, and potential to be successful. The positioning of women workers as other, as outliers, or as riskier prospects than the masculine norm was evident in role-allocation practices as experienced by the women interviewed. In a way similar to role allocation, the routines of television production, which determine how productions are planned, organized, and discussed, also revealed evidence of gendered practices.

On numerous occasions the women interviewed experienced a difference in the allocation of assignments, the perspective applied to stories, and the dynamics of teamwork in comparison with their male counterparts. For instance, female interests were presumed to lie in soft or private-sphere arenas of health or education, whereas men retained primacy over hard or public-arena discourses such as politics, economics, and defense. One woman noted that this practice also extended to media workers’ ideas of what the audience expected.

A broadcast journalist commented: “Problems arise when the interests of male and female audiences are pigeonholed so that editors believe women are more interested in soft/emotional issues, when in fact women may be more interested in the hard/prestigious issues if they were covered by women” (Respondent H). The presumption that the interests of female audiences lay in soft issues in turn becomes a barrier to female journalists getting assignments on the hard topics. As one woman commented, “Because I was a woman . . . , I was given the mundane, anemic, brain-numbing items to present. . . . All serious, intellectual items [were] automatically given to the male members of the team” (Respondent I).

The gendering of the production team also drew on women’s perceived soft skills to engage women in the emotional or empathetic work of productions (Guerrier et al. 494). This type of work centered on the building of relationships, which was crucial to the production process but was largely invisible to the team and undervalued by the organization, and so did not contribute to the advancement of women’s careers. One worker commented, “People skills are underestimated in media and women have them” (Respondent P). Women were caught in a bind of being expected to do indispensable affective labor, which was simultaneously unvalued or invisible, and which also served to free men from the requirement to do that part of production work. In addition to having aspects of their work undervalued in the production process and experiencing gender bias in role allocation, women worked in an overarching cultural context that privileged men. As I stress in my article “Men *Own* Television” (1212), women in Irish screen production were expected to subscribe to traditionally masculine practices of long working hours, a rigid separation of career and life, and a lack of workplace flexibility. This norm of work was presented as the standard, logical, and practical approach to work, even though the privileged position of men in society that both underpins and facilitates their complete availability for this type of work was absolutely obscured.

Television work demands a level of availability that was often impossible for women to give because they were also engaged with family responsibilities. The impact of having children for workers in Ireland is greater than in any other OECD country (NWCI 1). Across all employment sectors in Ireland in 2011, 45 percent of married men

work for forty or more hours per week, compared with 15 percent of married women (CSO 21). In short, married men are more available for work than women. In addition, women in Ireland carry a disproportionate care burden, conducting 72 percent of all care work (NWC 6), an imbalance that is not acknowledged in any way by the media industry or by Irish society more generally. In workplaces that value long hours and complete availability, men's availability, enabled by women spending less time in paid employment and more time in unpaid care work, means that women are placed at a distinct disadvantage by a cultural norm of long hours.

Motherhood was particularly problematic for women working in broadcasting; the mothers interviewed by the author stated that it led to bias against them and presumptions about their capacity to work. A production assistant noted that when she told her employer, a large broadcaster, that she was pregnant, the rolling contracts that she had held for five years simply ended. Similarly, a series producer who had applied for promotion recounted that she did not get it, and when she challenged the commissioning editor in question, he said, "But sure you're pregnant" (Respondent A). Although some flexibility was possible for mothers working for large broadcasters, for most freelance, independent, or commercial-station workers, a strong culture of competition to get and keep work, as well as an understanding that every worker was replaceable, meant that oftentimes women did not even seek to rearrange their work practices. Objections to workload were rare, as women understood that complaints "meant that someone else would do the job" (Respondent M). For some of the women interviewed, the media work culture and its incapacity to accommodate other care work eventually led to women exiting their careers. As one producer said, "There was never any barrier to women progressing in the industry, it was just that the whole industry worked against you being able to 'have it all' as a woman" (Respondent D).

In addition to navigating a difficult work culture, women also have to negotiate the limitations on female participation in a networked labor force. In light of Deuze's persuasive characterization of media production as a fundamentally networked process (182), it is all the more important that women have equal and fair access to the vital networks that sustain contemporary media workers. The networked nature of media production is gendered insofar as women are easily excluded

from predominantly male networks, and alternative female-dominated networks of workers are in a minority. The lack of networks for women in media leaves them out of important connections to labor-market recruitment, causing a knock-on effect whereby the fact that it is more difficult for women to gain media employment in turn means that it is less likely that they will end up as the senior members of networks. The block on women entering media is thus perpetuated. These masculine networks dominate right from the starting point of careers, even for female college graduates: “You’re not coming at it from a gang of lads that all went to college together and became a network of cameras, sound, directing. You’re coming at it as a woman, and you are more isolated because, unless you’re introduced to these people, you’re at a disadvantage” (Respondent C). The impact of networks endured throughout workers’ careers, even for senior women. As Vanderbroeck notes, “Because they constitute a minority, women at the top or on their way up have few role models to follow” (767). This was the case for one Irish cameraperson who commented on meeting another female camera operator over the age of forty: “I nearly dropped my camera when I saw her. . . . I’ve been all over the world with the job, and there are no older women out there” (Respondent C).

A final key factor in the gendering of women’s experiences of media work was the informalization of the industry. The fact that recruitment, production, and promotion occurred on the basis of informal networks meant that there was a corresponding absence of any formal structures of negotiation or protection for workers in media industries (O’Brien, “Men *Own* Television” 1216). The informalization of the industry networks meant that recruitment or work allocation was unstructured. This left women vulnerable to bias, discrimination, and occasionally outright bullying. As one woman noted, “One man was very biased against women to the point of bullying. It was very underhand, never direct. . . . [H]e’d treat you like you hadn’t a clue . . . , and ignoring you, he’d never ever do any of that to any of the lads. I approached a male senior manager and he just told me to ignore him. . . . Nobody tried to address the problem I was having” (Respondent J). Discrimination or bias specifically on the basis of gender was difficult to “prove.” As one director said, “Because financiers and commissioners are making qualitative decisions, there’s no objective or structured way of assessing the criteria on which deci-

sions are made. . . . There's no comeback for a female writer or director because they make subjective or qualitative decisions" (Respondent B). Because work in the industry is increasingly casualized, with informal recruitment procedures, and because getting work depends on networks of coworkers, all freelance and even some permanently employed workers were reluctant to tackle any issues of gender bias or discrimination head-on. Nobody wanted to be seen to "make trouble" (Respondent B).

In sum, the experience of the twenty women workers interviewed was that inflexibility in media work and divisions between work and life responsibilities had a more severe impact on women, who had a disproportionate care burden, and this fact was not accommodated in any way by the industry. In addition to dealing with this scheduling rigidity, these women also endured a gender-based bias in perceptions of their skills. The roles and routines of broadcast production work were also gendered in subtle ways. This gender bias either led to them being allocated particular types of work, or served to exclude them from participating in other types of work. Whereas women were perceived to have soft skills needed to perform very necessary affective labor with guests and participants, this work was not valued within production. Instead promotion and success were connected to traditionally masculine "cutthroat" characteristics or discriminatory practices of presuming that men were entitled to senior roles, whereas women had to earn those roles. Thus women in media work were structurally disadvantaged by a gendered work culture.

Inasmuch as gender influenced how Irish women were represented in media, it also played a role in women's career progression and their status as workers in Irish media. If the commonly understood solution to the lack of female representation on the airwaves—having more women in key decision-making roles in media—is itself encumbered by its own gendered biases and structural impediments, then it is clearly the case that women and Irish media have a long way to go before any kind of parity of representation and participation is possible. The postfeminist discourse that women have already achieved equality is, at a minimum, highly inaccurate. In view of the immense challenges facing Irish women in broadcasting, a number of organizations and activists have campaigned to redress the imbalances in both representation and participation.

REFRAMING GENDER

In attempts to reframe inequality in the media women's agency has been organized with the aim of modifying media structures, setting baselines in knowledge of gender inequality through research, and developing strategies to mobilize constituencies to participate in activism for change. In the Irish case there is evidence of activism for change at both a national and a European level. In recent years the National Women's Council and the Countess Markievicz Summer School have hosted a variety of events, such as discussions on media representation and collaborations on research projects, and they have lobbied for improvements in women's representation in media. Women On Air is a voluntary networking group that has run discussion seminars and informal training workshops. It has also compiled a contact list of female area-experts for producers and researchers in an effort to convince producers—who frequently complain that women are more difficult to get on air—that equal representation is possible. Particularly for broadcast organizations that explicitly claim to serve the public interest (and in particular RTÉ), there is an urgent need to appropriately address women's interests by ensuring their right to communicate. To that end RTÉ has engaged in training initiatives for small groups of women in an effort to promote increased participation. One current-affairs discussion program on the commercial station TV3, *Tonight with Vincent Browne*, had an explicit policy of gender balance for all of its discussion panels on its program.

At the European level a number of actors have also engaged with the question of gender inequality in media. The European Broadcasting Union, of which Ireland is a member, issued a Charter for Equal Opportunities for Women in Broadcasting in 1995. The European Women's Lobby reported on Beijing +5 and Beijing +10, a five- and ten-year review, respectively, of the implementation of the UN General Assembly Declaration and Platform for Action on Women, originally announced in Beijing in 1995. The European and International Federation of Journalists has surveyed and reported on best practices for gender equality, and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has convened events for members to discuss and promote equality for women in media. In 2013 the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on gender equality, and the media and noted that “mem-

ber states should particularly ensure through appropriate means that media regulators respect gender equality principles in their decision-making and practice” (1). The council proposed a number of measures to achieve that objective, including reviewing and assessing gender-equality policy and legislation, adopting and implementing national indicators for gender equality, providing information and promoting good practices, encouraging the development of accountability channels, promoting active research and publication, and advancing media literacy and active citizenship (1). Unfortunately, very little academic research has addressed the question of how media regulators might best promote accountability or implement actions for gender equality (Refram 4). In an Irish context, apart from supporting some research on media monitoring, the BAI has not been particularly proactive with regard to gender equality. The regulators’ interventions in media equality have to be shaped by their various remits: to regulate, to issue licenses, to arbitrate on complaints, to promote fairness and objectivity, and to advise the legislature. Crucially, this range of activities places them at the center of the media landscape and makes them a highly influential player when it comes to issues of changing the gender balance in media representation. In light of the limited national-level engagement on the part of broadcasters and regulators with the immense challenge of redressing gender equality in Irish broadcasting, the situation is unclear as to significant change in the immediate future. Sadly, the required changes could not be more vital to Irish broadcasting and to Irish society more generally.

CONCLUSION

As Horgan notes, “the media inform social and political change as well as reflecting it” (2). This is true of women’s position in Ireland, where the media have actively contextualized the changes to women’s status but have also acted as a specific context within which to understand how women have progressed, or have been frustrated, in achieving various equalities. Currently, despite forty years of second-wave feminism’s demands for change, women in Ireland still have not achieved equality in the mass media either in how they are represented or as participants within the industry. The issues that Irish women face on a daily basis and the complexity of the roles that they

are required to play in their homes, work, and communities are not adequately represented. Instead Irish women continue to be systematically depicted as passive, silent, and inactive spectators in society, politics, and media rather than engaged, vocal, and active participants. This negative depiction in turn leads to a situation in which women's capacity to communicate publicly and to engage actively as citizens in reforming a patriarchal society is compromised by a profoundly gendered media framing. In addition, the dominant discourse of Irish women's postfeminist "advancement" makes it doubly difficult to argue that inequality and patriarchy are ongoing problems in cultural industries and Irish society.

Notwithstanding a few analyses of women's role in television drama (O'Connor; Sheehan), much remains to be understood about women's engagements with Irish media. The status of women in Irish broadcasting and its various impacts on them need to be more thoroughly acknowledged. Within Irish universities academics need to intentionally influence future generations of media professionals to put gender at the core of their work, as Byerly and Ross suggest in an international context (201). Similarly, within Irish Studies there is a need to further examine the distinctive and nuanced role of women in the cultural and social history of Irish society generally and their position in the evolution of Irish media in particular. This is a twofold enterprise of inserting women as a category of social actors into the mainstream story of Irish media history, from which they have been largely excluded. But it should also involve interrogating the issues that women's history raises for historiography dealing with diversity and hybridity within the category of "Irish women" itself. It is only with an acknowledgement of the complexity of the variety of positions of Irish women vis-à-vis the media that a more accurate account can be offered of the impacts of broadcasting on women. This endeavor matters not just for the purposes of record but for the women active in media industries in Ireland today who negotiate the glass ceilings and cliffs—or, more accurately, the labyrinth—of a career in Irish broadcasting. Understanding the structural blocks and barriers to self-agency faced by women in Irish broadcasting may enable us at last to see a woman sitting one day in *The Late Late Show* presenter's chair.

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