

Women in theatre

A research report and action plan for the
Australia Council for the Arts

April 2012

Assoc Prof Elaine Lally
in consultation with
Prof Sarah Miller

Women in theatre

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned in July 2011 by the Australia Council for the Arts commissioned to bring the research on the issue of women in creative leadership in Australia up to the present day, and provide a basis for the sector to discuss these issues and to reach agreement on some strategies to address the situation. It gathers together quantitative and qualitative information on the continuing gender disparities, and attempts to identify structural barriers and potential levers for addressing entrenched inequalities.

After concerted policy and strategy interventions in the 1980s through to the mid-1990s, the issue of gender equality in creative leadership in the theatre sector largely fell off the policy agenda until December 2009, when a media storm erupted and created momentum for change in the form of new networks, events and debates.

Quantitative analysis of data held by Ausstage is presented for the Major Performing Arts Companies and for

the Theatre Board Key Organisations (Multi-year). There is significant variability in the representation of women as playwrights/writers and as directors from year to year, with a pattern of 'good years' and 'bad years' for women. In the MPA companies only 30%-40% of productions have a woman in a creative leadership role, with this proportion dipping below 30% in both 2008 and 2010.

The picture for the Theatre Key Organisations is rather better, with a significantly higher representation of women in the key creative roles of writer/playwright and director, though by no means gender-neutral. While 52% of productions have at least one woman in a creative leadership role, a female writer is somewhat more likely to be working with a woman as director than a man.

Most worryingly, however, in both categories of company it appears that there has at best been no progress over the decade since 2001, and

there is evidence that the situation for women in creative leadership deteriorated over that time.

On a positive note, however, board composition for both MPA companies and Key Organisations is gender-balanced, though only one woman chairs an MPA company board.

Around two-thirds of General Managers are women, and women form more than one-third of Artistic Directors across both categories of company.

Underlying issues were canvassed through interviews. Many of the issues raised in the interviews conducted for this research are frustratingly similar to those identified in the 1980s and 1990s research, policy and strategy. Many people expressed the perception that the last decade has seen women losing ground in the struggle to claim a greater stake in creative leadership opportunities.

Diagnoses of the causes and possible actions to improve the situation varied widely, from the problem lying with the leadership model of the autonomous artistic director and a lack of transparency in selection, to the more general arrangements of precarious employment and career progression within the sector.

Given that anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies have been in place for many years without significant progress towards gender parity, we cannot assume that there are simple solutions to the disparities, or that the approaches that have been put in place in the past will be sufficient to create significant inroads into the problems. Three major issues must be addressed to clear the path towards gender equality: the perception gap on the current state of parity, the need to balance family and career commitments, and the lack of sustained organisational commitment and action.

A cross-sectoral approach is therefore proposed that involves three inter-related elements:

- **Information:** a systematic approach towards the compilation of a regular 'scorecard' of indicators, so that the state of the sector and any advances can be tracked and monitored
- **Accountability:** adherence by companies to best practice gender parity objectives set by company boards and senior

management, and reported
against as part of annual
reporting

- **Vigilance:** individuals taking responsibility for the integrity of the decision-making they make themselves and of those around them.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the assistance in the preparation of this report of: Jonathan Bollen and Jenny Fewster of Ausstage, Katy Alexander and Jane Howard who assisted with the research, the individuals we interviewed (listed in Appendix 1), the staff of the Australia Council Library, and everyone who took part in the discussion at the Salon held at the Australian Theatre Forum in September 2011.

Reviewing progress to date

We have something of the utmost importance to contribute: the sensibility, the experience and the expertise of one half of humanity. All we ask is that we are able to do this in conditions of complete equality.

Dorothy Hewitt launching the Australia Council's Women in the Arts report, 1983¹

Creative leadership is on the agenda more than at any time in the past. Intensive debate about creativity and innovation has found its way into policy debates in Australia and internationally. 'Creativity has come to be valued', suggests Richard Florida, 'because new technologies, new industries, new wealth and all other good economic things flow from it'. Attention to what has become known as the 'creative economy' is paradigmatic of this new valorisation of creativity: it remains an attribute of individual people, but becomes something more in the form of 'imaginative innovation as the very heart – the pump – of wealth creation and social renewal'.²

Indeed, some commentators suggest that we are seeing a shift in the foundational drivers of global social

and economic organisation. In the 1980s we grappled with the implications of the shift towards the 'information economy' and the 1990s with the shift to the 'knowledge economy'. The 2000s, some have suggested could be characterised by a shift to a 'networked economy' model with the spread of the Internet and greater connectivity. The logical next stage, Daniel Pink has suggested, is one which enhances the capacity for new ways of thinking to be brought to realisation, in a move towards what he refers to as the 'conceptual age':

We are moving from an economy and a society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place, the Conceptual Age.³

¹ Australia Council Women in the Arts Committee, 1987, *The Committee's Report, December 1987*, p.1.

² *The Art of Engagement*, p.8.

³ Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*, p.12.

Here in Australia, the Gillard Government's recently released *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper* has placed creativity and the arts firmly on the national policy agenda. It proposes that the National Cultural policy should 'bring the arts and creative industries into the mainstream'.⁴ Two of the Goals outlined in the Discussion Paper have particular relevance to the topic of this report:

- Goal 1 aims to 'ensure that what the government supports—and how this support is provided—reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture'.⁵
- Goal 3 aims 'to support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas'.⁶

To extend the sentiment articulated in the quote from Dorothy Hewitt above, women make up half of humanity and therefore form half of the potential creative resource, at whatever their level of engagement with the arts and cultural economy. It is now more than

30 years since concerted efforts to level the gender playing field began, and in 2011 Australia has a female Prime Minister and Governor General, many current or former State Governors and Premiers are women, and we can see women achieving the highest levels of status and leadership across many industries and sectors of the economy.

And yet, gender-neutral representation in creative leadership is elusive. The presence of a minority of high-profile women in positions of power and influence may be indicators of a genuine shift in the long-standing gender imbalances, or they may in fact signal a more incremental evolution in gender segregation, with a continuing differentiation and segregation between 'women's work' and 'men's work'.

In July 2011 the Australia Council for the Arts commissioned this research report to bring the research on the issue of women in creative leadership in Australia up to the present day, and provide a basis for the sector to discuss these issues and to reach agreement on some strategies to address the situation. This research gathers

4 Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*, p.12.

5 *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*, p.14.

6 *National Cultural Policy Discussion Paper*, p.16.

together quantitative and qualitative information on the continuing gender disparities, and attempts to identify structural barriers and potential levers for addressing entrenched inequalities.

It should be noted that while the focus of this research report is on gender equality, as many of the people interviewed for the research emphatically reinforced, disparities in opportunities and appointments are even more marked for members of other culturally diverse categories. Although this report is only able to touch on these issues in passing, many of its findings in relation to gender apply to other dimensions of the culturally diverse population of Australia.

Reviewing progress from the 1980s to the present

The 1980s

In 1982–83, as part of the Women & Arts project, the Australia Council sponsored a study of the status of women working in the arts, conducted by the Research Advisory Group of the NSW Women and Arts Festival.⁷ This research clearly showed that women faced considerable discrimination and a variety of obstacles in establishing a

career in the arts. Women worked in the least powerful positions in arts organisations and tended to be better represented in areas such as community theatre, youth theatre and education, which are generally perceived as having lower status. Women received lower pay than men, fewer and smaller grants from Council. Lack of childcare and other domestic and financial pressures resulted in women dropping out of careers in the arts.

- In 1981–82, women comprised 37% of the total number of individual applicants for Australia Council grants, a percentage which had remained relatively stable over the previous recent years. The application success rates were the similar for women and men, however women requested on average 86% of the amount requested by men.⁸
- In September 1983 women constituted 32% of the members of the Australia Council and its Boards.
- In 1983 women formed 60% of the staff of the Australia Council, but only two of thirteen members of the senior management team were women.⁹

⁷ Appleton, Gil, 1982, *Women in the Arts*. Interestingly, Lucy Freeman's Masters research (2011) provides evidence that women were better represented in positions of creative leadership prior to the 1970s. A list of theatre company founders and artistic directors to 1968 lists 60 individuals of which 45% were women (p.26). However, by 1979 only 16% of 32 subsidised theatre companies had women in artistic director positions (p.34).

⁸ Australia Council for the Arts, 1984, *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*. p.11.

⁹ Australia Council for the Arts, 1984, *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*. p.8.

In May 1984 the Council's Policy and Planning Division endorsed a paper entitled *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*, outlining the issues and strategies to address them.¹⁰ After presenting the evidence, the Strategy states that:

*The evidence given provokes a number of questions. Some are fundamental, and cannot fully be answered with our present state of knowledge. Some have to do with entrenched attitudes in the community, which will take many years to disappear, and yet which help to perpetuate discriminatory practices. ... Effective strategies to improve the situation of women must tackle both social attitudes and actual practices, and should desirably be mutually reinforcing in these respects.*¹¹

The development of equal opportunity programs within the larger subsidised arts organisations would become a criterion for assessing grant applications, and major organisations should report in their annual grant application on their progress towards equal opportunity. A range of other strategies were implemented, including amended guidelines for general grants requiring arts organisations to review the representation of women on their governing bodies, research and information to encourage more women to apply for grants, and equal

opportunity programs throughout Council's own operations.¹²

In July 1985 the Council established a Women and the Arts Advisory Committee to advise on the implementation of the strategy document and to monitor policies and programs for their impact on women, and to identify additional steps to assist women in the arts in Australia. The Committee presented a Final Report at the end of its term, in December 1987,¹³ which included an expression of the Committee's delight with the announcement of the Sydney Theatre Company's 10th Anniversary Season, which was quoted in part:

*'Sydney Theatre Company is an Affirmative Action Company and I'm pleased to announce that for the 1988 season 54% of the acting roles will be taken by women. Such a statistic is particularly hard to achieve when a large commitment of our work is to the classics where traditionally, the odd Trojan Women being the exception, women's roles are far fewer. As well next year, 66% of the new Australian plays have been written by women. We are very pleased with both these achievements. I might add that of the Sydney Theatre Company's executive staff, 50% are women.'*¹⁴

10 Australia Council for the Arts, 1984, *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*. [Australia Council Library call no. 700.88042 AUS]

11 Australia Council for the Arts, 1984, *Women in the Arts: A Strategy for Action*, p.15.

12 Aldridge, 'Positive Councillng', p.20.

The Committee concluded its report by saying that it believed that the momentum needed to be maintained, and that it 'anticipates that Council and its Boards will maintain its commitment to addressing the behavioural and structural barriers that still prevail for women in the arts'.¹⁵

The Committee went on to recommend seven future strategies for arts organisations in the areas of: affirmative action in employment; training; exhibition policies; theatre production policies; higher education policies; governing bodies; and equity in grant funding within Council itself.¹⁶

A review process carried out in 1990 showed:

- Comparisons of 1989 figures with 1981–82 showed a significant rise in female applicants to most Boards, and although there were still fewer than male applicants, women had a slightly better success rate overall.
- An improvement in the representation of women on governing bodies, from 27% in 1985 to 40% in 1989.

- An investigation of the annual statements by companies on their progress towards equal opportunities for women were encouraging, with an increase in the number of organisations reporting specific steps towards improvement. However, less than 50% of organisations had showed clearly that EEO arrangements had been built into their operations by 1989.

These indicators were outlined by Ruth Aldridge in a newsletter article for Women in Arts: Networking Internationally, where she noted that, although the situation was improving, 'continued and concentrated efforts will have to be made to effect lasting change' and that 'despite some improvements over the last decade or so, sexist attitudes are still prevalent in the community and are widely reflected in the media'.¹⁷ A particular note of caution was reserved for the major client organisations:

13 Australia Council Women in the Arts Committee, 1987, *The Committee's Report, December 1987*.

14 Australia Council Women in the Arts Committee, 1987, *The Committee's Report, December 1987*, pp.2–3.

15 Australia Council Women in the Arts Committee, 1987, *The Committee's Report, December 1987*, p.53.

16 Australia Council Women in the Arts Committee, 1987, *The Committee's Report, December 1987*, pp.53–54.

17 Aldridge, 'Positive Councillings', p.20.

The Australia Council's 1983 'Strategy for Action' was a promising document which anticipated Federal legislation on EEO and Affirmative Action, yet even though these programs are now firmly established in both the public and private sectors, and even though levels of female staff have become equitable, with several women in power positions such as heads of departments, the Council does not seem to be taking a strong enough line with the major client organisations.¹⁸

The 1990s

By 1994, the Australia Council had been actively pursuing strategies to secure a gender balance in creative work for a decade. Gillian Hanscombe's *Report on the Evaluating and Monitoring of the Australia Council's Women and Arts Policy* (prepared for the Women in Arts Unit of the Arts Council of England), included updated research and documented advances but noted that:

The situation in 1994 is uneven and does not reflect complete transformation; on the other hand, significant improvements have already taken place and others are clearly in process.¹⁹

The improvements included:

- An increase in the proportion of applications from women from 30% before 1982–3 to 46% in 1993–4.
- Gender balance achieved in the membership of Council and its Boards and Committees: in 1993 52.5% of these bodies were women.
- The success rate for women applicants was continuing to increase.²⁰
- The 1983 research had showed that not only did fewer women apply, they applied for smaller amounts than men. By 1993–4 the gap in levels of funding requested had almost closed: women applied on average for \$19,922, 97% of the average requested by males.
- However, there were far fewer applications from women for Australian Artists Creative Fellowships (the 'Keatings'), awarded to senior artists for long projects.
- Hanscombe also commented that 'monitoring is made more difficult by differences between projects proposed by a woman, projects involving mostly

¹⁸ Aldridge, 'Positive Counselling', p.18

¹⁹ Hanscombe, Gillian, 1994, *But is it Workable? A Report on the Evaluating and Monitoring of the Australia Council's Women and Arts Policy*, Sydney NSW, prepared for the Women in Arts Unit, Arts Council of England, p.1-2.

²⁰ Hanscombe *But is it Workable?*, p.5.

women, projects with a women creative artist and other participants, leading to “number games and a lot of definitions”.²¹

Again, it is the major clients who are particularly targeted for criticism, while smaller clients had been more responsive to the need for change:

A further problem has been that the programmes of major clients haven't sufficiently reflected the Board's priorities generally. Some believe that their subsidy is just platform support simply to exist. Attempts to direct how the subsidy might be better used were strongly resisted 'on artistic grounds'. ... Political realities are such that the Committee doesn't have as much control as it would like with respect to some high-profile, major clients. Others, however, are quite interested in developing their programmes, and are interested in the priorities the Committee has been setting.

*Attitudinal change is far more easily achieved – and far more evident – with respect to smaller clients, who are interested both in wider programming and in changing the organisational structures of Australian theatre, e.g. by exploring job-sharing, part-time positions, and so on.*²²

Further detail on progress was published in 1995, with a national survey of the development of

women's writing for performance. Conducted by Playworks, a national organisation established in 1985 with a brief to nurture new women writers, encourage new forms of writing for performance and develop the work of experienced women writers, *Playing with Time* sounded a note of cautious optimism but pointed out that despite a strong campaign for equity, 'attempts to achieve equal opportunity for women are still small steps compared to their historical disadvantage'. There is also a need for 'caution against acceptance of an assumption that women have been well treated and are now equal'. As one respondent to the survey points out:

*It has not escaped my attention that in the 1995 Sydney Theatre Company subscription season there is only one play by a woman; at Belvoir Street Theatre there are no plays by women; Griffin's season is not a whole lot better.*²³

Statistical analysis was also presented, showing:

- In 1994/95 women were 46% of applicants for Literature Board Grants for writing for performance, receiving 37% of the funding allocated, compared

²¹ Hanscombe *But is it Workable?*, p.11. See also Chesterman & Baxter, *Playing with Time*.

²² Hanscombe *But is it Workable?*, p.11.

²³ *Playing with Time*, p. 21.

with 1986/87, when women made up 45% of applicants but received only 32% of the funding allocated.

- Women were better represented in group-devised or experimental work, and women writers featured strongly in the programming and development of work by community theatre companies, theatre for young people, and puppetry companies. However:

*'Over the 10 years, we have begun to see a greater focus on contemporary Australian work, but this has not benefitted women writers, whose work has hovered just under 20% of the seasons, although it dropped in one year to only 8%. Australian men's works have risen from 30% of the repertoire to 38%. ... it also seems that women are more often consigned to smaller theatres or to seasons of one-act or short plays.'*²⁴

- The greatest imbalance is in the traditional mainstage companies, in both large and small organisations, and in particular, the companies where there is the largest investment of resources, those six companies which at the time had been brought by the

Australia Council into the Major Organisations Board, where the poor representation of women writers had not changed over the previous decade.²⁵

While many of the women writers responding to the 1995 Playworks survey acknowledged that they had themselves benefited from positive policies over the previous decade, it is disheartening to not that many of the issues they describe vary very little from those raised in the interviews conducted in 2011 for this research.

The 2000s

Beyond the 1990s, policy attention became redirected towards initiatives, reports and inquiries that looked at ways of strengthening and addressing systemic challenges to the sector itself. Interventions across the 2000s have included the *Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector* (2002), *An Analysis of the Triennially Funded Theatre Organisations of the Theatre Boards of the Australia Council* (2003), *An Examination of Resources for Writing for Performance* (2005), *Make it New?* (2006), *Anticipating Change in the Major Performing Arts* (2008),

²⁴ *Playing with Time*, page 119.

²⁵ *Playing with Time*, page 117.

and *Love Your Work: Training, Retaining and Connecting Artists in Theatre* (2008).²⁶

The issue of gender equality seemed to have largely fallen off the policy agenda until December 2009, when the iconic image of eleven men and one woman lined up for the launch of the 2010 Belvoir season launched a storm in the media and the blogosphere. Women directors and playwrights, in particular, responded by forming the Australian Women Directors Alliance (AWDA) and Australian Women Playwrights Online (AWOL). This momentum was also translated into a series of events set up to canvas and debate the issues, including the 2009 Phillip Parsons Memorial Lecture panel, the Women Directors Forum in May 2010, the Playwrights Solutions Roundtable in August 2011, and a Salon at the Australian Theatre Forum in September 2011, as well as the commissioning of this research report.

Quantitative analysis, 2001–2011

The following sections of the report present some quantitative evidence of

Performing Arts theatre companies and the Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year).

Productions by gender and creative leadership function, MPA companies, 2001– 2011

The following information extracted from the Ausstage database focuses on the credited playwrights (or writers) and directors for events by the theatre companies which are part of the Major Performing Arts group,²⁷ between 2010 and 2011.

AusStage provides a research infrastructure for investigating live performance in Australia, which been constructed by a consortium of university and industry partners, supported by funding from the Australian Research Council. It provides an extensive database of live events with a dramatic content, from January 2001 onwards, covering all of Australia. AusStage excludes music events in the form of concerts, rock bands, and so on but includes music theatre. Data from before 2001 is also included, based on the Australia and New Zealand Theatre Record, the PROMPT Collection at the National

²⁶ Cultural Ministers Council (Australia), 2002, *Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector*. Roberts, I.D. Pty Ltd., 2003, *An Analysis of the Triennially Funded Theatre Organisations of the Theatre Board of the Australia Council*. Tait, Peta, with Deborah Leiser-Moore, 2005, *An Examination of Resources for Writing for Performance*. Baylis, John, with Joshi, Atul, 2006, *Make it New? Some Proposals for the Future of Theatre Funding*. AEA Consulting, 2008, *Anticipating Change in the Major Performing Arts*. Bailey, Jackie, 2008, *Love Your Work: Training, Retaining and Connecting Artists in Theatre*.

²⁷ These are: Belvoir, Bell Shakespeare, Black Swan State Theatre Company, Malthouse, Melbourne Theatre Company, Queensland Theatre Company, State Theatre Company of South Australia, Sydney Theatre Company.

Library of Australia, the Wolanski Collection UNSW Library Records and other performing arts collections around Australia. As at 22 November 2011, the AusStage database contains data on more than 61,000 events, 6,400 venues, 90,000 contributors, 10,000 organisations and nearly 50,000 resources.

For the purposes of this report, the AusStage database provides a rich and detailed infrastructure to investigate gender in creative leadership in Australian theatre.

Although at this stage there are some gaps in the data, particularly in some regions, and there is an inevitable delay in updating the database with the events as they happen or are announced, AusStage is committed to developing and perfecting methods to gather and enter information efficiently and to provide extensive and consistent coverage.

In producing the analyses presented in this report, the completeness of the data on the relevant companies and time period was evaluated and additional data entry completed where required. Some notes on the process of compiling the charts and statistics are included in Appendix 2

for those who may wish to compile comparative analyses on the basis of the AusStage data.

The chart below gives an overview of productions for the period from 2001–2011 for the Major Performing Arts companies (as extracted from the Ausstage database) with a breakdown by gender of the writer/playwright and director.²⁸

In the chart below and in those which follow:

ff – designates that the production has at least one female playwright and at least one female director (could also have a male playwright and/or a male director)

fm – the production has at least one female playwright and no female director (could also have a male playwright)

mf – the production has at least one female director and no female playwright (could also have a male director)

mm – the production has no female playwrights, no female directors (could have multiple male directors/playwrights)

²⁸ Note that contributors designated as writers, authors or scriptwriters are treated as equivalent to playwrights in these charts. Productions which are group devised, directed and performed have been omitted from the data.

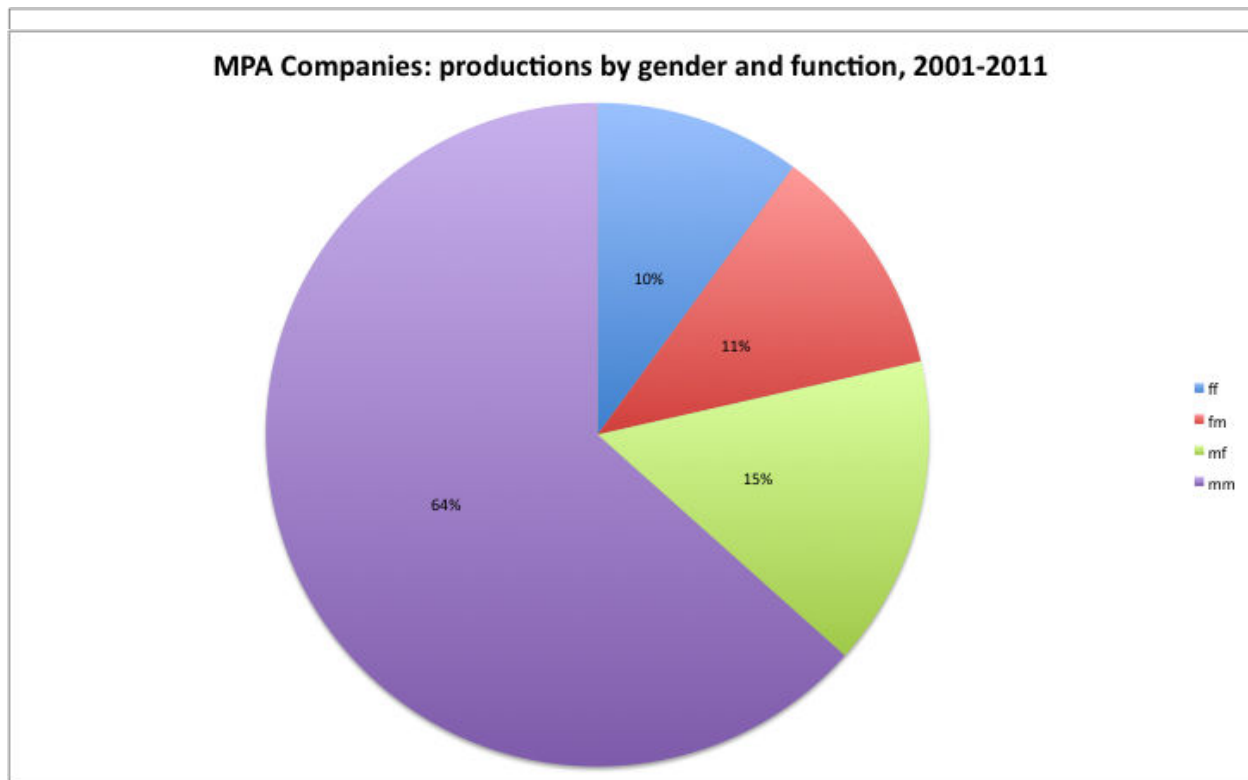


Figure 1. Percentage of productions by gender of the writer/playwright or director, MPA theatre companies, 2001–2011

As this chart shows:

- The proportion of productions with a female writer overall is 21% (the blue and red segments combined)
- With a female director is 25% (the blue and green segments combined)
- Only 36% of productions in the MPA companies have a woman in one of the two key creative leadership roles.

The following figure gives a more detailed annual breakdown, allowing an exploration of trends across the decade.

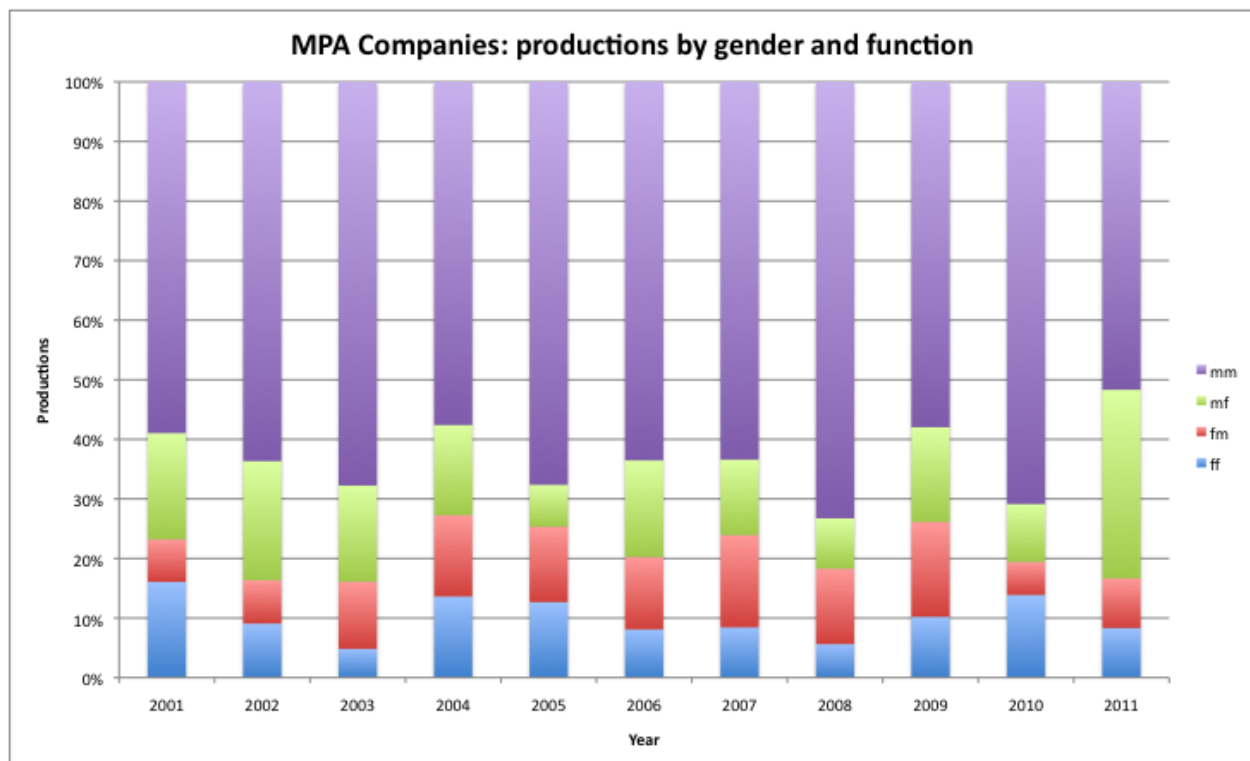


Figure 2. Gender and creative leadership within the Major Performing Arts theatre companies, 2001–2011

As this chart indicates, there is a notable variability in the representation of women as playwrights/writers and as directors in the seasons of the major theatre companies. The distribution seems to indicate a pattern of 'good years' and 'bad years' for women, although even in a 'good year' women's participation lags significantly behind that of their male counterparts. In most years only 30%-40% of productions have a woman in a creative leadership role, with this proportion dipping below 30% in both 2008 and 2010.

In summary:

- The participation of women as playwrights/writers over the period 2001–2011 reached a low of 16% in 2002 and 2003, followed by a high of 27% in 2004. 2009 showed the second highest proportion of women writers over the decade. Overall, the proportion of productions with women as writers hovers at little more than 20%, and only in 3 of the 11 years reaches 1 in 4.
- Over the 11 years as a whole, 25% of productions have a woman as director. The lowest points are 2008 at 14% and 2011 at 40%.

- Although the proportion of women as writers and/or directors in 2011 was higher than in more than a decade, there is a 'spike' in the number of women as directors, with women appearing as directors in 40% of productions. 2011 productions with a female playwright/writer (the blue and red bars) remains at 17%, at the lower end of the range for the decade. Indeed, 2011 was the poorest year for female writers since 2003.
- There is some evidence from this data that the opportunities for female directors were better in the MPA companies in the early part of the decade (2001–2004) than they were mid-decade (2005–2008). Although there is little differential over the period in the proportion of women as writers, between 2001 and 2004 28% of productions had a female director, compared with 20% between 2005 and 2008.

It should be noted that a preliminary tally of the MPA companies' 2012 season announcements (see Appendix 3) shows the proportion of female directors remaining relatively high (compared to pre-2011) and the proportion of female writers also showing signs of significant improvement.

Productions by gender and function, Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year), 2001–2011

This section gives comparable information drawn from the Ausstage database for the Australia Council Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year). The analysis includes those organisations receiving key organisations (multi-year) funding in the June 2008 funding round in the artistic explorer and artistic hub categories (but not the national service organisations).²⁹

²⁹ The analysis includes the following companies: Arena Theatre Company, Australian Theatre for Young People, Back to Back Theatre, Brink Productions, Circa, Griffin Theatre Company, HotHouse Theatre, JUTE Theatre Company, La Mama, Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People, Not Yet It's Difficult, PACT Centre for Emerging Artists, Patch Theatre Company, Red Stitch Actors Theatre, Snuff Puppets Inc, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, Stalker Theatre Company, Terrapin Puppet Theatre, The Blue Room, Thincle, Urban Theatre Projects, version 1.0, Windmill Performing Arts.

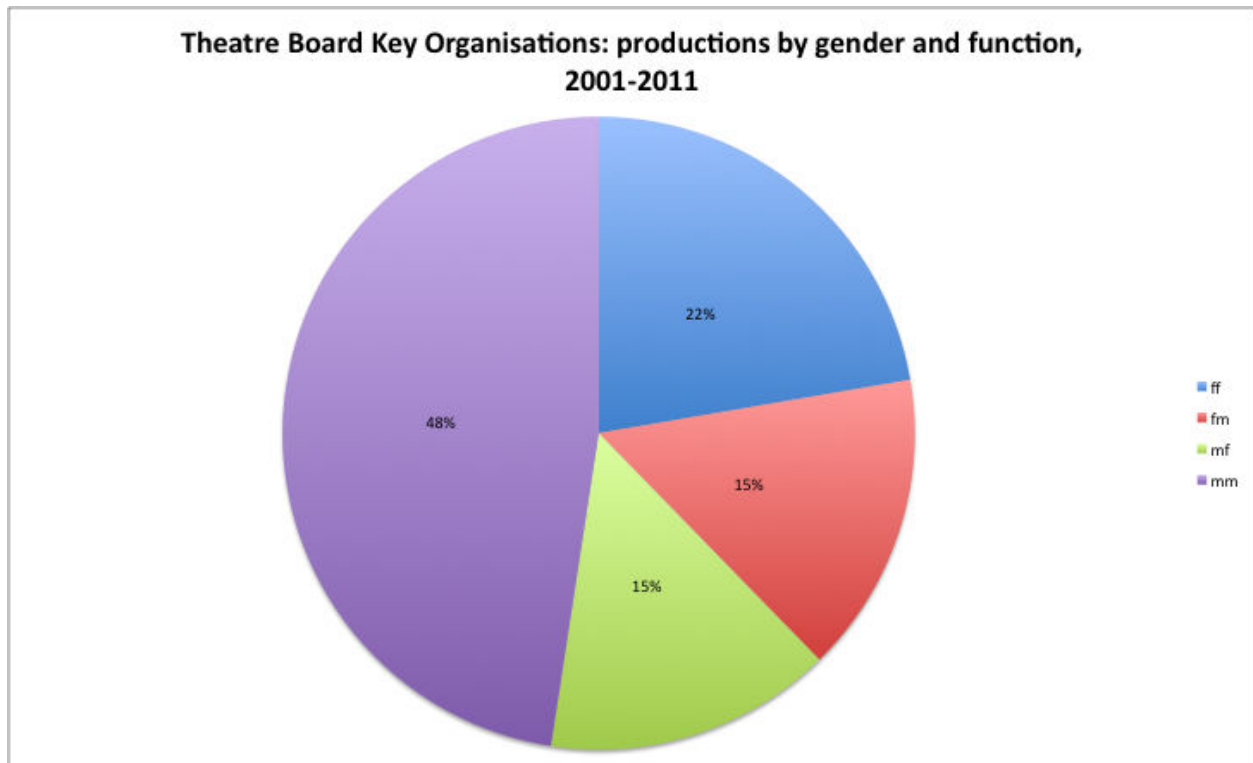


Figure 3. Percentage of productions by the combination of gender of the writer/playwright or director, Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year)

As this chart shows:

- Although the key organisations are not gender-neutral (which would be indicated by four equal segments in the chart), the chart above paints a rather different picture to the one for the MPA companies, with a significantly higher representation of women in the key creative roles of writer/playwright and director.
- 52% of productions have at least one woman in a creative leadership role.

- Women are writers/playwrights in 37% of productions (compared with 21% above for the majors)
- Women direct 37% of productions in the Theatre Board key organisations, compared with 25% in the majors as seen above.

The chart below gives a further analysis of this data by year.

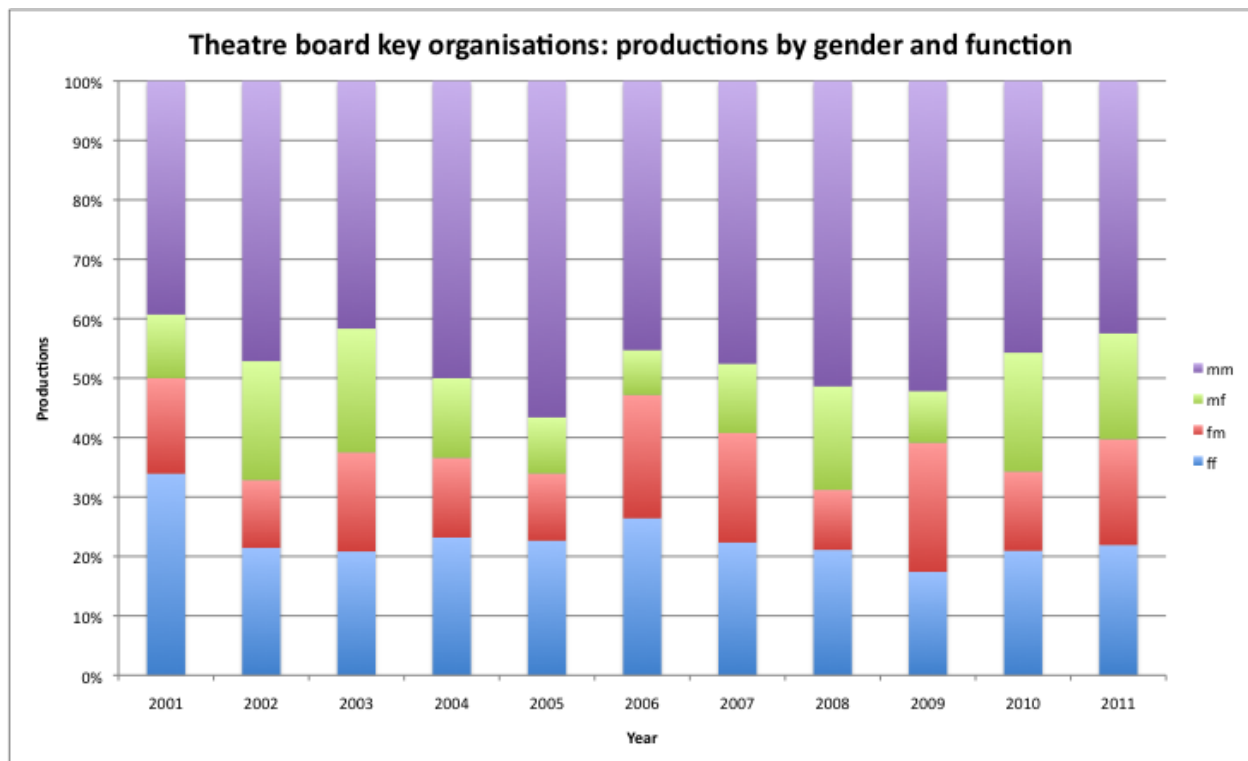


Figure 4. Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year), productions by gender and function

Notes:

- The picture in the Theatre Board Key Organisations is markedly better for women writers and directors than we saw in the Major Performing Arts companies, though it still falls some way short of equal proportions of men and women in these roles.
- The proportion of productions with a female writer shows some variability between years but ranges between 31% (in 2008) and 50% (in 2001).

Table 1 below gives an overview of the Board and senior staff composition of both categories of company:

- Board composition is gender-balanced for both types of company
- However, only one woman chairs an MPA company board
- About two-thirds of General Managers are women
- Women form one-third or more of Artistic Directors in both categories of company.

The following table has been compiled from the Annual Reports and websites of the MPA theatre companies and the Theatre Board Key Organisations (multi-year)

	Board members			Senior Staff	
	Male	Female	Chair	Artistic Director	General Manager
Bell Shakespeare	5	6	F	M	M
Belvoir	6	3	M	M	F
Black Swan STC	7	2	M	F	M
Malthouse	4	5	M	F	F (EP)
Melbourne Theatre Co	8	3	M	2 F, 1 M	F
Queensland Theatre Co	5	5	M	M	F
State Theatre Co of SA	3	5	M	M	F (CEO)
Sydney Theatre Company	8	3	M	1 M, 1 F	M
MPAG Theatre Companies	46 M 59% M	32 F 41% F	1F/7M 12.5% F	4F/6M 40% F	5F/3M 63% F
Arena Theatre Company	7	2	F	M	F
Aust Theatre for Young People	3	5	M	M	
Back to Back	4	4	M	M	F (EP)
Brink Productions	4	4	F	M	F (EP)
Circa	4	1	F	M	M
Griffin Theatre Company	5	4	M	M	M
HotHouse Theatre	5	2	M	1 F, 3 M (CD)	
JUTE Theatre Company	4	3	M	F (AD/ CEO)	

La Mama	2	5	F	F	F
Monkey Baa TYP	3	6	M	2 F, 1 M (CD)	
Not Yet It's Difficult	6	2		M	F
PACT Centre for Emerging Arts	3	4	M	F (AD/ CEO)	
Patch Theatre Company				M	F
Red Stitch Actors Theatre	4	2	M	M	F
Snuff Puppets Inc				M	M
Spare Parts Theatre				M	M
Stalker Theatre Company	2	4	F	1 F, 1 M	
Terrapin Puppet Theatre	3	4	M	M	M
The Blue Room	3	6	F		F (ED)
ThinIce	3	3		M	F
Urban Theatre Projects	1	6	F	F	F (EP)
version 1.0	2	4	M	M (CEO)	F
Windmill	2	5	F	F	F (GM/ CEO)
Theatre Board Key Orgs	70 M 48% M	76 F 52% F	8 F, 10 M 44% F	9 F, 19 M 32% F	12 F, 5 M 71% F

Note: CD=Creative directorate; CEO=Chief Executive Officer; ED=Executive Director;
EP=Executive Producer.

Table 1: Boards and senior staff, MPA companies and Theatre Board Key Organisations

Some perspectives from the field

As we saw in the previous two sections, despite concerted policy development since the 1980s and the fact that gender equality (like other forms of diversity equality) is now generally held to be the norm in contemporary society, systematic differences still persist in the patterns of participation by women and men as creative leaders in the theatre sector.

The individuals we spoke to in the interviews (who are listed in Appendix 1) conducted for this research universally acknowledged that there is still ‘a problem’. Many of the issues they raised are frustratingly similar to those canvassed in the 1980s and 1990s research, policy and strategy. Many also expressed a vaguely-held perception — borne out by the quantitative data presented above — that gender parity had in fact been better in the past, and that the last decade has seen women losing ground in the struggle to claim a greater stake in creative leadership opportunities.

The goal of achieving gender parity is clearly a complex problem with many layers of interacting factors. If the experience of the last three decades has taught us anything, it is that there are no quick fixes to these issues. One question that remains unresolved is that of what we hope to achieve when we speak of ‘gender parity’. In the interviews it was clear that there are quite diverse understandings of what is actually meant by ‘gender equality’ or ‘gender parity’. For some of the people we spoke to, equality meant equal numbers of men and women in equivalent roles across all parts of the sector. These were often the people holding the view that the best way to achieve this would be some kind of quota system, or, as one respondent put it ‘one man, one woman, in turn’. While a definition in terms of equal numbers of men and women in equivalent roles would make it easy to assess when parity has indeed been achieved, it would also raise questions about those areas that are currently dominated by women. In any case, such a strong position on the nature

of gender equality was not held by the majority of the people we spoke to. Equality more often was taken to mean equal treatment in access to opportunities, or an absence of discrimination on gender grounds.

Locating the problem with the model of autonomous artistic leadership

Many of those interviewed placed the responsibility and the 'blame' for gender disparities with the leadership model which gives the Artistic Director a high level of autonomous creative authority over all aspects of the creative work of the company.

It's a structural issue in the decision-making model. The Artistic Director has idiosyncratic vision and taste. You can't overlay a diversity grid over the choices that are being made by the Artistic Director, they are responding intuitively, applying aesthetic sense and artistic judgement on the basis of their history, education, personality, values. They have a circle of influence but how influential are the people around them really? The CEO has a lot of pressure on their time, those around them learn to work in a kind of shorthand with their leader. Maybe they just learn to work with the leader and put forward projects they know they will respond to and that will resonate with their artistic sensibility? Judgment can't be scientifically analysed, if the

company is successful then the Artistic Director is making choices that resonate with the audience. There is no impetus to change if the model is working and the company is successful.

Within this organisational framework, many creative positions aren't advertised and people are 'fast-tracked' by being directly appointed by the Artistic Director.

Some women we interviewed had themselves been the beneficiary of this style of direct appointment through the networks of people they had worked with in the past. Men are not the only ones who benefit, but in general the tendency is for there to be an easier pathway to employment and artistic opportunities for men. Even where individuals admitted that they themselves had benefitted and were grateful for this, they generally acknowledged that the lack of transparency in appointments has the potential to unfairly advantage people who are 'on the radar' of the Artistic Director, compared with those who aren't.

Artistic Directors are the artistic engine room of the entire company but also create the culture of the company through their artistic choices.

It's essentially being a feudal system of patronage. The Artistic Director is like the monarch at the centre of their court. The problem comes and goes because all the power is vested in the role of the Artistic Director, so the structure is antithetical to the way other social movements have changed. Equity relies on the benevolence of the autocrat. Rebellion only has to be serviced until it dies down.

Artistic Directors inevitably differ in the degree to which they are open to input from those around them, and in who is there to ask questions about balance, diversity and openness in the pool of talent that is being selected from.

This is the strength of the system as it much as it is a potential threat to diversity. Collaboration in theatre-making requires a level of trust that is built up in teams or networks of people who work together across multiple projects over a period of time. This is a good thing for people who are part of a successful network but makes it hard for outsiders to break in.

Like-mindedness is at the core of collaborative work in the theatre. Trust is a huge thing. During your training you learn what it is and how important it is. As an Artistic Director you become very cautious about who you employ.

The pressure on the Artistic Director to keep following the formula for success means that they need to have confidence that the people they appoint know what they are doing.

Part of the problem is the time-frames, there isn't enough time to make a greater investment into getting more women onto projects. It's easier to go with people you know and whose work you know. There aren't equal numbers of skilled women and men in the pool of choices, it's a resource issue. The time needs to be invested as part of the ongoing process to expand the pool of people available for consideration.

The choices are between a celebrated handful of blokes and a group of women whose work you haven't seen and who haven't been celebrated. You want certainty for your program, solidity and confidence that you can sell tickets. You need a strong person at the head of a project steering the ship. There's no doubt that women can get up to speed as fast as men and that men can screw things up, but risk aversion tends to favour the men.

We do know that, when allowed to follow their personal preferences, individuals choose to associate with people who are like themselves.³⁰ According to McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook, people's personal networks tend to be homogenous with

³⁰ McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L. and Cook, J.M., 2001, 'Birds of a feather: homophily in social networks', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27: 415–444.

regard to many sociodemographic, behavioural and intrapersonal characteristics. In fact, gender is one of the least differentiating factors, with race and ethnicity forming the strongest divides, and age, religion, education and occupation having a stronger effect than gender.

Connections between non-similar individuals also dissolve at a higher rate than those between people who share similar characteristics.³¹

What this suggests is that continuous vigilance and effort need to be expended to ensure that diversity is maintained rather than falling away over time.

Success is based on talent, but also on who you know.

They say 'I only choose what's best' – so why is there a predominance of white middle-class men? It's embarrassing and protectionist and reeks of elitism.

The thing about theatre that is probably not unique to the arts is that we all acknowledge that so much of the climb up the career ladder is based on networking. And I think men are better at networking, the way it's done in theatre. It's done at the foyer after a show over a drink, and I find that not my at-home environment. I'm not sure how confident I am speaking about my own work, and

how well I come across, in those kinds of environments. Male colleagues seem very at home. If you give me a formal networking opportunity, to present and talk about my work, I'll do very well, but in an informal environment I'm not comfortable.

The elephant in the room is that theatre is 'clubby'. People are allowed to gather round them people who they like working with, a 'clique' who gets the work. This is endemic to the culture of theatre, and when the person at the top changes a new range of people comes within scope.

One successful artist we spoke to feels that gender is irrelevant in terms of the collaboration in the extended network she is part of: 'it's all about the artistic conversation'. She collaborates with people who are part of a developing artistic language, exploring a set of ideas that are currently on trend. This is the continuation of a path and also of a set of relationships that were established very early on in her career. She keeps up a relentless schedule, working 8am- 7pm, 6 days a week, and then often another half day on Sunday. At night there are often Skype calls with collaborators overseas. On the other hand, as she says, drama school hours were similar. This artist was fortunate to be

31 McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L. and Cook, J.M., 2001, 'Birds of a feather: homophily in social networks', p.415.

mentored even from before her formal training, and the contact was instrumental in getting her a job straight from finishing her training. She says that she has never felt that there wasn't equal opportunity, 'you just work hard and get the jobs'. Because of this sense of a shared collaborative creative trajectory, she admits that any new voice would essentially be joining the conversation in the middle and might struggle to find a place within the artistic dialogue.

As this example shows, networks of collaboration are not rigidly fixed, but they do have a tendency to be relatively stable across multiple productions and between different companies commissioning the work. Patterns of differential gender distribution will inevitably tend to be perpetuated. There is therefore some complexity in the issue of gender and affinity networks of collaborators, and the relative proportions of men and women within these networks is not easily shifted. The question of how to characterise and analyse these networks empirically is, however, an interesting one that may be amenable to exploring through a further analysis of the Ausstage database.

Transparency in selection

When there are open calls I know that I do better myself and I'm sure that women do better proportionately. When opportunities aren't advertised or people are invited to submit on the basis of a phone call it makes it hard to get your foot in the door.

The boys club definitely exists. Men seem to have more access to informal mentorship than women. I see it happening among my peers and friends, someone gets 'taken under the wing' of a more senior person and gets fast-tracked. Men have access to 'mateship' networks and social opportunities that women don't. Women don't take care of each other in the same way. Maybe because there are so few opportunities people might think they've got to take care of themselves and have to work that much harder.

A successful young male associate director of one of the major companies was reported as saying at a public speaking engagement that in developing his career he had gone to see everything he could and spoken to everyone possible. The artist who recounted this experience pointed out that this isn't financially possible for many aspiring artists. Although she was not criticising this person as an individual but:

I am critiquing what he represents. I'm sitting in the room with a young blind woman beside me and a young Ethiopian man who's been in the country 9 months on the other side of me, and they're both theatre makers, and I thought this is not available to you and not available to me. Theatre is a dinosaur in many ways and it's trapped in the world of the white middle-class men.

For writers in particular there is a problem in that the work on the page has to be envisaged in order for whoever is commissioning the production to take the chance on it. A successful track record of productions therefore becomes important as an indicator of the potential of an unproduced piece. This produces a vicious cycle where women's work is not being produced, which in turn makes it less likely that their work will be produced.

One interviewee who reads a lot of plays expressed a surprise that more women's work is not being programmed: 'if anything they tend to be more adventurous and creatively ambitious in their work'.

When the play is on the page you don't know if it's going to work. It looks interesting on the page and

gets shortlisted, but then falls out of contention. All new work is risky but women's work is perceived to be riskier.

Reading the work on paper requires a vision of how it could work in production. The best writing, it was suggested in the interviews, leaves gaps for the audience to engage with through giving them emotional work to do and requires a skilled reader to be able to envisage what it could become.

Several of the people interviewed referred to US research which 'demonstrated' that directors and literary managers tended to see women's writing as more risky to produce than men's work. It is worthwhile to briefly document here the findings of that research, since most of the people referring to it had not read the original study and some misconceptions remain in circulation. The study in question is reported in an undergraduate thesis by a Princeton University senior in economics, Emily Glassberg Sands.³² The study was generally summarised by interviewees as having shown that women's writing is viewed as of lower quality and as less likely to be produced, based on a survey of artistic directors and literary managers who were sent scripts (all

32 Sands, Emily Glassberg, 2009, 'Opening the curtain on playwright gender: an integrated analysis of discrimination in American theater', Princeton University, Department of Economics.

written by women) some of which were attributed to an author with a male name. In fact, respondents in Sands' study reported being equally likely to produce scripts irrespective of playwright gender. However, artistic directors and literary managers believed that the scripts with female-named authors would be less likely to be produced in general, because other people are unsupportive of women authors, and because marketing directors feel that such work has less audience appeal than work by male writers.³³

This relates more generally to the tropes and stereotypes that circulate about men and women and how they are perceived. The media, in particular, romanticise and mythologise particular 'names' and a certain level of media regard is needed for companies to feel confident that the audiences will be there. There is a general perception in the arts and in the popular imagination that only men, not women, can be 'geniuses'.

We see this over and over again the 'wunderkind' thing – young males are picked up by males in leadership positions as protégés.

The media seems to believe that it is easier to sell the idea of young men. If a woman was in the same

position the media wouldn't present it in the same way. They need to sell the idea, the story that goes with it. Gender is an unavoidable lens through which things are mediated out into the wider public sphere.

'Boys clubs' are seen as cheeky, sexy, rock'n'roll, hot shots. Groups of women (even young women) don't have the same symbolic imaginary available to them, they're seen more as PC or 'mumsy', or as a bunch of whinging girls.

It seems that we can envisage the wunderkind but we don't have role models for what young female talent looks like. From the point of view of young women who are interested in drama they have fewer role models that they can look at and think 'I can do that'. You have to see someone like you to make the aspiration seem achievable. Maybe it takes women longer to figure out that to be a director is feasible for them. Men have so many role models.

Audiences and the media love discovering new voices and getting excited about them – but women's work isn't seen to generate the 'buzz' that the work of young men does.

Audiences love to follow 'celebrity' and see who is being promoted as the 'interesting new voices'.

You have to be over 35 (to be taken seriously as a woman director). That doesn't apply to

men. Boy wonders. Where are the women wonders?

Middle-aged women often find it challenging to get work as new is the thing that is wanted.

A report 'Writ Large', on new writing between 2003 and 2009, commissioned by the Arts Council England, is based on qualitative questionnaires from 60 theatres and 106 playwrights, as well as in-depth interviews with representative theatres:

There is general agreement that the increased prominence of women playwrights in the 1980s has not been sustained. Women receive fewer commissions than men; of those commissions fewer are delivered; of those delivered fewer are put on.³⁴

Although the report goes on to report that some companies (and writers) ascribe this to a lack of confidence among women writers, it concludes that there is no conclusive view or explanation of this phenomenon. It also suggests, however, that part of the difficulty may also be 'the critical hostility to women's writing often evidenced in the press'.³⁵

The observation among our interviewees that there are differences in the quantity

and quality of the attention that the media pays to women's and men's work is supported by Lucy Freeman's analysis of reviews published in 2007 in the daily and weekend newspapers.³⁶ Of the 577 reviews published, 50% focused on MPA company activity and Australian and international commercial productions. Work by men is more likely to be reviewed, irrespective of the 'tier' within the sector. Freeman also observes differences in the kind of language used to describe women and men: the description of a 'brilliant young' man who will make 'a dazzling debut' is accompanied by a list of the women who will 'support' him, while another male appointee is described as a 'young gun'.³⁷

Self-promotion

You are always trying to get the best person for the job and you appoint the best apparent person, there have to be both women and men who are apparent at the point of selection.

Many interviewees believe that self-promotion is at least as important as talent, especially for directors and playwrights, 'you need to get in their faces'. It was pointed out that a lot of

34 British Theatre Consortium, 2009, 'Writ Large: New Writing on the English Stage 2003–2009', available at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/writ-large/, cited in Reinelt 'Creative ambivalence', p.555.

35 Reinelt 'Creative ambivalence', p.556.

36 Freeman 'Women directors in Victoria', p.73.

37 Freeman 'Women directors in Victoria', p.74.

men who are very talented may also not feel able to do this, but most believed it to be more of a problem for women, because of social expectations about self-presentation and assertiveness.

Selling myself doesn't come naturally but it's part of the role.

Women find it more difficult to have the confidence to 'sell themselves', they feel that if they are assertive they will be seen as a 'ball breaker' and if they don't they become a wallflower. Approaching male Artistic Directors and Literary Managers at opening nights to 'talk business' is much harder for women, they feel they will be perceived as pushy.

It took a very long time to feel that the work I was producing is any good. Women seem to feel a greater need to be modest about their work than men, you can't be seen to be vain, you have to keep your pride secret.

Women should 'magic up some more confidence'. Men will say 'I can do that and I deserve this opportunity, give it to me'. Women tend to be very self-critical. They need to brush up their competitive instincts, get pissed off, say 'I can do this better than anyone else'. Women should be better at self-marketing without losing a sense of reality about their own skills. Know what you're really good at, and believe it. They are still reluctant to go all out to get the work.

However it was frequently pointed out that being given access to employment and creative opportunities shouldn't depend on the degree to which a person self-promotes, or requires them to present themselves in particular ways, unless this is made clear and doesn't unfairly disadvantage anyone.

It's difficult when the work hasn't been made yet, a set of assumptions come into play about what the final product will be. How someone pitches their work is very personal and then how someone responds is also very personal. Women and men do this differently but I take issue with the idea that in order to achieve you have to behave in a certain way. People should be open-minded about how they receive the information that is being presented, and broaden their vision.

Here, as often occurred during the interviews, the respondent refers to different styles of presentation that are characteristic of men and women. It is very difficult to get away from such generalisations about gender-based differences: between the kind of work that women and men make, between how people present themselves, styles of networking, styles of leadership and so on. These generalisations are often used to describe gender differences in value-

neutral ways, but they are also sometimes called on as a rationalisation for the perpetuation of gender differences.

We feel (as did many of the people we interviewed) that it is dangerous to buy into explanations for the continued disparities found in the proportions of men and women in any particular categories of professional position. There is always a danger that such rationalizations may be reduced to arguments about biological determinism, however research on any biological bases for gender differences is hotly debated and highly contentious.³⁸ It is important, therefore, to avoid placing reliance on such generalisations as explanations for the disparities that are observed. They have the potential to operate as dangerous assumptions, when the objective should be to mitigate whatever differences there might be between individuals (whether based on gender or not) that get in the way of equal treatment in selection and access to professional opportunities.

The structure of employment pathways within the theatre sector

The structure of employment pathways towards a sustainable and successful career in the theatre sector

was another large and complex terrain of differential opportunities and possibilities for creative professionals of both genders.

What counts as success is, of course, different for everyone.

Not everyone wants to write for the mainstage. The people I want to talk to aren't the ones going to shows at the major theatre companies. I write for spaces and communities that have a different kind of relationship to their audiences and I have diverse platforms for my work. My vision is about putting voices on stage that aren't seen on the mainstage. My work speaks to contemporary issues that are important to the communities who see her it.

I just love working with creative people. My motivation is to be part of creating great work and getting it seen. I love seeing the work come to life throughout the process, from the very beginning.

Many of those we interviewed felt that the barriers to career success for women had as much to do with the difficulties of finding enough work as an early-career professional to build track record and a sustainable level of momentum towards career success.

It was suggested that freelance work is a young single person's game: 'when you want to settle down, get a

38 Cordelia Fine's *Delusions of Gender* gives an excellent overview and critique of the many scientific claims about the biological bases for gender differences.

mortgage, start behaving like a grown-up, you need to find stable income'. It is at this point that, for some people, the option of moving into administrative and support positions, or teaching, becomes the best option for continuing to work within the sector they trained for. These positions may not be as prestigious as those that are on the pathway towards creative leadership, but they have many advantages. They are more plentiful than the creative leadership ones, they are often openly advertised and competitively selected against explicitly-specified criteria, they are a continuing and stable form of employment, and they allow for flexibility in moving between organisations and geographical relocation. Additionally, they are often better paid than freelance work.³⁹

Women tend to be over-represented in these support roles, the roles that are seen as supportive, nurturing and largely behind-the-scenes. Interestingly, there has been a trend in recent years towards women being appointed to stage management positions (which was substantiated in the tables given earlier in this report).

When you're younger you can manage on a lower income, patchworking together a living. There aren't enough weeks in the year to make a living salary given

the poor rates of pay for freelance work. There's an expectation that people will work for low pay because of the prestige, the opportunities to work and to gain experience.

As a freelancer you do work you don't get paid for, preparation and so on. After being busy you often have a fallow period. It's much harder to do that with a family.

Many people felt that success could only come at the expense of many personal sacrifices.

The fact that it's a young single person's game is dangerous for the artistic landscape. Even if someone is only doing one project a year it's still feeding something different into the creative ecology. The 'go, go, go' intensive way of working is not the best model. Creations from outside that mode, that have a longer gestation, should also be viable. If we lose artists because there is no possibility for them to achieve a work-life balance then that's another layer of diversity that's lost.

The challenge of balancing career and family responsibilities

You need to keep building momentum and maintain visibility. Step away for any length of time and your career ends. The sector is very competitive so there's a lot of anxiety that there might be nothing to come back to afterwards. It's mainly women who are

39 Jackie Bailey, 2008, *Love Your Work*, p.11.

disadvantaged by this, especially if they can't afford to invest the time they used to and have lost some of the 'fire in the belly'.

Before I had a family I worked 10-12 hour days, 7 days a week. I have a family now, so I can't do that.

I didn't intend to have children, I thought I had chosen a lifestyle that would preclude that. Lots of theatre people only have one child, or have them very far apart. It's very hard in practical nuts and bolts terms, it feels like we're running a race and it's almost impossible to win anyway. It's already so hard with one, I wonder if it would be impossible with two.

Family responsibility as an area of concern with implications for women's career progression has a history going back at least to the policy debates and initiatives of the 1980s. There is now, however a sense that the contemporary ethos is one in which parenting is a shared responsibility of both male and female parents, and many examples were given of both parents taking on primary care-giving roles. However, even where a male parent takes responsibility for primary care-giving while the female partner continues to develop their career, there is necessarily a career interruption for women during pregnancy and birth, no matter how short. Women reported that there is a

level of expectation 'that you'll be there all the time and if you step away you'll have to start again to build momentum'.

Complicating things for both men and women is the fact that it is often just at the point of having established the beginnings of a career in the industry, with around a decade of professional experience, that people begin trying to create a balance between family life and their career.

Theatre is inherently unfriendly for families. Working hours are hideous. It's a night-time profession which puts a strain on families. It requires extraordinary energy. Infrastructure doesn't support families. If you apply for a mortgage, you have no stable income.

Whether or not you're good at what you do is based on the last thing you did. The level of output required to remain current is made difficult by any career hiatus if you want to start or expand your family.

Despite an enormous expansion in the availability of child care since this issue was raised as central to the Women & Arts research and strategies for action in the 1980s, there are still significant issues in terms of cost and availability at times that theatre professionals need support. A recent report by the Social Policy Research Centre notes

that child care is an issue that still has not been sufficiently addressed across the economy, and that the impact of reforms aimed at helping mothers into employment over recent decades have been muted. Increased availability of child care has been accompanied by mounting costs and appears to have been most beneficial for mothers in better paid professional occupations.⁴⁰

Theatre in general has low levels of pay. Child care is expensive whatever sector you work in but working in theatre you pay the same rate as someone who is paid twice as much.

When employment is so precarious, artists with children feel under pressure to cope as best they can.

Budgets are tight and if you need more support than someone else it might be better to say nothing and muddle through. A lot of women don't feel they can have the conversation about needing support, they would be reluctant to put forward the possibility that they might have a family because it would disadvantage them. You need to make it easier to be chosen rather than harder.

40 Burke, Sharon and Redmond, Gerry, 2002, *Women's Financial Independence: Australia in the 1980s and 1990s*, p.24.

What needs to change?

The issues facing the theatre sector for women and creative leadership are complex and cannot be disentangled from structural issues in the nature of employment and in the wider culture and economy. In this section some ideas drawn from the interviews are canvassed in three areas: developmental opportunities and mentoring, family-friendly work practices, and new forms of grass-roots networking and lobbying.

Development opportunities and mentoring

A range of suggestions were made for programs and activities that would give women with potential for creative leadership opportunities for development.

Facilitating partnerships for development programs between the majors and the rest of the sector (small-to-medium and independent) in ways that will impact on women and other under-represented diversity groups.

Companies doing more to find playwrights and connecting playwrights to production or workshopping opportunities, perhaps building on the brokerage role already taken by Playwriting Australia.

Fellowships and residencies, skills and development funding

Open calls for proposals or appointments

Expanding the pool of people who are 'on the radar' for appointments where there is no open call for applications.

Many people stressed the importance of getting the balance right between discovery and nurturing of new young voices and recognising and developing mid-career artists. There was a sense that a lot of attention has been paid in recent years to nurturing emerging artists, but that there needs to be more support for mid-career artists to build a reputation and to develop their voice, their craft, and their understanding of the nature of the audience. Investment in early career artists is wasted if there is no follow through.

For playwrights, opportunities to travel and see work overseas, and to actually be there to have the experience would give people the opportunity to immerse themselves in themes, ideas, ways of story-telling and engaging audiences.

There need to be pathways for both genders to try things and evolve to be able to work in larger spaces. How many directors and writers are there out there who could be plonked into a 500+ theatre and succeed? The level of experience in those spaces is quite small.

I benefitted from several 'youth' programs, including the Spark program, and it allowed me to gain international experience straight out of training. I had a mentorship right at the end of the age range for youth programs and then it seemed like I fell off the youth opportunities wagon. I experienced that as a real shift, I only realised that I'd been in a privileged position once I realised that the opportunities were no longer there.

Many of the respondents believed that there were formerly more residencies, commissions and informal salons at companies.

Early in my playwriting career I had a writer-in-residence opportunity for 4-6 weeks. It gave me experience within a company context, becoming part of company life and developing

company 'nous'. I sat in on auditions and had a couple of pieces read. I had the time to work on my own writing but the important element was to spend an intensive period of time absorbed in the day-to-day running of a company. The company had applied for the funding and I really had no idea why they did it, but from my point of view it was an incredibly valuable experience. I think most writers have no idea of the pressures under which programming happens, and so they often have an impractical sense of entitlement and unrealistic expectations about the kinds of support that companies should be able to give them.

Associate Director positions in particular are the ones to target, it was suggested, since they are the next generation of Artistic Directors.

My own career development would be impossible to achieve now. In my early career I worked for an Artistic Director who was committed to giving young directors a shot, and who gave them a number of opportunities to build on their strengths. It's about giving people 2nd and 3rd chances as well as their 'break'. I was given excellent guidance and mentoring in a very hands-on way. It was like an old-fashioned apprenticeship really. I didn't know what I was doing at first and I developed over 8 or 9 years as an Assistant Director, learning the craft. It's a long-term investment.

I get a lot out of mentoring young women. Directing is a very isolating job. Being mentored is a great pathway into the profession. Tertiary training is essential, then mentoring.

Mentoring was positively regarded by many of the artists we spoke to, however mentoring, in and of itself is not necessarily an effective way of promoting women's career success. A 2008 Catalyst report provides some insights into mentoring as a form of career development among MBA graduates. More women than men in the survey reported having mentors, and yet the women were paid less, occupied lower-level management positions, and had significantly less career satisfaction than their male counterparts with the same education. These disparities remained when factors such as their industry, prior work experience, aspirations, and whether they have children are taken into account.⁴¹ As the report asks, if the women are being mentored so thoroughly, why aren't they moving into more senior positions?

A career progression penalty was experienced by women (but not men) who pursued a non-traditional pathway, such as working in the nonprofit, government or education sectors.

Women lag in career advancement from their very first post-training post, and continue to fall further behind at each career stage further on. This parallels the observation in theatre that women are much better represented in education, community theatre, youth theatre and regional areas, that is, in the areas that are poorly paid, under-resourced, low status, and encounter difficulties progressing further. It has been suggested that what women encounter is not so much a 'glass ceiling' as a 'sticky floor', exacerbated by stereotypes about women being good communicators, teachers, trainers and nurturers.⁴²

If the insights of this research in the business world can be translated to the arts sector, it appears that having a mentor has an impact on high achievers' career advancement from the very start of their careers, but that men reap greater benefits from mentoring than women.⁴³

41 Carter, Nancy M. and Silva, Christine, March 2010, 'Women in Management: Delusions of Progress', *Harvard Business Review*, <http://hbr.org/2010/03/women-in-management-delusions-of-progress/ar/1>. See also Carter, Nancy M. and Silva, Christine, 2010, *Mentoring: Necessary but Insufficient for Advancement*, Catalyst, http://www.catalyst.org/file/415/mentoring_necessary_but_insufficient_for_advancement_final_120610.pdf.

42 Chodorow, Nancy J., 2002, 'Glass ceilings, sticky floors and concrete walls: internal and external barriers to women's work and achievement', in B.J. Seeling, R.A. Paul and C.B. Levy (eds) *Constructing and Deconstructing Woman's Power*, New York: Karnac, p.21.

43 Carter, Nancy M. and Silva, Christine, 2010, *Pipeline's Broken Promise — The Promise of Future Leadership: A Research Program on Highly Talented Employees in the Pipeline*, Catalyst, <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/372/pipelines-broken-promise>. While men and women were equally likely to have a mentor, men's mentors were more senior and in positions of greater influence than those people mentoring women. Two-thirds of both women and men found their most helpful mentor on their own, and not through formal mentoring programs.

Comparing those individuals with mentors and those without, mentoring (especially by the most senior leaders) helps to narrow but doesn't close the gender gap in career advancement. This report makes an important distinction between mentoring in the form of a role model who provides advice and feedback, and the more active role of sponsorship, a specific kind of career support that involves actually advocating for the promotion of the individual, and giving them access to networks of influence. It appears that it is sponsorship, rather than mentoring, that is most effective in helping people to gain career advancement.

Family-friendly work practices

Most people balancing career and family describe it as difficult, ad hoc, and a process of 'juggling' their diverse commitments.

A number of the artists interviewed were parents, and spoke about both the difficulties of achieving a balance between family life and their career, and of the strategies that they had adopted.

I was running the company, I had a young child and I thought I would have a heart attack. Pregnancy and

breast-feeding are physically challenging as it is. I'm primary breadwinner which adds a level of pressure. I only took 6 weeks off with my first child. The second time is much harder.

Looking back now to the research and strategies of the 1980s, the assumption that providing adequate access to child care would be highly effective in addressing gender parity in access to opportunities for career progression seems quite naïve.

The hardest thing about my job is managing that balance of work and family. These jobs were set up by men, not by mothers. I would have chucked it in if not for support of my partner.

I was freelancing while I was having children. The outlook for freelance directors (both women and men) in Australia is really bleak. There are very few opportunities and \$15,000 per show is the peak industry pay. That gives you an idea of the most that a freelance director could possibly expect to make in a year. If you're working for a company, you get entitlements: sick leave, holiday pay and so on. There's a lot to be said for that.

One artistic director we spoke to described having provided a budget for a child care worker to go on tour with women performers with children: 'We feel that it's important to be careful and caring.'

We have a 3 year old child. We manage to scrape together a living. You have to be comfortable with a level of insecurity. We have a commitment to an irregular, uncertain, exciting and terrifying lifestyle. As you get older and have kids there's a fatigue at doing work whether there is an income attached to it or not'. Her partner is very committed to co-parenting and they 'take turns' to take up work opportunities. We fight hard to keep the balance between lifestyle, family and work, but every couple of years I have doubts.

I was given a lot of flexibility when I was appointed, I negotiated to work part-time and over the years was able to change the arrangements to suit. My family and partner are very supportive and it's a very family-friendly workplace. We have a strong school and local community. The children walk to school and parents take turns to walk with the group of children. My partner takes care of the children when I have to work late. My workplace is very understanding about the children needing to take priority if they are sick. The organisational culture has a 'give and take' quality and solid family-friendly policies. This comes down to values and leadership. The Artistic Director being a parent is a huge factor, and wanting those values to be built in to the organisational fabric. Policies alone are not enough, leadership has to be shown at the highest level in the company and the values incorporated into everyday practices.

As this example shows, family-friendly values and practices have to be embedded in the organisational culture throughout its fabric, and from the top down.

Women might be in key management positions but workplaces still operate as if they are masculine spaces. We have yet to see feminisation of workplaces.

One playwright did suggest, however, that playwrights might have an easier time juggling the demands of family and career than directors:

Children make a writing life harder financially, definitely. Playwrights can work at home though and don't have a boss so it's better than if you work in the corporate sector, you can stop at 3.30 and pick them up from school.

As a number of people suggested, gender equity and cultural diversity are both complex issues related to questions of the diversity of perspectives within companies. Although history has shown that signs of optimism have generally been shown to be premature, Reinelt has recently suggested that:

I do have cause for some optimism about the presence of significant women's writing, supported by a number of well-laced artistic directors or other institutional benefactors', and cites 'evidence

*of the increasing diversity of writers on British stages; it is almost possible to think that the theatre might finally be catching up with the fact of the multicultural society it represents.*⁴⁴

If this does indeed prove to be a justified cause for hope, it is important that Australia, itself a highly multicultural society, should be seen to also be at the forefront of progress towards equity.

Activism changing with the times

Activism is better put into projects than into protest

Social media have changed the terms of the debate and seem to be creating new possibilities for galvanizing of energies and generating momentum. There is a sense that the networks that have been created over the past two years may be sustainable and have an effectiveness that complements more formalised and institutionalised structures and organisations.

The nature of the debate has shifted in just the last few years, because of social media and the 'blogosphere', however this has both positive and negative aspects. Although there are now spaces for these issues to be debated, both offline as well as online, they often attract misogyny, misinformation and

uninformed opinions as well as allowing for robust and well researched discussion of the issues. Previously much of the debate was confined to private spaces and the only public debate was the occasional newspaper article. The internet has allowed people who were previously isolated in their critique to connect with each other, and it makes it easier to see where the fault-lines of similarity and difference are in the debates. What is unclear is how some kind of action can be generated. The blogosphere was crucial to permitting the issue of women in creative leadership to 'explode' at the end of 2009.

The Internet is also extremely volatile, an issue can have a high profile and attract a lot of debate ('a twitter storm') and then it can vanish again as something else comes along. The internet can therefore create an illusion that something is being done about an issue because the debate is raging, when it might just be that discussion is masking the continuation of the status quo, or that things will change temporarily and then go back to 'business as usual'.

What appears to have changed because of the debates of the past two years is that many people now feel empowered to speak out. People say

⁴⁴ Reinelt, Janelle, 2010, 'Creative ambivalence and precarious futures: women in British theatre', *Theatre Journal*, 62: 553–556, p.553–4.

that they had been aware of the female-unfriendly practices of the better funded theatre companies but that nobody said anything and this discouraged debate. Women felt afraid of seeming like a 'feminist fossil' and that if they spoke out they would be blacklisted, especially those working as freelancers: 'your income is modest anyway, you don't want to shoot yourself in the foot'.

Some examples were given of projects and activities that were actively working to promote women's skills and networks. The Magdalena Project Australia, for example, is the Australian arm of an international women's theatre network. In Australia it operates as an informal network, with the same aims and objectives as the international organisation. Others suggested a 'guerilla girls' approach – working outside the system and using creative, fun and theatrical ways of getting people's attention and alerting them to continuing lack of equity.⁴⁵

Crowd-sourcing of funding for projects is also becoming a viable way of getting relatively small projects off the ground, and has had some success in the arts. Platforms such as Pozible ('Australia's No.1 crowdfunding platform for creative individuals, groups and organisations'), and Kickstarter ('A new way to fund and follow creativity'),⁴⁶ are becoming increasingly popular ways to fund projects with a relatively modest budget (typically less than \$10,000). The model relies on the 'word of mouth' potential of social media (particularly Facebook and Twitter) for quickly spreading information about requests for project funding. The rapidly growing popularity and relatively good success rates of crowd-sourced funding for creative projects also demonstrates that 'audiences' are increasingly interested in being involved in projects in development, and in having a sense of personal connection with the artists

45 The original Guerrilla Girls was a group of artists formed in 1985. They assumed the names of dead women artists and wore gorilla masks in public, maintaining their anonymity as a way of focusing on the issues. Between 1985 and 2000, close to 100 women, working collectively and anonymously, produced posters, billboards, public actions, books and other projects to make feminism funny and fashionable. At the turn of the millennium, the Guerrilla Girls evolved into three separate and independent incorporated groups. Guerrilla Girls, Inc., (www.guerrillagirls.com), have written several books and create projects about the art world, film, politics and pop culture. Guerrilla Girls On Tour, Inc., (www.guerrillagirlsontour.com), is a touring theatre collective which develops original plays, performances and workshops, street theatre actions and residency programs that dramatize women's history and address the lack of opportunities for women and artists of color in the performing arts. GuerrillaGirlsBroadBand, Inc., (www.ggbb.org), also known as 'the Broads' exploring such taboo subjects as feminism and fashion and discrimination in the wired workplace through their website and live interactive activist events.

46 <http://www.pozible.com>, <http://www.kickstarter.com>. Supporters are typically rewarded in some way for their contribution (with tickets, a DVD, t-shirt), with a sliding scale of rewards depending on the level of the contribution. Contributors making the highest level of contribution may be extended a credit in the production, perhaps even an Associate Producer credit. The model is one of 'pledging' a contribution rather than a straight donation: if the project doesn't meet its funding target then the pledge is void.

themselves. The Duckhouse, for example, used Pozible to raise funds to present *They ran 'til they stopped* at PICA in November 2011.⁴⁷

Pessimism about the lack of progress

The sections above have outlined some of the structural factors which place barriers to women's career progression and full participation. The result is often a sense of hopelessness and helplessness, both about the possibilities for an individual's own success and for women in general when the odds seem so stacked against them.

Every 10 years somebody says 'where are all the women?' Then people start activating some measures, then 10 years later we've reverted. Whatever has happened has been short-term thinking, band-aids. The underlying problems have not gone away, which is that both men and women tend to give men the jobs.

When the issues flare up there is short-term investment but what's needed is investment in time in the career development of someone. At least a 15-year commitment to the development of someone's career. It's already too late when there's a ruckus because it means that momentum has been lost that will take time to redress.

The recent revival in interest contrasts with a period when 'we all lapsed into some kind of stupor'. But while the heat in the recent level of debate has called attention to the issues, some see it as not necessarily helpful because it has precipitated defensiveness in some quarters and a backlash of outright hostility in others (particular in some social media outlets).

Some interviewees feel that a lot has changed and the situation is better for women today than for previous generations, but that it is too easy for the situation to regress and there is no forward momentum for change.

I feel like I was beneficiary from affirmative action after I went to NIDA. There were very few women directors around when I came through. At the time people were talking about the lack of women in theatre. I feel we've been through these debates before.

When I graduated 12 years ago I never thought about gender as an issue, it didn't occur to me that it would impact on my career. When I look back now that seems very naïve. I was brought up in an environment where gender was never questioned, the opportunities were just there to be taken.

Although, particularly among younger women, we encountered some

47 <http://www.pozible.com/index.php/archive/index/3802/description/0/0>.

optimism about the issues facing women as creative leaders in theatre, there was an overwhelming sense of pessimism, especially among women who remembered the activism and strategic interventions of previous decades.

It feels particularly bleak now – I wasn't surprised that the statistics were so bad.

The problem is cyclical – it comes in waves. Equity for women had fallen off the agenda, then there was a moment of realization that things had been worse than we thought for longer than we realised.

Women who were around in the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, tend to be very pessimistic, 'weary from fighting the good fight', despondent and dispirited.

Some expressed deep concern that the feminist revolution is seen as having happened and been successful, and that continued activism attracts hostility because it is perceived to be redundant. Equality is mandated and can be legally enforced, and therefore any unresolved issues have been pushed under the surface and have become largely invisible.

Sexism is an intensely complex issue. You encounter casual misogyny all the time and it's embedded in the way we think.

It feels like there's a different kind of sexism around now that is elevating young men at the expense of women of all ages. Their mothers may have been feminists and they have strong wives and girlfriends but they have a sense of entitlement and the women around them don't want to offend them.

Because the values and practices of organisational cultures largely operate on a day-to-day basis as an invisible and unreflected-upon backdrop, the status quo tends to be positively reinforced. It's necessary to actively fight your own socialisation. There's no vested interest for men to do that, although there are examples of men taking responsibility for equity through their own values and behaviour.

I never wanted to believe that there were still barriers for women. There have been particular points where I've just gone 'oh, wow', it's quite shocking when you realise that other people are making assumptions about someone's abilities on the basis of their gender. I believe that it's unconscious, a lens through which people's experience of the world has evolved, and not a conspiracy, which is why it's tricky to try to take tangible actions against it. It is difficult to challenge the people in

decision-making positions in an explicit way, you have to have the conversation without really having the conversation.

We are socialised into silence and into keeping the peace.

Women in leadership roles are treated differently. People feel free to comment and criticise women in ways that they wouldn't with men, for example a photograph in a program. It is frustrating and gets in the way of the work.

Women who operate in a very male-dominated environment are forced to be part of a very masculine culture. The male recruitment bias of the mainstage creates a culture that is very masculine and sets up expectations of what the mainstage requires.

Until there are enough women at the top to start to change the environment in which we work, I don't see how we can ever quite fully be equal.

For some people, working with women directors will be an unusual experience. Older male actors speak to women in ways they wouldn't speak to men. 'I've had to develop a reputation for being tough – a hard-nosed bitch. I hate it but it's necessary.'

Diversity is the real issue

As many pointed out in the interviews, if the opportunities are lacking for women, they are even more scarce for the members of other equity target groups.

The real debate should be about the lack of diversity in programming and in the pool of talent recruited to the mainstage. A small number of people in the capital cities are very influential, so it really becomes an issue of those people being accountable for diversity in the choices they make.

Access and equity are very bad for non-Anglo Australians, both women and men. More commitment is needed to equal representation across all forms of diversity, not just gender.

Theatre should be responsive to the bigger social narratives: at the 2006 Census 45% of Australians are either born overseas or have a parent who was. Where is the embodiment of those values? Cultural mixing is the norm, not the exception.

If the issue of gender parity cannot be adequately addressed, there is little hope for an adequate response to discrimination against other forms of social and cultural diversity.

Towards an action plan

Compiling the research presented in this report has been a somewhat demoralising task. Contrary to what might be expected given that anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies have been in place for many years, it is disappointing to see that, not only has there not been continuous progress towards gender parity, but that there is evidence that things have actually gone backwards over the past decade.

Based on a survey of more than 1200 members of the Australian business community, Bain and Company conducted research⁴⁸ on attitudes towards gender parity. They argue that current gender parity arrangements are not working and that three major issues continue to block the way to gender parity:

- **A perception gap on the current state of gender parity.** While most men and women agree that gender parity in general is a desired goal, there is a significant gap when individuals are asked

whether gender parity should be an imperative within their own organisation. More than 80% of the women surveyed agree that it should, whereas only 48% of the men agree that achieving gender parity should be a critical business imperative. Further, men consistently perceive greater gender parity than women: about twice as many men as women feel that women have an equal chance of being promoted to senior leadership or governance roles. This perception gap makes it harder for organisations to act effectively to address gender disparities, especially since key decision-makers are currently more likely to be male.

- **Balancing family and career.** Women are twice as likely as men to take a flexible career path or a leave of absence and three times more likely to work part-time. Although the survey indicated that a growing number of men are prepared to make sacrifices

⁴⁸ Hrklicka, J., Cottrell, D. and M. Sanders, 2010, *Level the Playing Field: A Call for Action on Gender Parity in Australia*, Bain & Company, http://www.bain.com/offices/australia/en_us/Images/BAIN_BRIEF_Level_the_playing_field.pdf.

to support the careers of their partners, the absence of gender parity means that fewer men are called on to do this as their partner rises to senior executive positions. Women were also more likely than men to support their partner's career by working from home, relocating in support of a career opportunity for their partner, or turning down attractive job opportunities.

- **Organisations must show sustained commitment and action on gender parity.** The majority of the respondents in the survey do not see current initiatives aimed at achieving gender parity as effective, as measured by their success in improving the numbers of women rising to the highest levels of their organisation. Around three-quarters of respondents feel that their company leadership does not see gender parity as a priority, and that companies do not understand what employees need to make work-life balance sustainable.⁴⁹

What do we know about what works?

We cannot assume, therefore, that there are any simple solutions to these disparities, or that the approaches that have been put in place in the past will be sufficient to create significant inroads into the problems.

Research from the business world gives some insights into what forms of action and intervention by companies have most impact on gender disparities in senior positions. Women Matter 2010 (McKinsey) is the fourth in a series of research projects on women and business leadership.⁵⁰ Although gender diversity is generally considered important for company performance, it is not high on companies' strategic agendas and the implementation of programs remains limited. However, some measures were found to be more effective than others in increasing gender diversity in top management. These actions are listed below in decreasing order of effectiveness:⁵¹

- Visible monitoring by the CEO and the executive team of the progress in gender-diversity programs

49 Coffman, J. Gadiesh, O. and Miller, M., 2010, *The Great Disappearing Act: Gender Parity up the Corporate Ladder*, Bain and Company, http://www.bain.com/Images/WEF_The_great_disappearing_act.pdf.

50 McKinsey & Company, 2010, *Women at the Top of Corporations: Making it Happen*, Women Matter 2010, http://www.mckinsey.com/locations/swiss/news_publications/pdf/women_matter_2010_4.pdf.

51 McKinsey & Company, *Women at the Top*, p.15.

- Skill-building programs aimed specifically at women
- Encouragement or mandate for senior executives to mentor less senior women
- Performance evaluation systems that neutralise the impact of parental leave periods and/or flexible work arrangements
- Options for flexible working conditions (e.g. part-time or teleworking arrangements)
- Support programs and facilities to help reconcile work and family life
- Addressing indicators of the companies performance in hiring, retaining, promoting and developing women
- Gender-specific hiring goals and programs

Interestingly, the research found that the following measures had no statistically significant impact on the gender-diversity outcomes of organisations adopting them:

- Gender quotas in hiring, retaining, promoting or developing women
- Systematic requirement for at least one female candidate to be in each promotion pool
- Inclusion of gender-specific indicators in executives' performance reviews

- Programs to encourage female networking and role models
- Programs to smooth transitions before, during and after parental leave.

We therefore propose a cross-sectoral approach that involves three inter-related strands: ***Information, Accountability and Vigilance.***

Information

Various sets of statistics exist, and some are collected on a regular basis (for example the annual statistics on women playwrights commissioned by Playwriting Australia.) We suggest that what is needed is a more systematic approach, towards the compilation of a regular 'scorecard' of indicators, so that the state of the sector and any advances can be tracked and monitored.

Ausstage is a key infrastructure for documenting change over time, and the information drawn from the Ausstage database presented here may form the basis for continued monitoring, but should be supplemented by additional analysis of that data as well as other sources.

We propose to establish a research and information alliance as an offshoot of the research project behind this

report. The research allowed for a loose network of people and organisations interested in promoting the issue of women and creative leadership in the theatre, and we suggest that the establishment of a clearinghouse for information and research would support ongoing data gathering, analysis and distribution. Such a research and information alliance would also allow for discussion about standardization of how data is gathered, so that an information base can be built that is robust and reliable.

A useful model to consider in relation to data collection to monitor the status of women is the EOWA Census of Women in Leadership. An agency of the Australian Government, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) has published its Census of Women in Leadership, which measures the number of women in board directorships in the ASX200 companies, since 2002. The EOWA census not only provides a useful model, but demonstrates that the issues facing women in leadership in the theatre sector, it seems, parallel a lack of progress for women as leaders in the broader economy. The Agency reports, for example, that in its 2010

Census, women hold only 8.4% of board directorships. It concludes that 'the 2010 Census clearly shows that nothing significant has occurred in Australian business culture in the past eight years to address the systemic inequity that continues to prevent talented and capable women from contributing at this high level'. Further 'it is just not acceptable that women don't have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect the organisations they work for and the communities they live in.'⁵²

Furthermore, the 2010 EOWA Census presents evidence that things are not going forwards but backwards, paralleling the analysis for theatre companies presented earlier in this report.⁵³

Accountability

Encouragingly, EOWA cites action by the Australian Stock Exchange to change to its Corporate Governance Principles as cause for optimism. It seems therefore that attention to issues of women and leadership are again on the agenda in Federal government and in corporate circles at the highest level. It is therefore timely to consider how the theatre sector can become part of this trajectory for change.

52 EOWA 2010 *Census of Women in Leadership*, p.4.

There is mounting pressure on large corporate organisations to address gender diversity (especially at governance levels), which may provide some impetus for theatre organisations to follow suit. From 1 January 2011, amended ASX Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations will apply to entities listed on the Australian Securities Exchange which require them to adopt and disclose a diversity policy.⁵⁴ The policy must include measurable objectives relating to gender, and listed entities are required to disclose in their annual report:

- Their achievement against the gender objectives set by their board; and
- The number of women employees in the whole organisation, in senior management, and on the board.

Reporting will be on an 'if not, why not?' basis: if the targets set have not been achieved, an explanation for the reasons for failing to achieve them will need to be given.

If this level of accountability for diversity objectives is considered a good thing for corporate Australia, why should the Theatre sector lag behind? Reporting on diversity strategies as part of annual reporting demonstrates commitment to accountability for social responsibilities. The 'if not, why not?' principle recognises that there are no easy fixes to entrenched problems, but allows companies to demonstrate what positive steps they are taking.

In March 2011 Kate Ellis, Minister for the Status of Women, announced a suite of reforms to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the

53 EOWA 2010 Census of Women in Leadership, p.7. In 2006 12% of ASX200 boards had more than 25% women, and 13.5% of boards had two or more women. In 2010 these proportions have fallen to only 7% of boards with more than 25% women, and 13.0% of boards with two or more women. Of even more concern, there has been an upward trend since 2004 of boards with no women directors, from 49.7% in 2004, 50% in 2006, 51% in 2008, and 54% in 2010.

Women are progressively rarer at higher levels of the corporate ladder. In 2010 women hold:

- 45.3% of positions in the Australian Work Force (44.9% in 2008)
- 44.6% of management and professional positions overall (45.5% in 2008)
- 37% of Commonwealth Senior Executive Service positions (36.1% in 2008)
- 33.4% of positions on government boards (33.0% in 2008)
- 30.1% of seats in the federal parliament (29.6% in 2008)
- 17.9% of Australian University Vice Chancellorships (21.1% in 2008)
- 8.4% of ASX200 Board directorships (8.3% in 2008)
- 8.0% of ASX200 Executive Key Management Personnel positions (7.0% in 2008)
- 3.0% of ASX200 CEOs (2.0% in 2008)
- 2.5% of ASX200 Board Chairs (2.0% in 2008)

With the exception of University Vice Chancellors and overall management and professional positions, most of these statistics show a slight improvement for 2010 over the 2008 figures. At Board director level, there are more than 10 men to every woman. At CEO and Board Chair level, there are more than 30 men to each woman.

52 Australian Securities Exchange, 2010, 'Corporate Governance Principles and Recommendations with 2010 Amendments', 2nd edition, ASX Corporate Governance Council, <http://www.asx.com.au/governance/corporate-governance.htm>.

Workplace Act and, and the allocation of additional resources to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (to be renamed the Workplace Gender Equality Agency). While organisations with more than 100 employees have been required to report on their workplace equity plans, under the reforms they will need to report on tangible outcomes, pay equity, and on whether they have flexible work practices. The Agency will also be resourced to give assistance in developing gender equality policies and practices to organisations with a workforce of less than 100 employees (the point at which mandatory reporting comes into effect).⁵⁵

If companies are looking for models of best practice in gender equity, the 'Employer of Choice for Women' recognition through the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency provides some guidance. This formal recognition process is only available for organisations with more than 80 staff and hence most theatre companies cannot access this way of demonstrating their achievements. However, the criteria for recognition provide a checklist of actions that

organisations can take (and are included as Appendix 4).

These principles are not in opposition to but in fact support the Major Performing Arts Board principles of corporate governance and good practice.⁵⁶

- 'The board should ensure that it has input into, and final approval of, the company's corporate strategy and performance objectives. The board should monitor implementation of the corporate strategy and ensure resources are available. The board should consider, and have final approval of, the proposed performance program and budget for the following year and be provided by management with sufficient information to be able properly to evaluate the risks (financial, artistic, contractual, health and safety, reputational) inherent in the proposal.'

'Promote ethical and responsible decision making ... Confidence in the company can be enhanced if it clearly articulates the practices it intends directors and executives to follow. Therefore, companies should establish a code of conduct.'

55 Media release, 9 March 2011, 'Minister announces the way forward for women in the workplace', http://www.kateellis.fahcsia.gov.au/mediareleases/2011/Pages/ke_m_women_in_workplace_9march2011.aspx.

56 Australia Council for the Arts, December 2004, 'Major Performing Arts Board: Principles of Corporate Governance and Good Practice Recommendations for Major Performing Arts Sector'.

- ‘Recognise the legitimate interests of stakeholders ... Companies have a number of legal and other obligations to stakeholders, such as employees, clients/customers, governments and the community as a whole. The board should establish procedures to guide compliance with legal obligations (e.g. OH&S) and other stakeholder obligations.’

Lapovsky and Larkin argue that true transformation in leadership depends on achieving a critical mass of one third or more of women in leadership positions.⁵⁷ However, the question of how best to achieve such critical mass remains.

Companies express their values through the work they promote but also in the statements they make about their objectives and programs in their annual reporting procedures. QTC, for example, has made a commitment to investing in the careers of future women creative leaders, as well as to developing Indigenous projects and creative leaders, and intends to reporting on its progress towards these goals in its Annual Reports.

Vigilance (or mindfulness)

The real work is changing the complex of ideologies that situates the white, abled, middle class male subject as the normative consciousness, and which constitutes anyone else as Other. The real problem for women is that we are considered to have a gender, while men can be neutral. Men can speak for all of “mankind”, while women (or people with the wrong- coloured skin, sexuality, body) speak only to their own kind. The “human condition” has, for centuries, been considered to be a male state. And the real issue for theatre is that protecting the privilege of a minority means that its culture stagnates. Marginalising 53 per cent of the population means limiting access to a huge pool of ideas and energy. As any ecologist knows, a population without diversity loses genetic vigour and eventually dies out.⁵⁸

This is an important moment to be making an intervention, it’s time for new vision that is more inclusive in decision-making processes.

‘Mindfulness’ as a concept that was in broad circulation in relation to these debates in the period leading up to this research. Many of the people interviewed spontaneously introduced this as a topic in the discussion.

⁵⁷ Lapovsky, Lucie, and Larkin, Deborah Slaner, 2009, *The White House Project Report: Benchmarking Women’s Leadership*, p.5.

⁵⁸ Alison Croggon, ‘Gender and all that’, 2009.

There's just got to be a mindfulness and companies do need to respond to diversity questions. You live your values on and offstage. If that's excluding certain voices, that's not right. That means having diversity policies. We are really mindful that we scour every corner, drawing from the widest possible pool.

People have to be prepared to speak truth to power: taking responsibility for the mindfulness of decision-making they see around them

Mindfulness is about explicitly thinking about diversity but also about who you seek advice from. In the best creative environments there are natural tensions that can play themselves out. If everyone

agrees then that's not a productive creative environment. I want people to challenge me and put forward differing points of view.

Generational change is one of the things that allows that to happen.

Interestingly, a number of the women we interviewed who were veterans of the feminist campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s referred to the concept and process of consciousness-raising rather than that of mindfulness. Consciousness-raising now seems like a dated concept, but captures something of the sense that there needs to be an active process of exploration and dialogue, and that our awareness of our unconscious biases

and assumptions is not something we can decide to switch on and off.

Mindfulness, then, can only be achieved through processes that we prefer to refer to as vigilance.

Unlike the provision of accurate information and accountability, vigilance is essentially the responsibility of individuals, rather than an organisational capacity. It is what makes the difference between policies that are honoured more in the breach than the observance and real change in organisational cultures.

In particular, we must recognise that we are all subject to unconscious biases, unexamined assumptions and that we largely inhabit a comfort zone in which we interact in modes that are familiar and habitual.

We need to make people more aware of unconscious prejudices, and this applies to everyone, no-one is immune. We need to be aware that we all have these limitations and that it's unhelpful to respond with defensiveness when the limitations of our perspective is pointed out. We all need to take personal responsibility for making decisions that will make a difference to equity in access and representation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: People involved in this research

Name	Role
Donna Abela	Playwright
Gorkem Acaroglu	Director
May-Brit Akerholt	Dramaturg
Gil Appleton	Researcher
Sarah Austin	Director
Alice Babidge	Designer
Melanie Beddie	Director
Jane Bodie	Playwright & Lecturer
Melissa Cantwell	Director
Kar Chalmers	Producer
Patricia Cornelius	Playwright
Alison Croggon	Blogger
Maude Davey	Director
Wesley Enoch	Artistic Director
Joanna Erskine	Playwright
Catherine Fitzgerald	Associate Artistic Director
Kate Gaul	Artistic Director
Tanya Goldberg	Director
Jon Halpin	Artistic Director
Rachel Healy	Former GM
Melinda Hetzel	Artistic Director
Lindy Hume	Artistic Director

Noëlle Janaczewska	Playwright
Leland Kean	Artistic Director
Verity Laughton	Playwright
Lee Lewis	Director
Maryanne Lynch	Dramaturg
Tim Maddock	Director & Lecturer
Annette Madden	Producer
Suellen Maunder	Director
Chris Mead	Director & Dramaturg
Suzie Miller	Playwright
Mary Moore	Designer & Lecturer
Joanna Murray-Smith	Playwright
Marion Potts	Artistic Director
Alison Richards	Academic
Julie Robson	Producer/director & Lecturer
Laura Scrivano	Director
Mairi Steele	FACHSIA
Augusta Supple	Blogger
Katherine Thomson	Playwright
Alana Valentine	Playwright
Fiona Winning	Artistic Director
Catherine Zimdahl	Playwright

Total: 44

Appendix 2: Additional explanatory notes on the Ausstage data analysis

Jonathan Bollen and Jenny Fewster, AusStage, Flinders University

These explanatory notes give details on the process involved in compiling the statistics and charts provided in this report.

The AusStage database contains records on the basis of events, and therefore a production which tours is represented by entries for a series of separate events in different venues. For the purposes of the analyses presented in this report, we chose to focus on productions rather than events, on the basis that we are interested in decision-making and choices about creative leadership, which are made on a production basis. An event-based analysis would therefore have given greater prominence to productions with the highest presentation network. To derive a count of productions, multiple instances of events with the same title and company, in the same year, were collapsed into one entry.

Further, the database distinguishes between events that are produced by an organisation and events that are presented by an organisation. Our analysis includes productions that are produced by an organisation, presented by them, or both. This

means that where productions are co-produced by two organisations, or where one organisation produces and the other presents, the production will appear in both MPA and Key organisations charts in cases of co-productions between those types of companies. In cases where the co-production is between organisations in the same category the production is included only once in the relevant chart and statistics.

AusStage gathers information on live performance in Australia from publicly accessible sources, including company websites and publicity, news reportage and reviews, and materials in archival collections. We also undertake an annual exercise to enter data on events produced by organisations receiving federal and state arts funding. Our researchers endeavour to ensure that the information entered in the database is accurate, complete and up-to-date. But due to the collaborative nature of the AusStage database, we do not warrant that the data set on any individual, organisation or venue is complete. We do, however, take the opportunity to review and update data sets of interest to researchers.

In evaluating the completeness of AusStage data on the relevant companies for this report, we compared the data set on each company from year-to-year to determine consistency over time. We chose to focus on the period 2001-2011 because our data prior to 2001 is less consistent. We also noted some gaps in company records for recent years. We then compared our data with publicly accessible information on each company's activities – typically, the current season, past season and history/archive sections of company websites. When we found information that was not in AusStage, we updated our records. For the eight MPA Companies, we held 1,534 event records for the period 2001-2011; in evaluating the completeness of these data, we updated 73 event records and added 7 new records. For the twenty-three Theatre Board Key Organisations, we held 1,160 event records for the period; in evaluating these data, we updated 159 event records and added 35 new records.

We recognise that there could be further refinement to the methods used in deriving the analyses in this report. Further research on the data sets – such as accessing archival

collections, engaging company personnel in review, and cross-checking with Australia Council records – could be undertaken with additional resourcing. However we are confident that any further refinements are unlikely to make a substantive difference to the overall pattern of gender differentiation within the data. At this stage our objective is to provide a set of analyses which can be used to evaluate gender disparities over the last decade, as well as providing a set of benchmarks to assess progress in the years to come.

The accompanying table summarises the AusStage data relating to events, productions and individuals in MPA Organisations and Theatre Board Key Organisations for the period 2001 to 2011.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
MPA Organisations											
Events	119	100	124	127	153	153	144	186	142	150	93
Productions	56	55	62	66	71	74	71	71	88	72	60
Female playwrights	14	11	9	16	17	19	14	13	22	12	8
Female directors	18	14	15	16	15	18	16	12	22	18	21
Male playwrights	34	41	48	52	51	60	56	58	56	57	51
Male directors	22	32	35	31	40	38	41	45	46	45	26
Theatre Board Key Organisations											
Events	81	92	114	148	93	134	229	258	170	183	130
Productions	56	70	72	82	53	53	103	109	92	105	73
Female playwrights	32	29	30	34	24	27	47	40	39	36	33
Female directors	27	27	34	27	21	24	42	45	24	41	34
Male playwrights	34	57	56	58	38	31	70	78	73	75	54
Male directors	33	38	43	51	32	34	54	61	50	44	48

Appendix 3: Preliminary analysis for 2012 (manually compiled from season announcements)

	Playwrights	Directors
Belvoir/Company B	28.85%	48.21%
Black Swan State Theatre Company	33.33%	50.00%
Malthouse	31.00%	40.00%
Melbourne Theatre Company	25.00%	36.36%
Queensland Theatre Company	22.22%	11.11%
State Theatre Company of South Australia	54.69%	50.00%
Sydney Theatre Company	15.38%	26.67%

Note: these are preliminary breakdowns compiled manually from 2012 season announcements. They are therefore not directly comparable to the Ausstage data above, since they were not assembled using the same methodology.

Appendix 4: Preliminary analysis for 2012 (manually compiled from season announcements)

Criterion 1

An organisation **must** have policies in place (across the seven employment matters) that support women across the organisation.

Criterion 2

An organisation **must** have effective processes (across the seven employment matters) that are transparent and gender inclusive.

Criterion 3

An organisation **must** have strategies in place that support a commitment to fully utilising and developing all staff, removing barriers to women.

Criterion 4

An organisation **must** educate all employees (including managers, casual and contract staff) on their rights and obligations regarding sex-based harassment.

The organisation **must**:

- have in place a comprehensive and transparent sex-based anti-discrimination policy that also deals with electronic and IT usage (covering discrimination, harassment and bullying);
- provide sex-based harassment prevention training at induction for all staff, and ensure all staff (including managers, casual and contract staff) have received refresher education within the last two years; and
- have had no judgment or adverse final order made against it by a court or other tribunal relating to gender discrimination or harassment, for a period of three years prior to its EOCFW application.

Criterion 5

An organisation **must** have a gender inclusive organisational culture that is championed by the CEO, driven by senior executives and holds line managers accountable. The organisation **must**:

- include equal opportunity for women as a standing agenda item on a
- committee chaired by the CEO or his/her direct report;

- include equal opportunity for women as a standing agenda item or discuss equal opportunity for women proactively at least twice yearly at Executive meetings; and
- include equal opportunity for women as a standing agenda item or discuss equal opportunity for women proactively at least twice yearly at Board (or equivalent) meetings;

and

The CEO **must** demonstrate:

- his/her public commitment to staff in addressing gender pay equity and the representation of women in senior management; and
- that s/he is a visible champion for equal opportunity for women in the organisation.

Criterion 6

An organisation **must** deliver improved outcomes for women which must include:

- a minimum of 6 weeks' paid parental leave after a maximum eligibility period of 12 months' service;
- women in management and leadership roles being able to work part-time; and
- conducting a detailed analysis of the remuneration of its entire workforce to demonstrate whether there are gender pay equity issues in its workplace.

