Received: 30 March 2021 | Accepted: 19 April 2021

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.12701

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

On and Off Screen: Women's Work in the Screen Industries

On the basis of risk: How screen executives' risk perceptions and practices drive gender inequality in directing

Amanda Coles[1] | Doris Ruth Eikhof[2]

[1]Deakin Business School, Deakin University, Burwood, Victoria, Australia

[2]School of Culture & Creative Arts, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

Correspondence
Doris Ruth Eikhof, School of Culture & Creative Arts, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK.
Email: dorisruth.eikhof@glasgow.ac.uk

Funding information
ScreenWomen

Abstract

This paper explores how gendered perceptions of risk drive gender inequality. It does so by applying an Intersectional Risk Theory (IRT) framework to new empirical data on gender equality initiatives in the Canadian screen industries. The paper shows (1) that gendered risk perceptions constrain women directors' work opportunities; (2) that the construction of gendered risk perceptions ("doing risk") is shaped by the screen industry context and social inequalities generally; and (3) that practices of constructing risk perceptions can be disrupted and changed, which creates opportunities for a "re-doing" or "un-doing" of gendered perceptions of risk and offers new analytical perspectives onto the efficacy of gender equality initiatives. By interrogating how perceptions of risk inform decision-making, the paper contributes new understandings of the drivers of systemic and intersectional inequality as a defining characteristic of work and labor markets in the screen industries and in the creative industries more broadly.

KEYWORDS
decision making, gender inequality, risk, screen directors, screen production

1 | INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality is a defining feature of the screen industries, and an issue of economic, social and cultural significance.[1] Systemic gender inequality impacts who tells the stories on our screens; stories which influence how we see ourselves and the world around us. Men direct the majority of the screen content in Europe, Australia and North America. Between 2013 and 2016, men directed approximately three-quarters of the 47,444 television episodes aired by the four main UK terrestrial broadcasters (Directors UK, 2018). In 2017–2018, women directed just 19% of the episodes in US broadcast, premium and basic cable shows, and only 10% of the episodes on streaming services (Lauzen, 2018) (see also Directors Guild of America, 2019; Verhoeven et al., 2019; Women in View, 2019). Prestigious, large budget films are overwhelmingly directed by men (Smith et al., 2020; Telefilm Canada, 2019). Films directed by women are shown on fewer screens and have shorter screening windows than films helmed by men directors (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Women directors are also less likely to receive artistic recognition for their work, for instance in the form of nominations for awards or of their work being showcased at film festivals (Coles et al., 2018; Quick, 2018). Women's storytelling voices are even more systemically marginalized if they belong to racialized[2] or Indigenous women. Women of color represented just 1% of all directors in a study of 3,452 British film productions between 2003 and 2015 (Cobb et al., 2018) and directed only 8% of over 4,300 episodes in the 2018–2019 television season in the US (Directors Guild of America, 2019). Intersectional exclusion for women directors becomes even sharper as projects increase in budgets and prestige. Of the 1200 top grossing feature films released between 2007 and 2018, 3% were directed by white women, 0.4% by black or African-American women, 0.25% by Asian or Asian-American women and only one (0.08%) by a Hispanic or Latina woman director (Smith et al., 2019).

Previous research has demonstrated how gender inequality in the screen industries results from women's lack of access to key networks, precarious employment conditions, stereotypes of what work women are suited to (make-up, costume, coordinating, and communicating) and a misogynistic, 24/7 performance industry culture rife with outright sexual discrimination and harassment (e.g., CAMEo, 2018; Cobb & Horek, 2018; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; O'Brien, 2014, 2019). However, more recent studies draw attention to the need to better understand the link between gender inequality and screen industries' risk management practices (e.g., Franklin, 2018; Verhoeven et al., 2019). It is this line of enquiry into risk and gender inequality that our paper seeks to contribute to, consolidate and extend.

The role risk plays more generally in the creative industries is an established research focus. Caves identified risk as a defining characteristic of the creative industries because "nobody knows" which products will be successful in the marketplace (Caves, 2000, p. 2). For the TV industry, risk and uncertainty have been identified as key to decision-making in television programming (Bielby & Bielby, 1994; Roberts, 2010; Virts, 1984). Screen industries executives such as producers or commissioners operate in an environment in which managing business risks is understood as central (Franklin, 2018). What has been less explored is how industry gatekeepers' perceptions of the risk "attached to" or "presented by" individual screen workers are related to gender inequality. A key point for mitigating the "nobody knows" business risk is the hiring of directors. The dominant risk management practice producers, financiers and commissioners display at this point is to hire directors they know and trust (e.g., Christopherson, 2009; Davenport, 2006). There is some empirical evidence that gender plays a role in these considerations of whom to trust, and that women directors are seen as a riskier choice than men (e.g., BAFTA, 2017; European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016; Ofcom, 2019). These empirical insights into how risk translates into unequal opportunity and in/exclusion are, however, emerging rather than exhaustive. And, importantly, while they indicate *that* women directors are perceived as a riskier proposition than men, current studies do not explain *how* such gendered perceptions of risk arise, and how they might, therefore, be challenged or changed.

Our paper pursues these two questions. The aim of the paper is to use empirical evidence to argue (1) that socially constructed perceptions of risk held by key decision-makers are central to understanding gender inequality in the screen industries and (2) that attempts to improve gender equality need to be scrutinized for their capacity to intervene in these processes of risk construction. The paper pursues this aim with an analysis of new qualitative data on how decision-makers' risk perceptions and practices in relation to hiring directors affect gender equality in screen directing. The empirics are drawn from a case study of two gender equality initiatives specifically designed to increase the number of women directors working in the Canadian television production industry. Our research into these case studies focuses on gate-keepers' decision making. Risk emerged as the dominant theme from the data. To explore this emerging theme, we focused our decision-making perspective on diversity, inclusion and equality in cultural work with Intersectional Risk Theory (IRT, e.g., Olofsson et al., 2014; Nygren et al., 2017). Itself a newly emerging area of scholarly inquiry, IRT theorizes the "mutual constitution of risk and (social) inequalities" (Olofsson et al., 2014, p. 417) through an analysis of how risk is "done, redone, and undone" (Nygren et al., 2017, p. 421). Applying this analytical perspective to our case study data enables us to interrogate how constructions of risk inform decision-making and, we argue, produces new understandings of drivers of systemic, institutionalized gender inequality in the Canadian screen production industry.

Our analysis and findings allow us to advance three key arguments. First, risk discourses and logics are a normative force in hiring decisions in the screen industries. Risk perceptions structure how decision-making situations are perceived and acted upon, and a crucial set of these risk perceptions are gendered. Second, this normative function of risk is intricately linked to the broader industry context that hiring decisions are embedded in (e.g., perceptions of women and men directors), and the concomitant risk perceptions reflect and reinforce the social inequalities that permeate the context of the decision-making. They thus need to be understood in relation to that context. Third, perceptions of risk are constructed in dynamic processes than can be disrupted and changed, which creates potential for the re-doing or un-doing of risk and gendered risk perceptions, and therefore for improving gender equality in the screen industries.

This paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews current understandings of gender inequality and risk in screen production and explains our conceptual framework. Section 3 outlines the paper's empirical and methodological background. Sections 4 reports on our case study, which the concluding Section 5 discusses in relation to the current literature on gender inequality in the screen industries and with a view to future research and practice.[3]

2 | INEQUALITY AND RISK

Individuals' opportunities to make a living in the cultural and creative industries are shaped by risk: the prevalence of project-based production results in widespread income and employment insecurity and in substantive risks of not being able to provide for one's livelihood (e.g., Banks et al., 2000). Townley et al. (2009), for instance, note that especially in television and film production, "creative labor no longer has an organizational buffer against the inherent risk and uncertainty of project-based employment" (p. 951) (see also Blair, 2009; Lee, 2012). The risks associated with employment and income insecurity are key drivers of intersectional inequality in screen industries labor markets. Precarity is most sharply experienced by disabled, ethnic minority and working class film and television workers as well as workers with caring responsibilities, who are more likely to be women (see CAMEo, 2018 for an overview). Importantly, workers from (one or more of) these groups are not only more likely to find income insecurity or risks to career progression more problematic, they are also less likely to have access to strategies that can mitigate these risks. Networking, unpaid shadowing or internships, for instance, are more readily accessible to, and more successfully deployed by, white middle class men in urban locations (e.g., Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; O'Brien, 2014), which further confers advantage that operates on intersectional privilege. The ways in which risk is borne by individuals in the screen industries is demonstrably shaped by and embedded within intersectional social inequalities, including but not limited to race, class, gender, age and disability.

This paper, however, focuses on a different link between risk and inequality: the link between the risk management practices of industry decision-makers such as producers, broadcasters or financiers, and women's work opportunities in the screen industries, particularly in directing and other key creative roles. Franklin's (2018) study finds that "how risk is understood and managed in the film industry has a substantial impact upon which films are financed, produced and seen." Film and television industry executives mobilize risk logics to inform decisions about what content gets made and who makes it. Producers, for instance, will seek to minimize financiers and distributors' concerns about how risky a project might be by "going with the 'tried and true' among the industry workforce" (Christopherson, 2009, p. 79). UK industry organization BAFTA (2017, p. 19), too, points toward the link between risk and recruitment, describing the screen industries as "risk-averse, with an over-reliance on 'names' and established talent."

Importantly, these widespread risk management practices are not gender neutral. Christopherson (2009), for instance, notes that they lead to recruitment being dominated by "old boys" networks, which exercise homophily and familiarity to "manage" risk in hiring decisions (e.g., Conor, 2013; Wreyford, 2015). Verhoeven et al. (2019) point toward a "widespread belief" in screen production that "women are riskier than men as creative team members," and participants in a European Women's Audiovisual Network (2016) survey overwhelmingly stated that "women are perceived as 'risky' in a way men are not" (see also Directors UK, 2016; Ofcom, 2019). In their study of 1200 popular films, Smith et al. find that perceptions of likely profitable content are strongly gendered as well as racialized, concluding, "biases regarding women and people of color are driving decision-making rather than a sophisticated understanding of the marketplace. This results in giving films starring women and people of color less support than their white male peers" (2020, p. 4).

Unlike previous research into social inequalities in screen work (such as that referenced above), which focused on more abstract barriers to participation and advancement, these studies into gendered perceptions of women filmmakers bring into focus the practices of industry gatekeepers, of decision-makers in positions of influence. They suggest that the reason that gatekeepers and decision-makers are operating with a sharp focus on their personal network and the reputation of those being considered for key creative roles is not merely convenience or subconscious homophily or bias, but conscious attempts at managing execution risks for projects as well as the potential, or perceived, risk to their own reputation (and thus livelihood). Turning our attention to gatekeepers begins to shift our understanding of the role that risk plays in shaping industry norms, values and practices, from risk as an inherent feature of "screen as a business" to the concrete risk perceptions attached to individual workers.

The emerging evidence on women directors being perceived as "riskier" than men directors suggests that we need to examine the exclusionary practices in which gendered risk *perceptions* are mobilized through risk management *practices*. To do so, we focus on decisions: moments in which certain individuals (gatekeepers and decision-makers) exercise their power to afford or withhold opportunities for workforce participation and advancement in the screen industries. Analyzing decisions requires foregrounding "the decision-makers and their context, (…) their organizational positions and attitudes toward risk" and the business models and industry contexts within which decisions are made (Eikhof, 2017, p. 291). Within these decision-making processes we then need to understand how risk is constructed and perceived, and how those practices of constructing and perceiving risk link to the decisions that industry gatekeepers make about women directors. In other words, we are examining how risk logics and discourses "work" in decision-making contexts to shape directors' access to work. To understand how individuals construct and perceive risk, we bring in Intersectional Risk Theory (IRT).

IRT is a relatively new area of scholarly work that seeks to bring the interdisciplinary field of risk research into a deep dialog with feminist theory to advance our understanding of the ways in which perceptions of risk are both inflected by, and reproduce, intersectional inequality, especially in relation to gender, race, sexual orientation, class and age. Starting from the premise that "neither risk nor inequality occur 'naturally' in a given society" (Olofsson et al., 2014, p. 420), IRT focuses on the interactive relationship between the social constructions of risk and the (re)production of inequalities. IRT understands inequality as intersectional, that is, it views race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and class as interoperating in specific historical, social, cultural, political and economic contexts to produce social hierarchies and complex power relations (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1990). By adopting an understanding of intersectionality as central to the theorization of risk, the theory foregrounds the ways in which our constructions of risk, and responses to perceptions of risk, are deeply intertwined with social power relations.[4]

IRT contests the conceptualization of risk as objective and neutrally observable. Rather, IRT points out that perceptions of risk are manifestations of values and beliefs, and that they are constructed through practices that need to be understood in the context of organizational, industry and societal norms. Consequently, the core proposition of IRT is that risk perceptions both reflect and are shaped by the interaction of the same social power relations through which inequality is (re)produced in any given context, including but not limited to gender, race, class, age, disability, sexuali orientation, and Indigeneity. Whether a trainee from a working class background, for instance, is perceived as a "riskier" investment proposition for a bank, would not only be shaped by general perceptions about individuals from working class backgrounds, but likely also by the class background of the specific decision-makers assessing the risk. In these ways, IRT examines how risk is ascribed, by whom, upon whom, and on what grounds; what Olofsson et al. (2014) refer to as "risk logics."

With these considerations, IRT creates the conceptual terrain upon which we can understand risk and perceptions of risk as socially embedded meaning-making that manifests in a series of decision-making practices. Importantly and particularly germane to our analysis, IRT also points toward the existence of risk discourses and their functions (Giritli et al., 2020). First, the construction of risk fulfills a normative function: risk structures how individuals perceive decisions they make. Secondly, through constructing certain populations (e.g., women directors) as "riskier" than others, risk discourses also structure the lives of individuals about whom those decisions are made. Third, risk discourses obscure the socially constructed power relations that lead to certain populations being constructed as "risky" by rendering the underlying risk-related values and beliefs as objective, neutral, observable truths. An important implication of this last point is that constructions and perceptions of risk, of risk logics, and risk discourses serve to support, justify, rationalize and normalize inequality.

As a new analytical framework, IRT offers scholars three key analytical foci: the context of any risk-related practices, practices of "doing risk"; and practices of "re-doing/un-doing risk" (Nygren et al., 2017). Nygren and colleagues (Nygren et al., 2017) use these three lenses to explore the interplay between structure, agency, power and resistance in relation to risk and social inequality. The focus on context draws our attention to the social, industrial, and organizational structures and power relations in which individuals and their practices are embedded. In analyzing this context, IRT explicitly acknowledges the interplay between different elements and levels of context, which also makes it a particularly attractive choice for analyzing the screen industries, in which the relationships between individuals, organizations and industry-level is more fluid than in other industries. The "doing risk" draws from the "doing gender" approach to ask how individuals, through concrete decision-making practices, construct certain perceptions of risk and act upon them. It then explores how those perceptions and actions are based on social norms; and how those norms interact for instance in decision-making to form, in the eyes of those who perceive the risk and make decisions, coherent risk logics. Focusing on "re-/un-doing risk" then asks how practices of risk construction are contested, challenged and changed. Nygren et al. (2017) use the re-/un-doing risk focus to capture variations in the contestation of risk management perceptions and practices, framing, "the redoing of risk as reproducing risk but reshaping the accountability structures and undoing risk as disrupting and making it irrelevant" (p. 5). We used these three foci of risk context, doing risk and re-/un-doing risk for the analysis of our case study data.

3 | OUR STUDY

3.1 | Data and analysis

This paper is based on a case study (Haunschild & Eikhof, 2009; Yin, 2003) of Canadian screen production. Case study data were gathered in relation to a contract research project with an initial brief to explore screen executives' decision-making practices in two gender equality initiatives. The case study comprised new primary data (interviews, documents) as well as secondary data and research on Canadian screen production. From the interview data gathered, risk emerged as the dominant theme. We therefore used the conceptual lens provided by IRT to explore the case study data in depth with a focus on risk.

First and as prompted by IRT, to better understand the context in which risk is constructed and produced, we reviewed secondary data, industry and scholarly research on Canadian screen production for information on production processes, financing as well as general business and employment statistics. In doing so we built on and extended the research engagement with work and labor markets in the Canadian screen production sector the first author has developed over the past decade.

Second, to gain in-depth insight into concrete practices of risk construction and perception, we analyzed new primary data collected as part of a contract research project commissioned by a sector organization in the Canadian TV industry which we will refer to as ScreenWomen.[5] ScreenWomen had designed and undertaken two gender equality initiatives (Initiative A and Initiative B) which involved juries of screen production executives making decisions about women directors. A key aspect of both programs was to engage these industry decision-makers in various simulated and real recruitment situations in order to prompt reflections about their hiring networks and strategies. The objective of both programs was to increase the profile and pool of women directors being hired in Canadian television, and to dispel empty pipeline myths around qualified talent. We conducted a total of 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight screen production executives involved in the initiatives as jury members, the ScreenWomen Executive Director and four director-participants of the initiatives. The interviews were designed to explore the underlying logics that inform widespread decision-making practices.

Initiative A was developed collaboratively by ScreenWomen and KidsEnt, a children's screen content production company. The initiative was run over three successive rounds in 2016–2017. In the first round, ScreenWomen shortlisted program applicants in-house. For rounds 2 and 3, juries of four industry executives and producers each shortlisted women directors for an opportunity to direct one episode of a children's TV show by KidsEnt.[6] Prior to directing their episode, the participants were paid to shadow a senior mentor director on the show.

Initiative B was designed and run solely by ScreenWomen and without connection to Initiative A. Initiative B comprised coaching, masterclasses, sessions with jury members and lunch with industry decision-makers. A jury of five industry executives was asked to each nominate three women directors who they thought would benefit from being "spotlighted" through the initiative. The jury was then asked to consider the 15 nominated candidates, agree upon selection criteria, and collectively identify five women directors who then went on to undertake the program.

We contacted the 13 broadcast executives and producers who served as jury members for initiatives A and B for interviews. Of the 13, eight accepted (interviewees E1–E8), four declined and one was uncontactable. Two interviewees voluntarily self-identified as racialized during the interview and seven interviewees presented as women. Five interviewees worked in the private sector; the remaining three were employed in national and/or subnational public broadcasting. The majority of the interviewees were located in the major national domestic television production center.

Interviewees E1–E8 were first asked to reflect on their experience of decision-making as a jury member. Their participation in ScreenWomen's initiatives was then used as a stimulant for reflecting on women directors, decision-making and gender inequality in film & TV more broadly. Interview questions were kept comparatively open to solicit rich, in-depth data that could provide insights into participants' perceptions and sense-making.

Additional interviews were conducted with the founding Executive Director of ScreenWomen as well as four director participants from Initiatives A and Initiative B (interviewees DP1–DP6). ScreenWomen also provided program development and promotional documents for Initiative A and Initiative B as well as written notes from the exit interviews that ScreenWomen conducted with two additional director participants in Initiative A. These documents were included as supplementary case study material (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Overview interview participants

Participant Category	Number of Interviews
Executive Program Participants/jury members (E)	8
Director Program Participants (DP)	4
ScreenWomen Executive Director	1

Undertaken in 2018 and early 2019, all 13 interviews were conducted via phone/skype, lasted on average 45 minutes and were audio-recorded. We undertook an inductive approach to data analysis which involved intensive note-taking based on repeated, careful listening of the interview recordings (Bryman, 2004; Flick, 2004) for keywords and concepts related to three key analytical foci: first, how decisions are made about hiring directors; second, how, or if, either of these two initiatives influenced the decision-makers perceptions and practices; and third, how, or if, participation in the programmes benefited the director participants. This method produced a thematic qualitative analysis of the gendered dimensions of risk logics and discourses in relation to directing as a profession.

Findings from the analysis of interview data were contextualized with findings from our analysis of industry and academic research on the Canadian screen industries. This combination of new data from first person accounts and existing information on industry structures and practices enabled us to attend to the interplay between practices and structures that IRT emphasizes as critical throughout our analysis.

3.2 | Limitations of our study

Our case study involved industry executives who recognized gender inequality in screen production as an important issue requiring intervention and who had therefore agreed to act as jury members for Initiative A. Recognition of gender inequality is still not industry mainstream, which makes the industry executives interviewed representative of peers who are interested in inclusion and diversity rather than the average screen industry executive. In addition, our data pertain to decision-making in the context of two gender equality initiatives rather than "real" hiring processes. However, encompassing various selection scenarios, pitching and networking situations, ScreenWomen's initiatives recreated the informal and subjective approaches to hiring decisions that are typical for the screen industry. The juries for Initiatives A and B were not given any formal rules, but simply asked to draw upon their professional experience and expertise in their decision-making processes. While the case study context of ScreenWomen's initiatives might initially seem somewhat artificial, we argue that it provides useful insight into actual industry practice and into the perceptions and practices of what might be considered more progressive and change-friendly decision-makers.

4 | GENDER EQUALITY IN SCREEN DIRECTING: A CASE STUDY

4.1 | The Canadian screen industries as a context for perceiving and "managing" risk

As a first step, IRT draws our attention to the context in which risk perceptions are constructed and activated. In our case study, the context in which decisions about directors' work opportunities are made is the Canadian screen industries. Their workforce and production statistics mirror those of the screen industries internationally: Women directed 27% of the 243 episodes in the TV series funded by the Canada Media Fund in 2017, a notable increase from 12% in 2014. However, of the 24 television series analyzed, 50% (n = 12) hired no women directors at all, whereas only two television series hired no men. In other words, men directors had access to work opportunities on nearly twice the number of projects compared to women directors.

As film and television production internationally, producing film and television content Canada comes with high sunk costs (because it is capital and labor intensive) and high market risks (because "nobody knows" [Caves, 2000, p. 2] which products are going to be well received by audiences). The wider industry context is marked by disruption and uncertainty and the risk environment is intensified by technological convergence, ownership concentration, new entrants, digital disruptions in both production and distribution methods, changes in audience behavior, market demands for new services, and shifting domestic and international policy and regulatory contexts (e.g., Canadian Radio-television & Telecommunications Commission, 2018). With an already risky basic business proposition embedded in a constantly changing industry, film and television production is a risk-intensive business (Grant & Wood, 2004).

In response, a portfolio of industry practices is deployed with the aim of mitigating risks:

- Projects are typically co-financed, which allows investors to reduce their overall business risk by spreading investments across a portfolio of productions. The financing profile of Canadian television projects in 2018 illustrates the complexity of capital investment resulting from this practice.
- Project inputs are typically sourced from external suppliers and freelance workers rather than through ownership, which also reduces sunk costs and investment risks (Coles & MacNeill, 2017).
- A project's journey from financing through development into production and distribution is sub-divided into various distinct stages. For each stage, decisions are made about whether to progress the project, and if so, with which creative direction and resource commitment. These practices again curtail potential losses and attempt to reduce risk.

The decisions that move projects through the different stages of development and production involve a complex cast of stakeholders from across the film and television value chain, including producers, broadcasters, studios, distributors and public and private financiers. At the beginning of a project, these stakeholders decide about screen content and the creative direction of screen output. Data from our case study indicate how these decisions are shaped by gendered risk logics. KidsEnt, the production company involved in the ScreenWomen initiatives, had tried to pitch

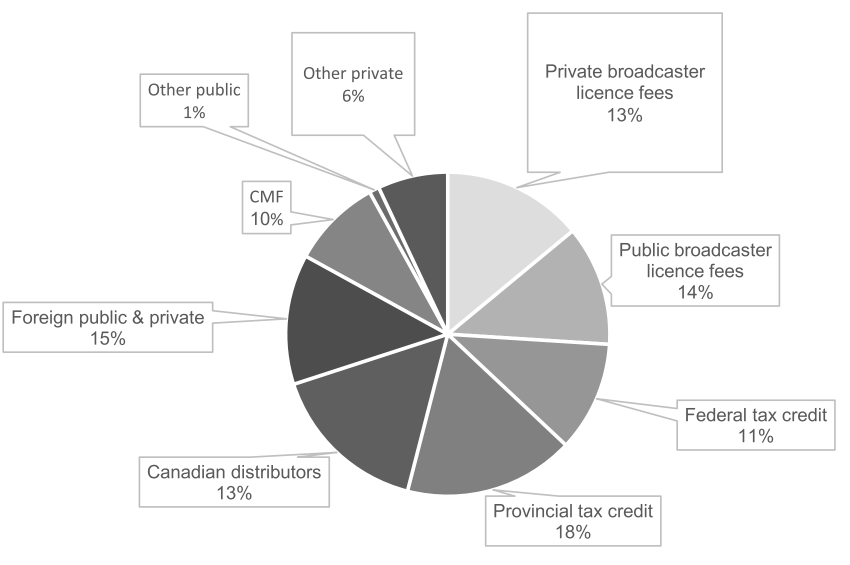

FIGURE 1 Canadian television production financing, 2017–2018. Source: Canadian Media Producers Association (2018)

to international (Figure 1) investors, including major global media corporations, a science-focused live action children's television program with a girl lead. KidsEnt had a strong track record producing successful live-action children's television programs, including sales into numerous international territories and nominations for multiple prestigious awards such as the Emmys. Despite well-developed financing networks and relationships with US studios, KidsEnt encountered systemic barriers and challenges in their attempts to find production finance for a girl-led STEM show: "The concept was rejected by every single US network, with three specifically saying because it was a girl lead…One network said they'd take the show if we changed the show to have a boy lead," E8 recounted. He went on to point out the conscious gendered construction of risk activated in those decisions:

> This was *not an unconscious decision* of why girls weren't getting leads. This was like a very specific push from various networks… This came from a very old way of thinking that boys would only watch boy leads / girls watch girls, etc.

KidsEnt's experience illustrates how perceptions of risk influence decisions on projects and how those perceptions are deeply gendered: a girl lead is perceived to be too risky to invest in.

Exploring, as IRT prompts us to, the context of doing risk highlights the interplay between the structures in which risk becomes relevant (the risk-intensive business model of film and TV production in Canada with its concurrent practices of financing, contracting and project organization), dominant risk logics (what, or who, constitutes a "good" investment) and the relevant broader social context, in this case, gendered beliefs and values ("boys will only watch boy leads").

4.2 | Doing risk: Constructing women directors as "riskier" than men

The second analytical dimension IRT draws our attention to is "doing risk": how people understand and act upon risks; how those understandings and actions are based on social norms and power relations; and how understandings of risk, social norms and power relations interact to produce particular risk management practices. In this section we draw on interview data from our case study to demonstrate that the process of hiring directors is shaped by decision-makers' perceptions of risk and that those risk perceptions are gendered.

Across all interviews, there was a particularly noticeable pattern of decision-makers mobilizing the general risk discourse to explain that execution risk logics were a key driver in hiring decisions for directors: "You gotta get your shows in on time and on budget" (E5). Unanimously, the decision-makers then went on to explain that the common strategy for mitigating execution risks was to hire someone who could be "trusted." That trust was described as arising from interpersonal connections and relationships: "you go with what you know," E5 explained. E1 emphasized that "it's about liking people." Another executive reflected on how the "comfort of the experienced directors that everyone is used to working with" posed a challenge to bringing new talent into the industry. Decision-making was described by E3 as "a subjective thing, (…) a matter of experience, taste, and sensibility," which established trust in the respective decision maker's knowledge and expertize as the antidote to risk. While E6 commented that risk management strategies such as hiring through connections and making decisions based on familiarity or trust might only provide a "misguided sense of security," the decision-makers overall regarded them as a successful, or at least viable, way of doing business. The problem with getting new women directors into the approval lists, E1 explained, was that "they [decision-makers] don't want to risk change by changing who they hire."

This evidence demonstrates that hiring processes are a key site of "doing risk." Risk was mentioned frequently and explicitly, both indicating and reaffirming its position as a central concern. Terms related to risk and risk management, such as "trust", "comfort," or "sense of security" featured strongly. These, in the widest sense, antonyms of risk buttressed the construction of risk as a dominant feature. Importantly, terms such as "comfort" or "sense of security" relate to the individual. They describe a decision-maker's feelings or state of mind. Their use leads to a "doing" of risk that links the execution risks associated with a hiring choice, or the overall business risk of producing a TV show, to the personal situation of the decision-maker rather than, for example, a company's bottom line. In this way, the decision-makers' accounts demonstrated a "doing" of risk as not only something that was omnipresent and always pertinent because of the business model, but as something that was immediately personal and directly individually relevant to a decision maker. Their "doing risk" established risk as not only relevant to abstract corporations, business endeavors or even creative undertakings, but as a central feature of decision-makers' careers in screen production.

We then examined the "doing" of risk for potentially gendered aspects. First, interviewees explicitly referred to commonplace industry discourses whereby women directors are perceived as a riskier hiring choice than men. E1, for instance, referenced industry views of "women [directors] as posing a risk to success." Similarly, the ScreenWomen Executive Director recounted how, in industry consultations and discussions about design and promotion of both Initiatives A and B, producers and executives would tell her that "you can't just parachute a woman in, it's a very complicated business, it's very high risk." One of the decision-makers involved in the ScreenWomen initiatives exemplified these industry perceptions in her explanation that some shows had a higher risk profile, and were thus not appropriate contexts for pursuing gender equity initiatives. Stating that "not every director is right for every show. If its high budget, if it's a pilot,…," E5's rationale established women directors as higher risk propositions than men, thus explicitly gendering the doing of risk in relation to hiring decisions for directors.

Second, the interviewees' reflections also evidenced less direct, more implicit doings of risk as gendered that supported the more outright, explicitly gendered risk discourses. The most prominent example across our interview data in this regard related to the gendered use of job shadowing. Job shadowing is a widespread practice in screen production whereby typically less experienced directors observe an established director in their daily work on a particular show, from pre-production through to shooting a full episode. Shadowing is a key aspect of directing: being in a room with executives and producers who can then observe the shadow at work is seen as creating exposure for directors and helping them to become known. However, shadowing does not provide the director with a directing credit, and our executive interviewees were also very clear about the fact that shadowing did not equate to experience, which was the decisive quality directors were required to have. Our director-participant interviewees viewed shadowing as an at-times useful and important practice, but one that typically offered few, if any material benefits. Importantly, shadowing is typically unpaid and not everyone is able to work for free and thus requires directors to personally invest unpaid time, in addition to related expenses (i.e., travel and accommodation) for a relatively ambiguous, speculative pay-off (see below for a discussion of the intersecting equalities created by shadowing). From the potential shadow's perspective, shadowing thus intensifies individual and household risks for directors, including financial insecurity, associated with project-based freelance work.

More importantly for our analysis of the gendered doing of risk, however, our interview data indicate gendered shadowing practices: women are more likely to have to spend a considerable time shadowing before decision-makers hire them in an official capacity. Similarly, DP4 recounted: "I have really great friends who are men, and I've seen them get opportunities with zero experience, without shadowing, without anything." E5 also noted that the industry is seeing "a lot" of women shadowing but not many getting the opportunity to a direct a one hour dramatic television series. Such gendered requirements for shadowing contribute to the gendered doing of risk: requiring women to spend more time shadowing than men reinforces the construction of women as riskier hiring choices and needing more exposure and training before they can be trusted with positions that have "real" execution risk attached to them. Overall, applying an IRT lens to our data analysis thus demonstrated that "doing risk" is central to decisions about hiring directors and that this "doing" of risk is markedly gendered: women directors are constructed as a riskier choice than men.

4.3 | Re-/un-doing risks: The ScreenWomen initiatives

The third dimension to which IRT directs our analytical attention is that of re-doing and un-doing risk perceptions and practices. IRT frames risk logics and discourses as manifestations of values and beliefs. On this basis, constructions of risk have to be constantly "done" and re-affirmed to persist. Each practice of doing risk holds the potential to "do" and construct risk slightly differently than before. IRT points out that these dynamics can offer opportunities to change how risk is done (re-doing risk) or to question risk discourses more fundamentally (un-doing risk). We applied this perspective to our case study data to analyze if the ScreenWomen initiatives re-did the gendered perceptions of risk pertaining to the hiring of screen directors, or even un-did the underlying risk discourses.

The ScreenWomen interventions were conceived and designed with the deliberate intention of intervening in hiring practices: "We kept coming up against this Catch-22 where the producers would say 'oh we'd love to attach a woman director but the broadcasters won't greenlight it' and the broadcasters are telling us just the reverse: 'they never pitch us women directors'," explained the Executive Director. While she did not explicitly use the word risk, her explanation clearly referred to risk and its gendered construction: "Maybe there's some truth to both of their positions in the sense that a big chill sets in because the producers assume their odds are going to be reduced if they come forward with a women director, and broadcasters think they won't be able to sell it to their CEOs with a woman director." Reflecting on the ScreenWomen initiatives, the Executive Director demonstrated a deep understanding of the intersectional axes of exclusion that women directors face and of the need to design initiatives that address the above-noted risk-related issues of "trust" and "comfort," for decision-makers with an intersectional lens. She described her overarching goal as,

> more people getting more comfortable, or more experienced at least, with a greater variety of women directors […] And I think to that extent for me, the one thing that I feel the most comfortable about, is that there is a larger cohort now…It's a sense of shifting the culture from within; changing the menu that's on the table.

In setting this mandate for the ScreenWomen initiatives, the Executive Director already established a fundamental re-doing of risk. Intervening at the point of decision-making culture and practices around hiring women directors (rather than with women directors themselves, for instance through training), the initiatives re-did risk by changing the focus from the *object* of decision-making, directors, to the decision-making *subjects*, executives.

From our interviews with the broadcasting executives and producers, evidence of other re-doings of risk emerged as well. Being on the juries of Initiatives A and B dispelled the myth that women directors needed training first and that women, until they had had that training, were a riskier hiring choice. "50 percent of the applicants who applied don't need the program", explained E1, "The top tier did not need mentoring at all. They needed to be hired." E6 recounted how they were "surprised by the depth of talent and experience" in the applicant pool. Even the Executive Director for ScreenWomen commented, "for [each initiative] we had 50ish applicants who qualified to apply, and of those 50, easily half of those could all have been employed successfully. And that was something we didn't know." By changing executive perceptions about women directors, the ScreenWomen initiatives "re-did" risk. The outcome was a discursive deconstruction of women directors as generally needing more mentoring or training before they became a trusted hiring option.

The re-doing of risk became also apparent in several interviewees' reflections on the ScreenWomen's Initiative A, in which participating directors first undertook paid shadowing before directing their own episode. The executive of KidsEnt, where the women directors from Initiative A undertook their shadowing and directing work, spoke explicitly about the re-doing of the risk perceptions:

> We had nine hungry directing personalities pitching and trying to make it their own, … , [the] quality of those episodes stood above our established directors. We just hired them outright. These shows have performed better than [what] we had produced previously."

The directors participating in Initiative A themselves also recognized this re-doing of risk, and how it was important to their prospects of being hired: “No one will hire you until you have a TV credit. That credit changed my whole career” (DP1).

But while the ScreenWomen initiatives re-did risk *perceptions* and *logics*, they did not fundamentally un-do risk *discourses*. To the contrary: the designs for both initiatives were premised on the assumption that perceptions of risk were key and would remain key, but that better understood gender equality could be achieved by working with decision-makers to revise their current gendered risk perceptions. ScreenWomen (as opposed to KidsEnt) “taking the risk” of funding paid shadowing as well as the showcasing, networking, and mentoring components of Initiative B, accepted risk as inherent in hiring directors, and worked with rather than against this premise. In so doing, the underlying risk discourses were affirmed rather than challenged. The KidsEnt executive reflected on his experience as “more risk taking.” E1 expressed the key message from the initiatives as “[the industry has] to get comfortable with a risk which is not a risk”. Evidence such as this suggests strongly that although the ScreenWomen initiatives resulted, in various ways, in a re-doing of risk, they did not result in an un-doing of risk. The fundamental, often explicit but always implicit, premise that the hiring of directors is conducted on the basis of risk remained intact.

4.4 | Intersections of inequality

Intersectional Risk Theory emphasizes the need to understand how “the lived experience of oppression cannot be separated into single issues of class, race, and gender, [and] how it becomes intertwined with risks” (Oloffsson et al., 2014, p. 426). In the context of our case study, it is thus important to articulate our entry point for engaging with IRT. First, our feminist scholarship is grounded in an understanding of *gendered experiences as intersectional by definition*. We view gender and other social hierarchies including race, class, age, disability, and Indigeneity as non-homogenous, socially constructed, historically and culturally specific, performative spaces in which power and knowledge is (re)produced and contested. Thus, the analysis of our interview data was undertaken with a lens to examining how decision-making practices generally, and in both Initiatives A and B, either advanced or disrupted intersectional gender inequality. As explained earlier, from our data on decision-making risk emerged as a key theme. Evidence on intersectional aspects of gender and risk was less strong in some of the IRT's three dimensions of context, doing risk and re-/undoing risk than in others. While intersections of inequality is evidenced, for instance, in workforce statistics for gender and race, case study evidence on intersectional inequality was strongest in the dimension of re-/undoing risk.

The ScreenWomen Executive Director was explicit in her overarching objective to disrupt standard industry practices that entrench intersectional gender inequality. Describing her goal for Initiatives A and B she stated that she “wanted to see women in their 20 and 30s and women of color and Indigenous women going through.” These aims led her to attempt a re-doing of risk via a consideration of the racial diversity profile of the jury members. Although the initiatives had already been given a mandate to recruit a diverse pool of women directors, it was the representation of women of color on the jury for Initiative B that turned out to be critical: “If two vocal advocates for non-white women had not been in the room the outcome would have undoubtedly been different” (E2). E2, who identified as a woman of color, emphasized that if the program had not viewed disrupting white privilege as central to redressing gender inequality, the program would, despite better intentions, have “reproduced the privileged access and opportunities enjoyed by the white women who were *already* in ‘the system’.” E6's interview also affirms the importance of racial diversity on the jury panel, noting that the one woman of color on the panel, “brought a really important voice and perspective, so I was really glad she was there… Even though this is a gender issue…it's almost like gender and race (sic) can't be separated because they're kinda connected at their root to the same issue.”

Our case study data on shadowing brought another aspect of intersecting inequalities to the fore: that of gender, class and caring responsibilities. Unpaid job shadowing, which, as explained above, operates on the pretense that women directors are generally less experienced (and thus require more “training” or “exposure” than men directors), exacerbates historical overlapping intersectional socio-economic structural labor market inequalities more generally. But its not just that “a lot of men don't have to shadow,” as DP3 explained, but that, as DP3 elaborated, this imbalance also meant that men “don't have the extra expense” of financing time spent shadowing. DP4's account also illustrates the intersecting inequalities of gender and socio-economic status: “How are you supposed to survive if you're shadowing for free for years? That's why women give up. That's why they say I can't do this anymore. I want to do it. I am as good as all of these male counterparts but financially I'm not privileged, I'm not independently wealthy to keep this lifestyle up.” In contrast to existing industry practice that entrenches intersecting inequality, DP3 emphasized how paid shadowing as a feature the ScreenWomen's Initiative B re-did risk in ways that addressed intersectional inequality and successfully enabled her to advance her career:

> Because I was in [a distant city], and for me to come, and shadow for free, and pay for housing and all that stuff it was like…you know I still have a family to take care of, I have two kids, I can't really afford to just do that. But ScreenWomen got me a fee. They supported me by paying me weekly. Which was just crucial. Race, class, gender? They're hitting all three. And you can't really separate those things. And all three of those things were holding me back…because you know even if I was a black woman that had more money I could maybe possibly do it, but all three things were taken care of and I was given equal opportunity across the board. Because of that jumpstart its been moving positively and forward, since that day. It was a gamechanger. You can have the talent and whatever, but if you don't have the platform and the support, again for gender, class AND race, it just doesn't work.

DP3's comments point to the urgency of understanding the ways in which race, class, and gender interact in the risk-related industry norms, values, and practices that shape career opportunities for directors. With their re-doing of risk, the ScreenWomen initiatives advanced an intersectional perception of gender inequality in relation to hiring decisions. As DP3's also emphasized: “it starts with them making sure the judges were diverse, and they were, and again, people fought for a diverse pool.” ScreenWomen's interrogating both the composition of existing networks, and the industry norms and practices that underpin gender inequality based on an intersectional understanding of gender, led to an important foundational re-doing of the risk management frameworks that inform both decision-making and career opportunities for women directors.

5 | CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

There is a general understanding of the screen industries as risk-intense and an emerging recognition that gender inequality for women directors, in particular, is related to gatekeeper risk management strategies. However, the construction, mobilization and impact of “risk” in relation to gender inequality in the screen industries remains under-researched. Our paper has sought to address this gap. This concluding section brings findings from our analysis in conversation with existing research to discuss which aspects of gender inequality in the screen industries our case study highlights as in need of further exploration.

Franklin's (2018) study describes the screen industry's attitudes to risk and risk management as “substantially influenced by individual, cultural or organizational mindsets rather than driven by impartial best practice” (p. 16). However, Franklin's study does not explicitly link the thus described decision making to individuals’ opportunities for work or to social inequality. The first advance that our IRT-informed analysis of case study data allows us to make is to show that risk, however constructed, does not just serve a normative function (i.e. it structures decisions made by individuals in particular contexts), but that it also structures the lives of individuals about whom decisions are made. We start to see that a key element of the not-impartial mindsets Franklin points toward are *gendered* constructions of risk, which are both explicitly articulated and powerfully enacted through supplementary practices of doing risk, such as the gendered use of shadowing. Decision-makers’ gendered perceptions of risk lead to decisions with substantive material consequences, both for individual women directors, their careers and livelihoods, and for gender inequality at the industry level. To fully understand how powerful such gendered perceptions of risk are (and how important it therefore is to evidence and change them), we need to consider evidence from elsewhere which shows that market data provides no proof for women-led film or shows being less profitable (Loist & Prommer, 2019). Importantly, compared to feature films, many of the key creative, technical, and financial decisions are beyond the director's control in episodic television, and even highly experienced and regarded directors describe themselves as "not really [having] any power [… or …] responsibility" (Coles, 2016).

Second, our IRT-led analysis has demonstrated the need to analyze practices of risk construction in their context. Doing so enables us to bring together findings from previous research to show how constructions of risk are buttressed by gendered perceptions of risk more broadly. Such general gendered perceptions of risk cast, for instance, women collaborators as more likely to default on their work deliverables because of unforeseen caring commitments (Creative Skillset, 2008). Elsewhere, there is evidence that women leads on screen are associated with higher market risks, the example of KidsEnt in the case study is prominently echoed by the experience of screenwriter Mark Stiepleman in his attempts to secure funding for "On the basis of sex," the 2018 biopic about U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg:

> "….to financiers and development executives, the character of Martin Ginsburg as a supportive husband was far-fetched. Backers offered to fund the film if he was rewritten as angrier, or less understanding; maybe he should threaten to divorce his wife, if she didn't drop the case." (Ryzik, 2018)

Similarly, Smith et al. (2020, p. 2) found that "that films with women at the center are not supported in the same way that films with male leads/co-leads are". Analyzing context also draws our attention to variations in gendered risk perceptions: Evidence of women being more likely to direct in lifestyle, home or body documentaries while men work across a broad range of genres and topics (Directors UK, 2014; Simone, 2019) suggests that gendered risk perceptions of directors depend on genre as an important contextual factor. Finally, analyzing context prompts us to consider the position of the decision makers themselves. Davenport observed a good decade ago that "the producer benefits from the efficient functioning of networks, [but] she or he is also a network member and subject to socializing constraints; and so, given a heavy reliance on reputation, may be unlikely to risk experimentation" (2006, p. 255). Risk logics and discourses connect the execution risk associated with project-based investments with the individual decision-makers' perceived career risk (e.g., Eikhof, 2017). However, the implications of such connections between perceived risks and the outcomes of decisions remain both under-researched and largely unaccounted for in practice and policy-interventions.

Third, our analysis draws attention to the fact that understanding risk and risk perceptions as dynamic social constructions allows for an exploration of how gendered risk perceptions might be re-done or un-done, which in turn offers new perspectives onto the efficacy of gender equality initiatives. To date, gender equality initiatives have typically assumed that the absence of a pipeline of highly skilled, qualified women directors is the key issue to fix, and therefore focused on training, networking, and mentoring programmes for women (e.g., Screen Australia's Gender Matters program [Screen Australia, 2019]). In contrast, more and more research points out that training and professional development programs for women directors will not fundamentally address systemic barriers that lie in hiring, financing and commissioning decisions (Coles & MacNeill, 2017; Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020). Analyzing the link between risk perceptions and decision-making advances our understanding of why training individual directors does not challenge or change the risk perceptions of decision-makers. By contrast, such training initiatives actually reiterate a doing of risk that constructs women directors as riskier than men, and individual women therefore as in need of remedial intervention. Similarly, networking and mentoring programmes can change access to networks, but access in itself does not re-do or un-do the gendered risk perceptions and practices that operate within the networks in which hiring decisions are made.

Last, deconstructing the doing and re-/un-doing of risk also makes intersectional inequalities visible and actionable, as evidenced in our analysis of data on shadowing as reinforcing inequalities based on class and caring responsibilities, and of ScreenWomen's re-doing of risk (paid shadowing, explicit intersectional mandate). Such intersectional analysis of risk perceptions allows us to better understand why homophily, which has been identified as shaping hiring decisions in the screen industries (e.g., Conor, 2013; Wreyford, 2015), is so difficult to challenge and change: the omnipresent perception of decisions through the lens of risk makes (unconscious) biased perceptions of whom to trust particularly powerful, in relation to gender, but also in relation to any other characteristics that deviate from the norm of a white, middle-class, not disabled man.

Olofsson et al. (2014) point out that the individualization of risk by key decision-makers (in policy contexts and beyond) "renders any structural inequalities invisible, as if these power hierarchies no longer existed; as if they did not still prop up the structures of power, inequality, and injustice; as if women's and men's positions in the labor market do not differ; as if women's pay was not 80 percent of men's; as if labor markets were not racialized and so on" (p. 425). Bringing, as we have done in this section, findings from our analysis in conversation with evidence from elsewhere shows the need for both research and policy to much more systematically understand diversity, inclusion and inequality as outcomes of decisions based on the individualization of risk rather than of the continued inability of workers from certain underrepresented groups to break into the screen production workforce. In the screen industries the "mutual constitution of risk and inequalities" (Olofsson et al., 2014, p. 417) materializes as deeply gendered conceptualizations of business risk that influence decisions about what gets made and by whom, which in turn reinforces existing inequalities in both workforce participation and on-screen representation. While our case study pertains to screen directors, evidence elsewhere suggests that similar practices of mutual constitution are at play for other professions (e.g., screen writers [Conor, 2013; Wreyford, 2015]) and other decision-making situations, including in other cultural industries and regarding other diversity characteristics (e.g., Burke & McManus, 2009 on class and art school admissions; Kopmann (2015) on class and advertising). We thus propose that research into how risk and inequalities interact and co-constitute can improve our understanding of social inequalities in cultural work throughout.

However, our study offers not only opportunities for conceptual development. As Loist and Prommer (2019) point out, more inclusive hiring decisions lead to more inclusive on-screen representation. Our analysis shows that intervening in the risk perceptions of decision-makers is key to achieving both. Future policy and practice for improving equality and inclusion in the screen industries, in relation to gender as well as race, class, disability, or culture, will need to intervene in the ways decision-makers perceive risk. Merely empowering workers from currently underrepresented groups to access training or industry networks will not transform structural inequalities. What is needed is a change of how decision-makers perceive those who are already in the screen industry, and those who are trying to get in. Re-doing and un-doing risk will be central to affecting this change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our anonymous research participants for their trust and time, the editors and anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, Dr Kendra Briken for her insightful reading of our manuscript as well as Jemina Wood and the production teams at GWO and Wiley for their work. This article was, to use a phrase suggested by Wiradjuri artist Merindah Donnelly (2020), "written, reviewed and revised under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic," a difficult time for all involved and which heightens our gratefulness for all contributions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The research data from which the findings presented in this article were derived cannot be shared as data sharing would compromise research ethics standards.

ORCID

Amanda Coles https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9757-5422
Doris Ruth Eikhof https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2596-4167

ENDNOTES

[1] Our use of the terms "women" and "men" is grounded in a politics of gender inclusivity as central to an understanding of intersectionality. In Verhoeven et al.'s words, "our use of two genders throughout the following analysis is not intended to in any way essentialize or reiterate these dual categories. Our intent is to understand how the uneven distribution of power in the world occurs in terms of social differences" (2019, p. 136). The terms "male" and "female" are only used in direct quotes from interviews or other publications.

[2] We use the terms "racialized women," "women of color," and "Indigenous" in line with the terms used most frequently in Canada/North America, where our case study was undertaken.

[3] A note on terminology: throughout the paper, the terms "perception" and "construction" refer to practices exhibited by the subjects whose practices are being analyzed, for example, by an individual perceiving a certain risk. The terms "conceptualisation" or "understanding" refer to academic practices of theorizing risk perceptions, not to how individuals might conceptualize or understand risk.

[4] For a comprehensive overview of this emerging body of scholarly work, see Giritli et al. (2020).

[5] For confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms are used for all organizations and individuals involved in the research.

[6] The final selection of 11 women directors from the jury's shortlist was made by KidsEnt, the production company producing the children's show.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Amanda Coles is a Lecturer in Arts and Cultural Management/Employment Relations at Deakin University. She is a Co-Researcher with the SSHRC funded Interuniversity Research Center on Globalization and Work (CRIMT) in Canada, and a member of the Kinomatics Project in Australia.

Doris Ruth Eikhof is a Professor of Cultural Economy & Policy at the University of Glasgow. As a critical creative economy scholar specializing in equality, diversity, and inclusion, she has led projects for and with the British Film Institute, Creative Diversity Network, BAFTA, ScreenSkills, and Creative Scotland, amongst others.

How to cite this article: Coles, A., & Eikhof, D. R. (2021). On the basis of risk: How screen executives' risk perceptions and practices drive gender inequality in directing. *Gender Work Organ*, *28*(6), 2040–2057. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12701