



## The Role of the Media and Cultural Industries in Change

Evidence of a causal relationship between the media and public attitudes has always been elusive, given how difficult it is to demonstrate with any clarity.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which media can influence beliefs, behaviours and values remains contested amongst theorists, media professionals and activists alike. Contemporary approaches, however, have moved away from assumptions of *passive audiences* or *persuasive media*, instead viewing media consumption and production as a dynamic, iterative process<sup>2</sup> which reflects dominant norms within society as much as it may reproduce them.

This paper seeks to clarify how the media, creative and cultural sectors in Scotland continue to play a key role in shaping attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality. Our lives are increasingly mediated; we spend more of our time exposed to multiple forms of media, including time spent online, watching films, television and streaming, listening to podcasts and radio, being exposed to advertising via all these mediums, and interacting with one another on social media platforms and video calls. Alongside this lies the creative and cultural sectors, including the newspapers, magazines and books we read, the games we play, the music we listen to and the festivals, cinemas, theatres, art galleries and concerts we attend. The media and cultural sectors in Scotland continue to inform normative social attitudes and beliefs around gender by dint of their sheer prevalence in daily life (intensified by the effects of Covid-19) and their significance to our heritage as a country. Challenging the sectors' practices, policies and output is key to greater equality in wider society.

Through a series of questions and answers, this paper traces how attitudes are created, how gender is socially constructed, and how media can both uphold and help dismantle harmful stereotypes, values and behaviours. Finally, it examines the need for urgent support for ongoing action in Scotland with reference to employment, wellbeing, gender-based violence (GBV), and equality as a moral imperative.

### How are attitudes created?

Attitudes are embedded sets of beliefs which are formed over time. Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' posits that we internalise sets of beliefs about the world<sup>3</sup> and then convert these into perception and practice. If the attitudes we embed in our understanding of the world are translated into the way we perceive others and the ways we behave, then it is imperative we examine how these attitudes are created in the first place.

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<sup>1</sup> Ross K (2010) *Gendered Media: Women, Men and Identity Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>2</sup> Bruns A, Burgess J (2012) Researching news discussion on Twitter: New methodologies. *Journalism Studies* 5–6:801–814.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu P (2013) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.

Crucially, attitudes are not static but can change<sup>4</sup> depending on social context, exposure to certain ideas or framings, and personal experience and evaluation. Depending on the emotions, behaviours and thoughts associated with them, particularly from an early age, the kinds of information we receive can inform how our attitudes towards people, objects and ideas develop and adjust over time. From a cognitive processing perspective, it is widely understood that both adults and children tend to categorise information<sup>56</sup> into fewer, easier units to reduce the effort required for information processing. Then we encode those categories with values - as easy shorthands.

### **Stereotypes: helpful or harmful?**

When applied to gender information, stereotyping functions to categorise information about what it means to be 'male' and 'female'. This may be efficient, particularly for small children who are processing enormous amounts of new information all the time – but it is also inaccurate and damaging.<sup>78</sup> The shorthand becomes accepted as standing for the whole category; for example, pink and blue become didactic signifiers about who can play with what.



Gender stereotypes gloss over differences within and between groups, instead reinforcing rigid ideals.

Media sectors rely on stereotypes. For example, advertisers effectively target new consumers by deliberately perpetuating gendered content. But the stereotypes can also be reproduced unconsciously in the words and phrases we choose, the angles of photographs, the prominence of a news story, the selection of one musician over another, or the character representation in a game.

### **How do gender stereotypes inform our attitudes?**

Gender itself is increasingly acknowledged as a form of enactment; a social and cognitive process through which we manage information about the world and reproduce specific behaviours. Butler's influential theory of 'gender performativity' articulates how repetitive reproductions of conventional masculinities and femininities inform gender itself.<sup>9</sup> This repetition is particularly important when examining the mediated world of today, in which every billboard and commercial, every digital space, webpage and podcast, every radio bulletin, TV programme and

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<sup>4</sup> Albarracin D, Shavitt S (2018) Attitudes and Attitude Change. *Annual Review of Psychology* 69:299–327.

<sup>5</sup> Rose Rees H, S Ma D, W Sherman J (2019) Examining the relationships among categorization, stereotype activation, and stereotype application. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4:499–513.

<sup>6</sup> Neuberg SL, Williams KEG, Sng O, Pick CM, Neel R, Krems JA, Pirlott AG (2020) Toward capturing the functional and nuanced nature of social stereotypes: An affordance management approach. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 62:245–304.

<sup>7</sup> Aina OE, Cameron PA (2011) Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes with Young Children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood* 39:11–19.

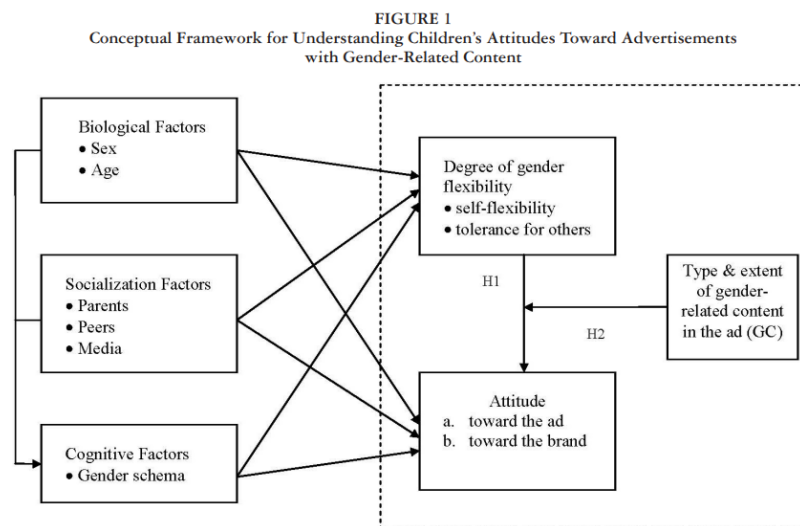
<sup>8</sup> Ellemers N (2019) Gender Stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology* 69:275–298.

<sup>9</sup> Butler J (2002) *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

streaming platform, and every magazine, book, pamphlet and newspaper presents an opportunity for gendered assumptions to be replicated and consumed.

Normative conceptualisations of what is considered ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are therefore repeatedly mapped on to ‘male’ and ‘female’, encoding societal perceptions and values until they become categorically defined.

In advertising, brands spend significant amounts of money researching the effect of gendered content on consumers’ attitudes and behaviour. Figure 1 below shows a conceptual framework developed to understand children’s attitudes towards advertisements with gender-related content.<sup>10</sup> Our understanding of the world around us is shaped by our socio-cognitive development in tandem with the gender-related content to which we are exposed.



Importantly, gender-based content also affects our attitudes towards ourselves. Research based on social role theory and gender schema theory has shown that participants’ own gendered self-concept is reinforced after having been exposed to gender-typed magazines.<sup>11</sup>

### But what does this have to do with inequality?

As we move through the world absorbing and reproducing these coded versions of gender, we create a collective, embedded understanding of gendered norms. These norms systemically benefit some genders at the expense of others. Gramsci calls this ‘cultural hegemony’ – a set of ideas from a dominant social group which solidifies to become universally accepted. Fairclough argues that through this same process, we create normative assumptions of gendered roles.<sup>12</sup> Ideological norms of gender are therefore reproduced in art exhibitions, TV ads, music selections, viral videos, press awards, gaming characters, stock photos, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> Bakir A, Palan KM (2010) How are children’s attitudes toward ads and brands affected by gender-related content in advertising? *Journal of Advertising* 39:35–48.

<sup>11</sup> Knobloch-Westerwick S, Hoplamazian GJ (2012) Gendering the Self: Selective Magazine Reading and Reinforcement of Gender Conformity. *Communication Research* 39:358–384.

<sup>12</sup> Fairclough N (2001) *Language and Power*. London: Pearson Education.



The ideologies built into the texts, images, films, discourses, and gendered constructions to which we are exposed then inform our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us. A review of initiatives by Lemish and Gotz in 2017<sup>13</sup> discusses the cultivation and reception effects of gendered images, toys, TV characters, music videos etc. on children and demonstrates how such segregation influences preferences for 'gender appropriate' toys, traditional perceptions of gender roles and attitudes towards aspirations and occupations. Gender stereotypes have been shown to affect students' choice of musical instrument to learn,<sup>14</sup> children's reading outcomes,<sup>15</sup> and reactions to working mothers.<sup>16</sup> Internalised racial stereotypes can erode self-perception and create a fear of confirming a negative stereotype of one's race later in life.<sup>17</sup> Disfiguration stereotyped as villainous in popular entertainment impacts the wellbeing of children and adults with facial differences.<sup>18</sup> Clearly, then, identifying and changing the stereotypical content to which we are exposed is a powerful way to change societal attitudes around gender and beyond.

### So how can media content help change attitudes?

There is strong evidence that media content affects public discourse and values.<sup>19,20,21</sup> Research has shown how the media framing of public health issues such as the MMR vaccine<sup>22</sup> and obesity<sup>23</sup> gain credibility and become embedded into public discourse and consciousness. The Glasgow University Media Unit found a relationship between negative coverage of people

<sup>13</sup> Heintz K (2018) Beyond the Stereotypes? Images of Boys and Girls and their Consequences. *Communication Research Trends* 37:37–39.

<sup>14</sup> Eros J (2008) Instrument selection and gender stereotypes: A review of recent literature. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 27:57–64.

<sup>15</sup> Muntoni F, Retelsdorf J (2019) At their children's expense: How parents' gender stereotypes affect their children's reading outcomes. *Learning and Instruction* 60:95–103.

<sup>16</sup> Okimoto TG, Heilman ME (2012) The "Bad Parent" assumption: How gender stereotypes affect reactions to working mothers. *Journal of Social Issues* 68:704–724.

<sup>17</sup> Steele CM (2011) *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. United Kingdom: WW Norton.

<sup>18</sup> Changing Faces (2021) *I Am Not Your Villain: Equal representation of visible difference in film*. Changing Faces Available at: <https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/i-am-not-your-villain/>.

<sup>19</sup> Philo G, Berry M (2011) *More Bad News from Israel*. London: Pluto Press.

<sup>20</sup> Briant E, Watson N, Philo G (2011) *Bad news for disabled people: How the newspapers are reporting disability*. Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research and Glasgow Media Unit. Available at: [https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media\\_214917\\_smxx.pdf](https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_214917_smxx.pdf).

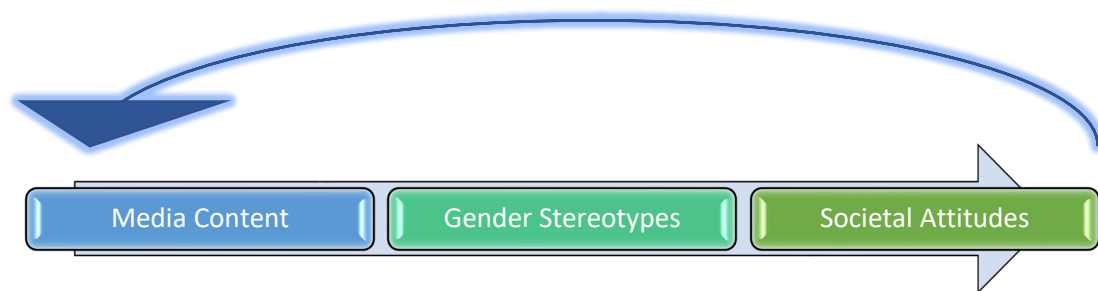
<sup>21</sup> Davis A (2006) Media Effects and the question of the rational audience: Lessons from the financial markets. *Media, Culture and Society* 28:603–625.

<sup>22</sup> Boyce T (2007) *Health, Risk and News: The MMR Vaccine and the Media*. London: Peter Lang.

<sup>23</sup> Hilton S, Patterson C, Teyhan A (2012) Escalating coverage of obesity in UK newspapers: the evolution and framing of the "obesity epidemic" from 1996 to 2010. *Obesity* 20:1688–1695.

receiving disability benefits and ‘hardening’ public attitudes towards them,<sup>24</sup> while the social consensus found in blog posts and their comment sections have been found to shape readers’ attitudes.<sup>25</sup> Researchers in the United States have found that racial biases subtly transmitted via nonverbal behaviour on television increase viewers’ own biases despite not being able to consciously report any such behaviours.<sup>26</sup> As soon as we start to examine whose stories are being told, by whom, who is choosing the stories, and who is missing, we begin to perceive the intersectional inequalities writ large in our society.

The Geena Davis Institute has studied the relationship between girls’ aspirations and having women leaders as role models in popular media. It states: “If we want to see more women in leadership positions in the real world, girls need to see more women leaders in the fictional worlds of entertainment media.”<sup>27</sup> So the impact of seeing powerful women in film and TV itself inspires young women to aim higher.



If we consume a range of media and creative content that no longer relies on shortcuts and binarised gender stereotypes then we begin to understand the world differently, and over time the socio-cultural conditions change to become more inclusive. Put simply, if we disrupt the input - we change the output. The media industry has the power to make innovative change – not just by reducing stereotypes, but by taking a step further and producing gender-transformative content.

“We strongly believe in the transformative role media can play in achieving gender equality in societies. By creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes. By challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions both in content and in the media houses. By showing women in leadership roles and as experts on a diversity of topics on a daily basis, not as an exception.”

**International Media Support<sup>28</sup>**

<sup>24</sup> Happer C, Philo G (2013) The role of the media in the construction of public belief and social change. *Journal of social and political psychology* 1:321–336.

<sup>25</sup> Lewandowsky S, Cook J, Fay N, Gignac GE (2019) Science by social media: Attitudes towards climate change are mediated by perceived social consensus. *Memory & Cognition* 47:1445–1456.

<sup>26</sup> Weisbuch M, Pauker K, Ambady N (2009) The subtle transmission of race bias via televised nonverbal behavior. *Science* 326:1711–1714.

<sup>27</sup> Goulds S (2019) The State of the World’s Girls Reports. Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media Available at: <https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/rewrite-her-story/>.

<sup>28</sup> IMS (2020) The crucial role of media in achieving gender equality. International Media Support Available at: <https://www.mediasupport.org/the-crucial-role-of-media-in-achieving-gender-equality/>.



Rebecca Kelly at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery in 2012 in front of a painting by John Lavery of Anna Pavlova.<sup>29</sup>

## Can media change behaviours as well as attitudes?

Various theoretical models attempt to define the relationship between media, attitudes, and behaviours. These include social cognitive theory,<sup>30</sup> the elaboration likelihood model<sup>31</sup> which is concerned with messaging and persuasion, and the reinforcing spirals model which uses social cognition, social identity, and system theories to examine “the role of media in formation and maintenance of attitudes and related behaviours”.<sup>32</sup>

There is evidence that media coverage can affect behaviours, as witnessed by the promotion of information and media campaigns around the links between smoking and cancer,<sup>33</sup> for example. However, conventional definitions of media which focus solely on ‘news’ or ‘coverage’ fail to reflect the heavily mediated world in which we participate daily, creating content as we consume it, and interacting with systems of gendered power in fresh ways. Increasingly media researchers look to the ‘totality’ of media production, content and reception to analyse nuanced causal patterns with behaviour.<sup>34</sup> In 2018 the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls

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<sup>29</sup> BBC News (2012) Your pictures of Scotland: 28 September - 5 October. BBC News Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19832143>.

<sup>30</sup> Bandura A (2009) Social cognitive theory of mass communications. In: Media effects: Advances in theory and research, 3rd ed., pp 94–124. New York: Routledge.

<sup>31</sup> Petty RE, Priester JR, Briñol P (2009) Mass media attitude change: Implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In: Media effects: Advances in theory and research, 3rd ed., pp 155–198. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>32</sup> Slater MD (2015) Reinforcing spirals model: Conceptualizing the relationship between media content exposure and the development and maintenance of attitudes. *Media Psychology* 18:370–395.

<sup>33</sup> Collins N (2013) Smoking, drinking and drug use fall dramatically among children. *The Telegraph* Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/10202902/Smoking-drinking-and-drug-use-fall-dramatically-among-children.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Philo G (2007) Can discourse analysis successfully explain the content of media and journalistic practice? *Journalism Studies* 8:175–196.

recommended the establishment of a Women In Media Body<sup>35</sup> which includes media, creative *and* cultural industries in its scope.

Any understanding of how such a body might affect behavioural change should consider:

- a) **The creative and cultural sectors as central to Scotland's enduring historical and cultural legacies.** Scotland's oral, folk music, piping and dance traditions are integral to our heritage and identity. Today they remain deeply exclusive, maintaining divisions in our population's sense of belonging. Making these sectors more accessible to the range of people who call Scotland home will change celebrations of our history, updating conventions as we tell the nation's story.
- b) **The increasing dominance of digital media.** 'Media' is no longer produced and consumed as it once was; the internet has created dynamic spaces for creativity and distribution that disrupt normative models of communication. Online content – articles, tweets, podcasts, posts, memes, TikToks, gifs etc. – is experienced as a 'mediascape'<sup>36</sup> and is simultaneously shaped by our own choices and practices. Behavioural patterns include sharing and recontextualising content; 'What Twitter Thinks' is increasingly acknowledged as a viable basis for a news article.<sup>37</sup> Thus modern conceptualisations of 'media' must encapsulate the liminal space between on- and offline worlds. Our engagement with digital texts requires knowledges or 'literacies' of how the digital world works, and our ability to 'read' critically what we consume online is increasingly important for our sense of self.<sup>38</sup> The impact of these online texts on our attitudes and behaviour is under-researched, as is the relationship between the expression of beliefs and behaviours on- and offline.
- c) **The relationship between content and workforce.** In no other sector is the equality of the output so inherently linked to the equality of the industry conditions. This is discussed in greater detail in the Theory of Change paper but briefly, in addressing the connections between creative content and the employment of the people behind the scenes, focusing on this industry affords opportunities to address behavioural patterns in recruitment, workplace culture, industry policies and budgeting alongside the representational diversity seen in the end product.

## Why is a focus on the media and creative industries so urgent?

### Covid-19

The ways in which Covid-19 has changed societal practices and perceptions in Scotland is not yet fully understood. Since March 2020 our world order, the way we interact, how we spend our time, and what we choose to do have all shifted increasingly toward the digital sphere. Our

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<sup>35</sup> NACWG (2020) 2018 First Report and Recommendations. First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls. Available at: <https://onescotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2018report.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Lury C, Lash S, Boden D (2007) Global culture industry: The mediation of things. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>37</sup> Bruns A, Burgess J (2012) Researching news discussion on Twitter: New methodologies. *Journalism Studies* 5–6:801–814.

<sup>38</sup> Tamplin NC, McLean SA, Paxton SJ (2018) Social media literacy protects against the negative impact of exposure to appearance ideal social media images in young adult women but not men. *Body Image* 26:29–37.

consumption of content has increased; one study found a consistently greater number of people listening to commercial radio, and for longer,<sup>39</sup> creations of spoken word,<sup>40</sup> poetry<sup>41</sup> and art<sup>42</sup> have become more widely shared, theatre and concerts are attended online,<sup>43</sup> and TV-watching and streaming have soared.<sup>44</sup> The intensity with which we interact with media has strengthened, and while we are yet to understand the impact this has on societal attitudes and behaviour, it remains crucial that we ensure gender equality in both the content we are consuming and the opportunities for creators of that content.

## Violence Against Women

The main obstacle to women's human rights continues to be violence against women as defined by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Covid-19 itself has in fact created the conditions for an increase in domestic violence<sup>45</sup> and in Scotland, one woman is killed each month by a partner or ex-partner.<sup>46</sup> The financial cost of violence against women and girls to the Scottish Government is around £4 billion.<sup>47</sup>

“Women's lives remain constrained by the threat and experience of rape, domestic abuse, stalking, sexual harassment, and other forms of this violence. Violence against women remains a human rights violation experienced at epidemic levels in Scotland.”

## Engender<sup>48</sup>

The media's role in legitimising and perpetuating the inequalities which fuel such violence is long acknowledged. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action called on governments to “take

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<sup>39</sup> Radio Today (2020) Research shows increase in listening during lockdown. Radio Today Available at: <https://radiotoday.co.uk/2020/11/research-shows-increase-in-listening-during-lockdown/>.

<sup>40</sup> Rothschild N, Fischer S (2021) Amanda Gorman steals the show on Inauguration Day. Axios Available at: <https://www.axios.com/2021/01/21/amanda-gorman-inauguration-viral/>.

<sup>41</sup> Sulway V (2020) This Morning viewers reduced to tears by “breathtaking” poem about coronavirus lockdown. Daily Mirror Available at: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/morning-viewers-reduced-tears-breathtaking-21969968>.

<sup>42</sup> Williams M (2020) David Byrne's irreverent illustrations muse on life during Covid. Creative Review Available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/david-byrne-dingbats-illustrations-pace/>.

<sup>43</sup> Mclaughlin A (2020) How concerts went virtual for Covid-19. Creative Review Available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/concerts-virtual-covid-19/>.

<sup>44</sup> BBC News (2020) TV watching and online streaming surge during lockdown. BBC News Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-53637305>.

<sup>45</sup> Scottish Government Social Research (2020) Coronavirus (COVID-19): domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls during Phase 3 of Scotland's route map (11 August – 11 October). Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-domestic-abuse-forms-violence-against-women-girls-during-phase-3-scotlands-route-map-11-august-11-october/pages/4/>.

<sup>46</sup> Davidson G (2020) Insight: Why violence against women in Scotland is an epidemic. The Scotsman Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/insight-why-violence-against-women-in-scotland-is-an-epidemic-3051336>.

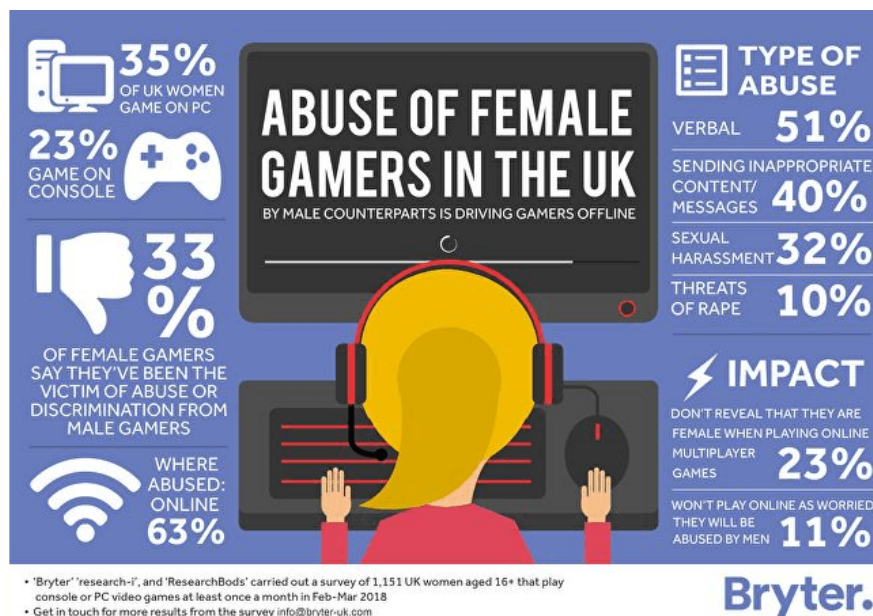
<sup>47</sup> Scottish Government (2009) Safer Lives: Changed Lives. Scottish Government. Available at: <https://womensaidorkney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Safer-Lives-Changed-Lives.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Engender (2017) Gender Matters Roadmap: Towards Women's Equality in Scotland. Available at: <https://gendermatters.engender.org.uk/content/resources/Gender-Matters-Roadmap---towards-womens-equality-in-Scotland.pdf>.



effective measures, including appropriate legislation against pornography and the project of violence against women and children in the media”.<sup>49</sup> Legislation alone, of course, is insufficient; addressing the stereotypes which reinforce binarised conceptions of roles, traits and qualities is crucial. News coverage, in particular, is important: “Good reporting can play a vital role in increasing understanding of violence against women and challenging its place in our society. On the other hand, irresponsible reporting can reinforce myths about the ‘causes’ of violence. It can encourage victim-blaming and deflect attention from the perpetrator, and discourage women from reporting violence against them.”<sup>50</sup> Research shows that evaluations of media interventions which target men and boys show significant attitudinal changes towards gender and violent action against women.<sup>51</sup> It is no longer acceptable for public bodies or private corporations working in the media and creative sectors to passively produce content which contributes to the socio-cultural inequalities upholding gender-based violence.

GBV is also prevalent online,<sup>52</sup> where increasingly as a society we are spending more of our time. One example is the Bryter research below, demonstrating the scale and range of abuse that women gamers face when they occupy digital space. Digital silencing and harassment threaten mental wellbeing, physical safety, participation, freedom of expression and access to information – all of which undermines our democratic values.



<sup>49</sup> UN (1995) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. United Nations. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Zero Tolerance (2021) Media. Zero Tolerance Available at: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-media/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ricardo C, Eads M, Barker G (2011) Engaging Boys and Young Men in the Prevention of Sexual Violence: A systematic and global review of evaluated interventions. Sexual Violence Research Initiative. Available at: <https://www.equimundo.org/resources/engaging-boys-and-young-men-in-the-prevention-of-sexual-violence-a-systematic-and-global-review-of-evaluated-interventions/>.

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International (2018) Toxic Twitter - a toxic place for women. Amnesty International. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>.

Women working in the media sector are themselves victims of GBV, while women marginalised by other social constructions such as race or disability are particularly targeted. For example, black women are 84 per cent more likely than white women to be mentioned in abusive or problematic tweets.<sup>53</sup> Women journalists disclose the explicit silencing they experience on- and offline<sup>54</sup> and the impact this has on their self-censorship, willingness to participate visibly in public space<sup>55</sup> and indeed remain in their careers. This is discussed more fully in the Surviving Social Media Paper. The media sector as a whole has a responsibility to ensure a safe working environment for all staff, creating cultural norms, and rigorous safeguarding and reporting policies that allow women the freedom and safety to perform their work. Were the media and creative industries to become leaders in this area, their high visibility could encourage other industries to follow suit.

### Supporting media communities

At a time so defined by separation, the creative and cultural industries demonstrate how communities of practice are central to keeping us connected. Supporting both grassroots and established groups to become more inclusive and representative of the population in Scotland could not be more important. Many of the groups I talked to spoke of the meaning they had found, whether through engagement in choirs, gaming groups, zines, journalist circles, etc. This meaning-making is borne out in the research.<sup>56</sup> Zero Tolerance's thorough review of What Works<sup>57</sup> in changing public attitudes towards women and girls underlines the importance of community-based, sustained interventions built on strong relationships which engage multiple agencies. By supporting media and cultural organisations and institutions to shift their own developed sets of practices and values towards greater equality, the impact is felt at scale throughout the sector across different communities. The collaborative nature of much of the media and creative sector means that this impact is amplified.

### Funding inclusive media

Again, due to public funding cuts and particularly the effect of Covid-19, the media and cultural sectors are grappling with loss of income and adapting to ensure their survival. In a July 2020 report,<sup>58</sup> the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee warned that the pandemic presented “the biggest threat to the UK's cultural infrastructure, institutions and workforce in a generation”. There is a clear financial incentive to ensure that media and creative content reflects

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<sup>53</sup> Glitch (2021) Resources. Glitch Available at: <https://glitchcharity.co.uk/resources/>.

<sup>54</sup> See results of Women in Journalism Scotland survey, 2020, or the accompanying paper *Sexism in Journalism*.

<sup>55</sup> IWMF (2018) Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting. International Women's Media Foundation. Available at: <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> Kapoor H, Kaufman JC (2020) Meaning-Making Through Creativity During COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology* 11.

<sup>57</sup> Nevens K, Yaqoob T, Hutchinson E (2021) “We need this to do things differently”: A framework for a new, inclusive and intersectional organisation to transform attitudes towards women and girls and promote gender equality in Scotland. Zero Tolerance. Available at: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/ZT-What-Works-2021-Report.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Digital, Culture, Media and, Sport Committee (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report. House of Commons. Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2022/documents/19516/default/>.

evolving societal attitudes. Research has found that diverse representations in films correlates with higher numbers of movie-goers,<sup>59</sup> for example. BBC Commissioner Steve Allen calls it a *commercial imperative* for media and creative industries to better reflect the populations for whom they are producing content.<sup>60</sup> The European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs extends the business case, pointing out that diversifying the media workforce will result in more diverse media content – which is more likely to appeal to wider audiences.<sup>61</sup> To bolster the sector is sorely needed; institutions and organisations need to be supported to instigate changes which will benefit them financially.

### Making change visible

A more egalitarian media and creative sector alone will not eradicate gender inequalities in Scotland. However, by focusing on the media greater visibility of any interventions instigated will necessarily follow. Programmes of social change benefit from wide social engagement, and media campaigns by their very nature are likely to attract attention, prompt public discourse and create opportunities for conversation around gender representation and equality. This increased visibility also constitutes a reputational risk to media institutions and organisations which choose not to engage. Attracting buy-in from senior industry leaders is made easier as their institutions rely on prominence for success.

### Building structures for equality

There is already an appetite in Scotland for work to be undertaken to address key gender imbalances across the creative sector. Throughout the year, conversations with people working in journalism, broadcasting, gaming, the visual arts, theatre, dance, comedy and radio have covered similar issues – and overlapping efforts to counter these have been discussed. The sectors are primed, but communication between them is preventing a cohesive strategy to apply pressure and make impactful changes. The formation of a centralised Hub to facilitate conversations and coordinate initiatives is overdue.

### The need for equal media

Like any other industry, the media, creative and cultural industries must contend with economic models, recruitment pipelines, workplace policies, cultural norms, hierarchical structures, promotion processes and leadership imbalances that systematically disadvantage women and marginalised people while promoting opportunities for men. Improving this is necessary work for its own sake. Equality in the media workforce is a moral imperative.

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<sup>59</sup> Movio (2020) I Want To See Me Why Diverse On-Screen Representation Drives Cinema Audiences. Movio. Available at: <https://movio.co/i-want-to-see-me/>.

<sup>60</sup> See BBC Creative Diversity Day Review.

<sup>61</sup> McCracken K, FitzSimons Dr A, Priest Dr S, Girmstair S, Murphy Prof B (2018) Gender Equality in the Media Sector. European Parliament Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)596839\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU(2018)596839_EN.pdf).

Significantly, however, the output from this sector has great influence over the discourses, values and behaviours in society. Progressing gender equality through the creative sectors is an important step towards progressing the wellbeing not just of the citizens who work in the industry, but of all of us who come into contact with the end product.

## Summary

The media, creative and cultural sectors are crucial in the progression of Scotland's public discourse and action towards gender equality. The community-based networks of creators and journalists across the country could play key roles in transforming narratives, creative content and workforce practices to advance the country's attitudes towards equality and to challenge the sectors' institutions to do better. While attitudinal change and behavioural change are tricky to capture, more straightforward to monitor are the numbers – instances of violence, numbers of problematic headlines, scales of cultural inclusivity, gender balances of institutional boards, exhibitions and awards featuring women, percentages of diverse faces and voices in the public sphere and so on. Stereotypes are dismantled through an iterative process where cultural values and beliefs are reflected in the content society produces and absorbs. Since stereotypes are often subtly unconsciously transmitted, there is still tremendously impactful work to be done in deconstructing media output, holding institutions to account and embedding gender mainstreaming into their policies.

Given the heavily mediated world we live in, bold action focused on our journalistic, creative and cultural sectors creates a clear path towards instigating visible, radical and positive change. Greater equality is not unreachable, but it requires long-term investment and prioritisation to challenge the power structures that uphold inequity.

The good news is that the media and creative sectors in Scotland are already taking action to change representational imbalances both in the industry and in the content produced. Conversations with industry leaders, grassroots campaigners and women working across different sectors have revealed a strong desire for greater social, cultural and economic equality and burgeoning initiatives prompted by recent social movements such as Me Too and Black Lives Matter continue the conversation. Moreover, the creative sector itself appears to be shifting from its assumption that capital-led content holds greater value, reflecting on the potential for greater geographical diversity.<sup>62</sup> Harnessing this current mood for change could not be more timely.

Due to Covid-19, our focus has shifted to the urgencies of public health and economic stability. Inequalities have become starker. UN Women estimates that gender equality could be set back 25 years by the impact of Covid-19 on society.<sup>63</sup> Now more than ever we need preventative action to ensure that the values of equality and diversity, on which Scotland prides itself, do not slip backwards but are supported to evolve. An **Equal Media and Cultural Centre for Scotland** would spearhead this crucial work.

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<sup>62</sup> Butterfield C (2021) Why Covid-19 has expanded the creative sector's horizons. Creative Review Available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/why-covid-19-has-expanded-the-creative-sectors-horizons/>.

<sup>63</sup> Engender (2021) Vision for a Feminist Recovery: Engender Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Election 2021. Available at: <https://www.engender.org.uk/content/publications/Vision-for-a-feminist-recovery---Engender-manifesto-for-the-Scottish-Parliament-Election-2021.pdf>.

### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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### **ABOUT ENGENDER**

Engender is Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, working to increase women's social, political and economic equality, enable women's rights, and make visible the impact of sexism on women and wider society. We work at Scottish, UK and international level to produce research, analysis, and recommendations for intersectional feminist legislation and programmes.

### **ABOUT GENDER EQUAL MEDIA SCOTLAND**

Gender Equal Media Scotland is a coalition of journalists, organisations and academics working to bring about women's equality in Scotland's media. The post of Development Officer is hosted by Engender, Scotland's feminist policy and advocacy organisation, on behalf of GEMS.