Sensemaking, Screenwriting, and Transgressive Women: Phoebe Waller-Bridge's Career Sensemaking in the Male-Dominated Screenwriting Industry

by

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Abstract

Screenwriting is a creative industry characterized by a high level of male-dominance within the broader male-dominated Hollywood landscape. As a result, many women who pursue careers in screenwriting find themselves disadvantaged. However, British screenwriter Phoebe Waller-Bridge provides an interesting case study as a woman in screenwriting who has experienced notable success in a relatively short period of time. Waller-Bridge has become known for the massively successful television series *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve* that have experienced widespread popularity in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Her success in Hollywood has led to lots of discussion surrounding her gender as a screenwriter due to the male-dominated nature of the screenwriting industry. However, Waller-Bridge consistently minimizes gendered issues and the political nature of her shows. This paper presents an iterative thematic analysis of Waller-Bridge's public career sensemaking across interviews in both trade and popular press in order to qualitatively analyze her sensemaking within a highly male-dominated, creative industry. This paper identifies themes in Waller-Bridge's public career sensemaking in order to identify the gendered nature of the screenwriting industry that persists today. As a result of this analysis, this paper contributes significant new findings to current research on women working within male-dominated, creative industries.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Phoebe Waller-Bridge began her career in television screenwriting after her one-woman, hit play *Fleabag* caught popular attention at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2013 (Hall, 2014). *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote that Waller-Bridge's play "was dubbed rude and filthy" however it ultimately won her the Fringe First award that year (O'Connell, 2019, para. 19). After the festival, Waller-Bridge was offered two television series which she both wrote and starred in, *Crashing* and *Fleabag*. Since then, Waller-Bridge has won three Emmys for her second season of *Fleabag* in 2019 (Television Academy, n.d.), as well as bridged over to film screenwriting including her recent involvement in the newest James Bond film *No Time to Die* (2020).

Since *Fleabag* became a television series, Waller-Bridge has gained attention for her work as a screenwriter on various female-helmed projects. For instance, BBC America's television series *Killing Eve*, an assassin story that trades a traditionally masculine narrative for two female leads, Jodie Comer and Sandra Oh. As a result of *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*, Waller-Bridge has been heralded by many for her complex female characters and feminist writing. Waller-Bridge explains that her screenwriting is significantly inspired by her early acting career and the limitations she felt in the roles available for women, while denying that she writes feminist shows. She explains, "I got very bored and very angry and eventually started writing the crazy bitches I wanted to be playing" (Hall, 2014, para. 7).

However, screenwriting provides an interesting context for Waller-Bridge's rapid professional success as it is an industry characterized as both male-dominated and creative labor. Within a professional context, women have been historically disadvantaged within both male-dominated and creative environments. Existing research finds that women experience an increased likelihood of gender discrimination within male-dominated industries and therefore

face greater professional obstacles within such fields (Inzlicht, Kaiser, & Major, 2008; London, Downey, Romero-Canyas, Rattan, & Tyson, 2012; Pinel, 2004). Creative industries also present gendered obstacles through organizational structures that disadvantage women through subjective hiring processes and biased meritocracy (Allen, 2013; Ball & Bell, 2013; Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Gill, 2011). Therefore, screenwriting presents one of the most disadvantageous professional environments for women today. However, Waller-Bridge appears relatively undeterred by the gendered obstacles faced by most women in these environments. For reference, here Waller-Bridge describes an experience in which she faced confrontation due to the number of women in *Killing Eve*:

> There was a meeting at one point where someone actually said, 'We can't have too many women,' meaning it will look unbelievable. I was like, 'What the fuck are you talking about? Not if its written well and shot well.' (Clarke, 2018, para. 9)

As a result, Waller-Bridge presents a compelling case study in relation to her public career sensemaking within today's screenwriting industry. An analysis of sensemaking provides an interesting lens into how individuals make sense of their career development and identity through retrospection of their career experiences (Weick, 1995). Through an iterative thematic analysis of Waller-Bridge's public sensemaking in popular and trade interviews, this paper contributes a new perspective into the career sensemaking practices of women in male-dominated, creative industries.

This paper will begin with an overview of the context of Waller-Bridge's career, followed by literature review, methodology, results, and discussion of new contributions and implications for career sensemaking scholarship. Specifically, this paper contributes to current research on career sensemaking of women in male-dominated, creative industries. Therefore, this

paper suggests significant implications on how researchers and new screenwriters should view

the screenwriting industry, as an almost invisible continuation of gendered inequalities within the

profession persists today.

Chapter 2: Context

From a young age, Phoebe Waller-Bridge always wanted to be a part of a story. Whether it was through acting or writing, she had an early love for drama and making people laugh. At age 10, she recalls writing loads of stories and poetry. "I know – what a wanker," Waller-Bridge said, "I always saw acting as a way in. I didn't really know how you became a writer. I also loved acting, so I was like, 'Oh, that's how you get into that world'" (Blyth, 2019, para. 25). Waller-Bridge describes her desire to work in acting and writing as an instinct, and she shares that drama provided a fulfilling outlet for her from an early age:

> It was such a strong instinct from early on. I just knew that I wanted to be in plays. I knew I wanted to be part of a story. I loved telling stories. I loved telling jokes. I loved watching movies. I just – I think that there was an – I was extroverted. I loved expressing that. And at school, it was just the most fun thing. You were allowed to swear in drama class, which was a big deal. And it was really social. And I just remember that feeling of being on stage. I played – I remember my first ever job – she says – at my school. (Gross, 2019, para. 151).

After her early days in drama, Waller-Bridge dove into her acting and ultimately attended the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). However, she quickly realized that acting may not have been the 'easy way in' to writing that she anticipated. "It just felt like the quickest way in, and, actually, it's a very hard way in" (Blyth, 2019, para. 25). Waller-Bridge describes her days at RADA as an experience in which she did not feel completely welcome. Also, Waller-Bridge reports that at RADA she became bored of playing "crying girls who had just had an abortion or were having a bath" (Malone, 2017, para. 20). Hattenstone (2018) illustrates the difficult transition Waller-Bridge experienced during her time at RADA:

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Waller-Bridge was in her element at secondary school. She starred in plays, made people

laugh, took ever more joy in tackling taboos. After A-levels she went to RADA to study

drama. RADA is famous for breaking people down before rebuilding a new, improved

version. But with Waller-Bridge, she says, they just left her in pieces. They told her she

was emotionally blocked because she couldn't cry on demand. "I went to RADA thinking

I was quite a good actor and came out thinking I was appalling." She struggled to find

work through most of her 20s. That's one of the reasons she started to write – to provide

decent parts for herself. (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 14)

It was after her time at RADA that Waller-Bridge met her long-time collaborator and friend

Vicky Jones during a Soho writers' bar night in London. Together Waller-Bridge and Jones

founded their theatre company DryWrite in 2007 (O'Connell, 2019). DryWrite aimed to promote

new writers and encourage them to take chances by writing and performing ten-minute short

plays in front of small London audiences (Blyth, 2019). Evans (2019) describes DryWrite as "a

late-night evening of shorts at a pub where writers could be anonymous and try out writing

exercises to make an audience feel things" (para. 8). Waller-Bridge shares her early experience

with DryWrite:

It was such a small scale, just coming up with these theater nights. Looking back now, I

mean, we were adorable. We put money into it, and I never acted in it or anything – or

even wrote for ages – but we were just like, 'What if we got 11 writers and we asked

them to do this, and we got an audience of 25 people to come and watch it?' And we

cared so much, it would be so exciting, and then that grew and grew and grew. (Blyth,

2019, para. 30)

Eventually, Waller-Bridge began writing her own plays for DryWrite. As a result, her character in *Fleabag* was born. The lead character of *Fleabag* is a character named Fleabag, played by Waller-Bridge, who is a woman in her 20s navigating sex, friendship, and relationships in her own unconventional way. Waller-Bridge recalls writing the original *Fleabag* play in three weeks, relying heavily on Jones as her director and collaborator. Waller-Bridge shares, "If she laughed, it was in. If she gasped, it was in. If she said, 'We can't do that,' it was in. But if the moment her face started screwing up, like, *Mmm…*, it was out" (Malone, 2017, para. 20). Many have asked Waller-Bridge where the name Fleabag originated, to which she explains:

> It's kind of my nickname. My family nickname. Flea ears, or occasionally Fleabag. And
> when I was trying to find a title for the show, my mum phoned me and referred to me as
> Fleabag on the phone and I was like, *oh shit. Shit that's it,* it's my name. (Saraiya, 2017).

Fleabag the play had relatively humble beginnings as a one-woman show played by Waller-Bridge for DryWrite. During the same time, Waller-Bridge also wrote various other plays that later stemmed into bigger projects such as her show *Crashing* in 2016. Ultimately, it was Jones who made sure Waller-Bridge's plays were performed for larger audiences. Waller-Bridge describes, "We were pissed at the Soho Theatre one night, the artistic director was there, and Vicky just ran up to him and said, 'Phoebe's just written a fuck-load of short plays and I think you should fucking put them on upstairs'" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 15).

At this same time, Waller-Bridge began to gain non-theatrical acting credits. She starred in Sky1's television comedy *The Café* and the Margaret Thatcher biopic *The Iron Lady* (2011)*,* starring Meryl Streep and Olivia Colman. On the set of *The Iron Lady* (2011)*,* Colman reports being instantly drawn to Waller-Bridge's sense of humor and the two quickly became friends. When DryWrite had the opportunity to bring *Fleabag* to the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe Festival,

Colman was among the supporters who campaigned to get them there. As a result, *Fleabag* was brought to the festival where it ultimately won 2013's Fringe First award and gained a variety of buzz (Hall, 2014). *The Hollywood Reporter* reports:

> *Fleabag,* an hourlong stage monologue that starts as a riotous meditation on sex and spirals into a revelation of gut-dropping betrayal, was dubbed "rude" and "filthy." *Time Out* wrote that Waller-Bridge was "almost certainly going to go to hell for it." The project minted Waller-Bridge the star of the festival, earning the Fringe First award and, soon after, a run at London's Soho Theatre. (O'Connell, 2019, para. 19)

According to *The Cut*, a BBC executive who sat in the audience of *Fleabag* in Edinburgh knew "within five minutes" that Waller-Bridge's show could work on television (Malone, 2017, para. 20). *Fleabag* quickly began acquiring a variety of theatre accolades. In total, *Fleabag* the play won Fringe First Award 2013, The Stage Best Solo Performer 2013, Off West End Award for Most Promising New Playwright 2013, Off West End Award for Best Female Performance 2013, and Critics' Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright 2014 (Hall, 2014). After seeing *Fleabag* the play, Colman reports, "I had gone thinking, 'Brilliant, I'm going to have an hour of wetting myself laughing – Phoebe is the funniest person I know. Instead, she pulled the rug from under my feet and broke my heart" (O'Connell, 2019, para. 20).

In response to Fleabag's festival success, Waller-Bridge sold two of her plays from DryWrite to be transitioned into television series. In 2016, Waller-Bridge premiered both *Crashing* and *Fleabag* as television series for U.K.'s Channel 4 and BBC respectively. However, although critically acclaimed, *Crashing* did not receive as much attention as *Fleabag* (O'Connell, 2019). Since its television debut, *Fleabag*'s had two seasons and been "heralded with borderline hyperbolic fever," with critics calling the show "thrillingly deep," "a minor

miracle," and "brilliance slathered on brilliance" (O'Connell, 2019, para. 5). In 2019, Waller-Bridge won three Emmys for her second season of *Fleabag*, including Outstanding Comedy Series, Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series, and Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series (Television Academy, n.d.).

Fleabag has caught critical attention for underlying feminist themes, leading to many interpretations of *Fleabag* as a feminist show (Blyth, 2019; Malone, 2017). However, Waller-Bridge denies that her show has a feminist agenda, but rather feminism is just one aspect of what her character grapples with (Fey, 2019; The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). For example, in the pilot episode to the series, Waller-Bridge's character shares to her father, "I have a horrible feeling that I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, depraved, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist" (Waller-Bridge, 2016). For further example, in Season 2, Kristin Scott Thomas makes a cameo appearance in order to deliver a powerful message to Waller-Bridge's character on the female experience:

> I've been longing to say this out loud. Women are born with pain built in. It's our
> physical destiny – period pain, sore boobs, childbirth. We carry it within ourselves
> throughout our lives. Men don't. They have to seek it out. They invent all these gods and
> demons so they can feel guilty about things, which is something we do very well on our
> own. And then they create wars so they can feel things and touch each other, and when
> there aren't any wars they can play rugby. We have it all going on in here, inside. We
> have pain on a cycle for years and years and years, and then just when you feel you are
> making peace with it all, what happens? The menopause comes. The fucking menopause
> comes and it is the most wonderful fucking thing in the world. Yes, your entire pelvic
> floor crumbles and you get fucking hot and no one cares, but then you're free. No longer

a slave, no longer a machine with parts. You're just a person. In business. (Waller-

Bridge, 2019)

Earlier in the same episode, Thomas' character wins an award for Best Woman in Business, to

which Thomas responds that it is nothing but "infantilizing bollocks," "a subsection of success"

and "the fucking children's table of awards" (Waller-Bridge, 2019). As a result of messages such

as these in *Fleabag*, Waller-Bridge has been called a feminist writer. However she pushes back

against such labels (The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). Nonetheless, because of *Fleabag'*s success,

Waller-Bridge has created a name for herself in Hollywood within a short period of time. So

much so that Waller-Bridge now finds herself unable to even ride the London Tube, her self-

proclaimed "idea place," without being recognized (O'Connell, 2019, para. 25).

Recent projects for Waller-Bridge include other female-helmed shows such as her

screenwriting and production work for BBC America's series *Killing Eve.* Based on Luke

Jennings' novellas *Codename Villanelle*, the show *Killing Eve* is a cat-and-mouse assassin story

starring Jodie Comer and Sandra Oh. The show has gained notable success including an Emmy

nomination for Outstanding Drama Series and BAFTA award for Best Drama Series (Television

Academy, n.d.; Waterson, 2019). Similar to *Fleabag, Killing Eve* has also been referred to as a

feminist show by the press, further casting Waller-Bridge in a feminist light through her work

(Barton, 2019). However, Waller-Bridge continues to explain that her work does not have a

political agenda (Fey, 2019; Malone, 2017). Nonetheless, *Killing Eve* is heralded by critics for its

representation of women within a traditionally masculine genre (Adegoke, 2019; Knight, 2019).

Sarah Barnett, president and general manager of BBC America, shares what makes *Killing Eve*

unique to audiences, particularly regarding two female leads:

Cat-and-mouse assassin stories have been told so many times and for good reason: There

is an enduring appeal there. What was so fascinating was that making these two leads

female casts the genre in a whole new light. You realize how implicitly masculine this

form of storytelling has been. (Clarke, 2018, para. 7)

Barnett later refers to bringing Waller-Bridge on as a screenwriter for *Killing Eve* as a "bulls-

eye" for the show. Barnett shares, "As we developed the show we became more and more

excited about the potential to do something daring" (Clarke, 2018, para. 13). Oh also expresses

her appreciation for *Killing Eve,* "What I love about these characters is that they're not women in

relationship to their men," Oh continues, "We're not formed from there. We're not defined by

them" (Clarke, 2018, para. 27). Although Waller-Bridge avoids having a feminist label attached

to her career, Waller-Bridge does admit her goal is to write women as authentically and

truthfully as the women in her own life (Backstage & Amazon Prime Video, 2019; Blyth, 2019;

Hall, 2014; The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). According to *The Guardian,* "Waller-Bridge

depicts characters who say the unsayable, do the undoable and defy every stereotype of feminine

behavior" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 9). Sian Clifford, long-time friend of Waller-Bridge from

RADA and co-star in *Fleabag,* talks about why she thinks Waller-Bridge's writing has spoken to

so many audiences:

I know that she has a passion for writing transgressive women. I also know that she

writes without an agenda. She really writes the people she wants to see on TV. It just

happens to have landed at a moment in this moment in time when I think we are so thirsty

for real representations of humans, and not just women, but humans. They come from a

very pure place inside of her. They're just real, fully-formed, three-dimensional humans.

(Blyth, 2019, para. 20)

The current moment in time is significant to consider in relation to Waller-Bridge's success, especially in regard to her representation of women. Recently, Waller-Bridge was brought on to polish the upcoming James Bond film, *No Time to Die* (2020) (O'Connell, 2019). Across the franchise's history, the only other woman to be credited with a James Bond writing credit is Johanna Harwood for *Dr. No* (1962) and *From Russia With Love* (1963) (Blyth, 2019). The James Bond franchise is historically linked to misogynism and voyeuristic portrayals of women (Neuendorf, Gore, Dalessandro, Janstova, & Snyder-Suhy, 2009). As a result, the press has interpreted Waller-Bridge's involvement with the film to mean a feminist shift for the franchise as well as a potential for a future female James Bond (Enck, 2019; Harmon, 2019; Marine, 2019; Reilly, 2019). However, Waller-Bridge denies such claims (Blyth, 2019; Harmon, 2019). Nonetheless, the press continues to speculate about her involvement, *The Hollywood Reporter* reports, "Her hiring speaks to an awareness Bond needs to better serve female characters in his post-#MeToo debut" (O'Connell, 2019, para. 28).

As a result of the #MeToo movement, reporters have questioned James Bond's relevance in today's culture and interpreted Waller-Bridge's hiring to mean a strategic, female-helmed shift for the franchise in order to remain relevant (Blyth, 2019). The #MeToo movement began in response to multiple sexual assault allegations against Hollywood executive Harvey Weinstein and empowered women to speak up about sexual assault (Cevallos, 2018; Dastigir, 2019). As a result, discourse surrounding the #MeToo movement has brought issues of women's rights to the forefront of today's culture. Consequently, the public has been paying more attention to women's rights and empowerment (Shugerman, 2017). Therefore, there is a greater commercial viability for women-led projects in Hollywood that did not previously exist, especially for a

screenwriter like Waller-Bridge who has been celebrated for 'feminist' writing and authentic portrayals of female characters.

Waller-Bridge is relevant in today's cultural environment not only because of her success in terms of her Emmy wins and other accolades, but also because she is a prime example of the current commercial viability of female-centered projects in Hollywood. Screenwriting is a male-dominated, creative industry that has a reputation for portraying inequal representations of men and women on screen (Lauzen, 2015). Therefore, Waller-Bridge provides an anomaly in relation to Hollywood's male-dominated reputation. Further, Waller-Bridge's ability to bridge British and American content into massive successes in the US and UK speaks to her current influence in the industry. As the President and General Manager of BBC America, Barnett shares why she thinks Waller-Bridge's work has become so commercially viable in today's industry:

> British content has never been more loved. As streaming platforms increasingly acquire or make British shows from scratch, the initially daunting but really interesting opportunity is how do we think about commissioning, developing and putting on the air shows that have enough vitality to catch people's attention and land not as an American show, or a British show, but something that is an effervescent new cocktail? …It is not about telling stories of strong women necessarily. There's just so many flavors of men's stories that are represented in hero or antihero roles, so it is time to start telling stories where the many shades of being female are being represented, and we've only just started to do that. There is a marvelous sea change happening where we are profoundly shifting away from an invisible, unconscious assumption that the big stories have men at the center, and anything else is a subset of that. (Clarke, 2018, para. 26)

Waller-Bridge's widespread success makes her one of the most popular names in the screenwriting industry today. Due to her female-centered work, her current commercial viability makes her an interesting case in relation to Hollywood's current male-dominated nature. In an industry where women are consistently found to be disadvantaged (Conor, 2014), Waller-Bridge has seemingly overcome all obstacles in relation to being a woman in screenwriting. In order to better understand the career environment in which Waller-Bridge operates, the following literature review will provide an overview of career sensemaking and gendered labor, as well as provide a history of women in screenwriting.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The following literature review first provides an overview of current scholarship on career sensemaking, followed by a review of gendered labor, then concludes with a brief history of women in screenwriting and the current screenwriting industry. In relation to gendered labor, this review specifically focuses on literature surrounding male-dominated industries and creative labor. The screenwriting industry is characterized as both a male-dominated industry and creative labor, therefore an analysis of the organizational factors that influence such environments is integral for fully understanding the screenwriting industry's organizational culture.

Women working within both male-dominated industries and creative labor experience increased risk of facing gendered obstacles within these careers (Conor, 2014; Gill, 2011; Inzlicht et al., 2008; London et al., 2012; Pinel, 2004). During career sensemaking, individuals extract significant cues from their career experience such as social interactions or organizational factors in order to make sense of their career identity (Canary & Canary, 2007; Weick, 1995). Therefore, women in male-dominated, creative industries face an increased risk of having such interactions affect their identity construction within these careers. Further, the screenwriting industry as both a male-dominated industry and creative labor presents additional challenges for women which may consequently affect their career sensemaking (Conor, 2014). In order to understand the influence organizational inequalities have on the professional experience of women pursuing careers in these industries, it is important to first consider how individuals make sense of their careers and career identities. Therefore, the following section begins with a discussion on current theories in career sensemaking.

Career Sensemaking

Within career literature, there are two primary ways to understand careers: objectively and subjectively (Canary & Canary, 2007; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). An objective view sees career as a culmination of an individual's occupations and professional achievements over a set amount of years, while a subjective view understands career as an individual's recollection of their own experiences throughout their unique career path (Canary & Canary, 2007; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). More so than a list of jobs on a resumé, personal accounts of an individual's career provide valuable insight into how an individual makes sense of their overall career development as well as identity. Career sensemaking is significant because people often use careers as a means to construct their identity, therefore as individuals make sense of their careers, they are simultaneously making sense of who they are (Canary & Canary, 2007).

Weick (1995) developed the concept of sensemaking to provide a framework for how individuals and organizations deal with uncertainty in their environment. Sensemaking is a continuous process that occurs as a result of incongruous events that require individuals to find meaning out of ambiguity (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010; Weick, 1995). Often, these events occur as a shock to an individual or organization and break normal routine, therefore sensemaking is used to communicate meaning as well as provide a basis for future action (Boudes & Laroche, 2009; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Mills et al. (2010) explain, "At its most basic, sensemaking is about understanding how different meanings are assigned to the same event" (p. 183).

Weick (1995) defines the seven characteristics of sensemaking as: grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and extracted by cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Therefore, retrospective career

sensemaking focuses on the social and organizational interactions, extractions of cues, and overall identity creation throughout the course of an individual's career. In other words, people choose to extract certain cues from their career experiences and interactions from the past, then assign meaning to these cues in order to construct a personal career identity and story (Canary & Canary, 2007). Retrospection is integral to career sensemaking because people begin to assign meaning and significance to such cues only after they occur (Weick, 1979; Weick, 1995).

Through retrospection, narrative construction becomes a fundamental process of sensemaking (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2011; Weick, 1995). When individuals share stories from their careers, they inherently reveal those moments they assign meaning or significance to in regard to the overall development of their career and how they view their career identity. Canary and Canary (2007) state: "When individuals consider their careers as stories, they can integrate events that occurred throughout their work experiences, extracting those cues that help them make sense of how their careers unfolded" (p. 227). When individuals create these career narratives, they integrate organizational factors, social interactions, and their own individual characteristics in order to create sense of their career and identity within that career.

Through the process of narrative sensemaking, individuals are able to maintain a positive self-conception by assigning meaning to the events they associate as defining moments in their career (Weick, 1995; Zikic & Richardson, 2007). For example, Baumeister and Newman (1994) present a framework of motivations during narrative construction consisting of four needs for meaning. The needs for meaning include: an interpretation of experiences in relation to the individual's goals or fulfillment, a justification that the individual's actions are depicted as right or good, a sense of efficacy in which the individual exerts control, and a sense of self-worth which portrays the individual as attractive and competent. Therefore, narratives are often a tool

used to maintain a positive self-conception. Maclean et al. (2011) further explain the utility of narrative construction within sensemaking:

> Stories are primary sensemaking devices within life-history narratives, helping individuals make sense of change: *locating* the self in time, space and context, *making meaning* from its interactions with fluctuating reality, and incorporating change into a unified self in a continuous process of *becoming.* (p. 20)

Through this continuous process of *becoming*, the individual is constructing their identity through making sense of their experiences. When an individual engages in sensemaking, they do so through a particular lens or framework (Hamel, 2009). Individuals frame the narratives of their career based on the cues they extract from their experiences in order to make sense of their career development and identity (Weick, 1995). Hamel (2009) defines sensemaking as both a cognitive activity as well as a process of gathering and organizing information from social interactions. Since an individual's career consists of many factors, including organizational factors, social interactions, and personal characteristics, an individual must sort through these experiences and extract the events, or cues, they assign the most meaning (Canary & Canary, 2007). Weick and Daft (1983) describe the process in which cues are organized during an individual's career sensemaking:

> People use interpretation systems to try and make sense of the flowing, changing, equivocal chaos that constitutes the sum total of the external environment. People in organizations try to sort through this chaos into items, events, and parts that are then connected, threaded into sequence, serially ordered, and related to one another. In the course of interpretation, individuals, and perhaps the organization as a collective, develop cause maps. (p. 78)

Ultimately, an examination of career sensemaking provides information on how individuals make sense of past events as well as how they construct their current identity and relationships (Canary & Canary, 2007; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Due to sensemaking cues being extracted from organizational factors, social interactions, and personal characteristics, analyses of career sensemaking across various industries and demographics provide diverse results. For example, women in male-dominated, creative industries face an increased risk for destructive social interactions or organizational factors that could significantly affect the ways in which they make sense of their career. These factors include heightened risks of stereotype threat and gender discrimination within these industries (Inzlicht et al., 2008; London et al., 2012; Schmader et al., 2008).

Therefore, it is significant to examine the career sensemaking of women in male-dominated, creative fields in order to gain understanding of the influence gender imbalance has on sensemaking. Additionally, because career sensemaking is used as means for identity construction, an analysis of sensemaking provides a lens into how women in gendered fields interpret their identity. The following section provides an overview of the gendered challenges faced by women working in male-dominated, creative industries in order to identify factors that may contribute to the career sensemaking of women within these fields.

Gendered Labor

The following section will overview the specific challenges women face within male-dominated industries as well as creative industries. Screenwriting is characterized as both a male-dominated industry as well as creative labor, therefore it is significant to review the organizational factors that contribute to the persistent gendered inequalities that exist within each environment.

Women in male-dominated industries. Although women in many professional industries face challenges due to gendered organizational factors, male-dominated industries present an additional challenge for female workers. Research shows the majority of women not only experience discrimination, but also expect discrimination when entering male-dominated domains (Inzlicht et al., 2008; London et al., 2012; Pinel, 2004). Further, women who enter male-dominated industries are regularly placed in lower power positions than their male counterparts (Chen & Moons, 2015). Therefore, it is likely that women within these fields may experience lower levels of interpersonal and professional power.

Interpersonal power is defined as an individual's ability to have control over their social environment and has the potential to grow into other positive social tools, such as prestige and status (Kelley, 1971). Most individuals desire some level of control over their environments and the ability to influence others through interpersonal power, both socially and professionally (Chen & Moons, 2015; Kelley, 1971; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson 2003). However, research shows that the majority of women believe they are unable to obtain interpersonal power within male-dominated domains, and therefore avoid such environments (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007).

Further, the lack of existing representation of women in male-dominated fields contributes to the cycle of low representation within these fields. Without the presence of strong female role models within a profession, women face greater risk of stereotype threat from male counterparts (Latu et al., 2013). Culturally held gendered stereotypes also contribute to stereotype threat and can lead to discrimination within the workplace. Furthermore, gender discrimination within male-dominated fields can prevent women from entering the field

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altogether if gender-biased hiring practices go unchecked (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012).

Research shows that gender discrimination and stereotype threat also lead to decreased quality of performance from women (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Therefore, gender discrimination can cause women in male-dominated domains to fall behind their male counterparts. Often, this can lead to a woman's negative career sensemaking and consequent disidentification with the profession, ultimately continuing the cycle of gender exclusion within certain fields (Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012).

However, gender discrimination does not only exist within male-dominated industries. Professional gender discrimination exists within a variety of industries, including those often associated with higher levels of inclusiveness, such as creative industries. In fact, many patterns seen across male-dominated industries are also seen across creative industries, including biased hiring practices, gender discrimination, and an apparent boy's club.

Gendered labor in creative industries. Creative labor is defined as the production of art and culture, in contrast to traditional forms of production that are viewed as functional and utilitarian (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Morgan and Nelligan (2015) express that in order to work in creative industries, practitioners must be flexible, networked, adaptable, and entrepreneurial. Historically, the identity of the creative laborer is associated with professional artists, or auteurs, marked by elite individuality and status within the production of high culture art (McRobbie, 1998). However, contemporary views of what constitutes creativity and the creative laborer encompass a much wider range of fields (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). As a result, creative industries are more accessible to raced, classed, and gendered groups of people than they have been historically (Conor et al., 2015).

Typically, creative industries are presumed to be more inclusive than non-creative industries due to traditional definitions of *the creative* as artist, and associations of artists as diverse (Gill, 2002; Florida, 2002; McRobbie, 1998; Oakley, 2013). In reality, creative industries may not be as inclusive as they appear. Conor et al. (2015) state that within the vast range of creative industries, consisting of fields as diverse as architecture and advertising to fashion design and film production, women and minorities consistently fare worse than their white, male counterparts. Therefore, although creative industries are more accessible to diverse groups of people than ever before, certain exclusionary dynamics persist (Conor, 2014).

Gill (2011) argues that many inequalities within creative industries are unmanageable and hence made unspeakable. Inequalities are labelled unmanageable when they "exist and operate outside of the interventions and management strategies invoked to challenge such injustices," such as an organization's diversity policies (Gill, 2011, p. 62). Gill (2011) states that such inequalities are actually unspeakable inequalities because they often persist without being spoken about and are instead generally accepted as the industry's culture.

Gill (2011) continues that it is the culture of media and creative workplaces that causes inequalities to become unspeakable. "For in these media workplaces rhetoric of the meritocracy prevails and 'not making it' is interpreted through a toxic discourse of individual failure: you weren't good enough" (Gill, 2011, p. 63). Due to the subjective nature of what constitutes good creative labor, inequalities in creative industries often persist through the disguise of industry trade pains (Ball & Bell, 2013; Conor et al., 2015). According to Allen (2013), as a result of neoliberal creative industries that encourage entrepreneurialism, individualism, and self-responsibility, structural inequalities within these industries are often portrayed as individual, private problems instead of organizational injustices. Further, it is more commonly women than

men in creative industries that are encouraged to work on themselves in order to become "top girls" (Conor, 2014, p. 8). In other words, if a woman faces challenges in a creative career, it is common that she will be told to work harder in order to reach success. Consequently, obstacles faced by women due to inequality within an industry's culture are framed as individual, private problems rather than organizational injustices.

Inequalities within creative industries are able to persist partly because the evaluation of creative labor is largely subjective. There is no objective way to designate one creative product as better than another. Therefore, the evaluation of creative value is left largely to the discretion of creative industry decision-makers, most of whom are white men (Conor, 2014). Further, whether consciously or unconsciously, research shows tendencies toward familiarity during hiring decisions, which often leads industry executives to select job candidates most like themselves (Banks, 2015; Wing-Fai, Gill, & Randle, 2015). Consequently, if the majority of industry decision-makers are white men it is likely that the majority of creative laborers hired are also white men.

Therefore, although the pool of creative labor candidates is larger and more diverse than ever before, the impulse toward homogeneous hiring practices of white, male practitioners remains (Banks, 2015). If a woman seeking creative labor is continuously passed over for a job, this may be portrayed as industry trade pain due to the highly competitive nature of most creative industries, rather than systemic, gender-biased hiring (Conor, 2014). Hiring biases within creative industries are often able to persist unregulated due to the subjective, decision-making power of executives during the evaluation of creative value and subsequent hiring decisions (Jones & Pringle, 2015).

Research shows that women are more likely to be hired within recruitment processes with greater formality and transparency, which presents a further issue for women seeking work within creative industries (Conor et al., 2015). Beyond the subjective evaluation of creative value leading to hiring biases, the overall hiring environment of most creative industries is highly informal and can be best described as a contacts culture characterized by reputation and network-based hiring (Thanki & Jeffreys, 2007). The informal processes of industry networking for hiring decisions can lead to the further reproduction of gender inequalities within already inequal organizations. For instance, verbiage such as risk and trust can be used as justification for the cyclical hiring of experienced practitioners, a category likely consisting of mostly white men (Wreyford, 2015).

Ultimately, the informal hiring practices of creative industries reflect the equally problematic informal organization of the industries themselves. Florida (2002) argues that creative laborers prefer informality, as the nature of creative labor requires flexible and open working environments. However, consequently, the informal organization of creative industries leads the majority of creative laborers into high levels of job insecurity and a constant series of short-term job contracts (Banks, 2015; Ross, 2009; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). Therefore, many practitioners find themselves in a continuous process of seeking work, as well as constantly varying degrees of work demand (Banks, 2015; Randle & Culkin, 2009; Wreyford, 2015). Although creative laborers may experience long periods of unemployment, it is likely they will also face periods of long hours and juggling many projects at once (Pratt, 2002). Additionally, many short-term contracts lack benefits standard to other professional industries, such as sick pay, pension, and social security benefits (Conor et al., 2015).

Therefore, although the flexible nature of creative labor provides an appealing career path for individuals seeking work outside of traditional, non-creative professions, creative industries present problems for most creative laborers (Taylor & Littleton, 2012). However, unregulated hiring practices and informal industry organization appear to disservice women and minorities the most. Additionally, stereotypical assumptions remain among creative industries that working mothers are unlikely to be able to maintain the high levels of demand required by creative careers (Gill, 2014). Therefore, women are likely to face even greater professional biases after giving birth.

One of the largest, most multi-faceted creative industries that exists today is the film and television industry. Although contemporary Hollywood is predominantly male-dominated, early film and television production began as a relatively open field for women (Smith-Doerr, 2010). In the case of screenwriting in particular, women were the majority among silent film writers in the early twentieth century and are largely responsible for the commercial success of the silent film era (Casella, 2006; Francke, 1994). However, as the industry grew, so did male professional interest. As a result, Hollywood is a prime example of a highly male-dominated and gendered creative industry we see today.

Screenwriting

In order to understand the consistent male-dominance we see across a variety of film and television professions, it is important to begin with the evolution of the Hollywood industry. Screenwriting provides a particularly interesting case study in the history of Hollywood, as women in the early twentieth century experienced high levels of opportunity and success as screenwriters during the silent film era. However, the inevitable rise of male-dominated

Hollywood pushed women out of screenwriting professions and led to the inequal representation of men and women seen in the industry today.

History of women in screenwriting. The early screenwriting industry provided an appealing professional outlet for women in the early twentieth century. Anita Loos, one of the most successful women in screenwriting during this period, provides a colorful description of her time working as a Hollywood screenwriter. "Well it was a great big romp, really… I was doping out plots, sitting around with the producer – D.W. Griffith or Fairbanks or various directors – and doping out plots" (Conor, 2014, p. 3). Similar to the appeal of modern, flexible creative industries, the flexible organization of early screenwriting provided an appealing employment opportunity for women during this time (Casella, 2006; Francke, 1994). Film production during the early twentieth century was new and not well-established, therefore early Hollywood was not considered a legitimate source of employment for men because the profitability of the industry remained undiscovered (Smith-Doerr, 2010). As a result, women were free to prosper as some of the film industry's earliest screenwriters, at the time known as scenarists or scenario writers (Banks, 2015; Bielby, 2009; Casella, 2006; Francke, 1994). Tuchman (1989) calls this the *empty field* factor, as women were able to enter the field because men did not yet seek employment within it. Prior to Hollywood's male invasion, women in screenwriting experienced tremendous success as the silent film era had the highest percentage of Americans visiting the movies regularly over any other time period to this day (Smith-Doer, 2010). However, as the film industry continued to flourish, women in screenwriting became increasingly disadvantaged (Banks, 2015; Bielby, 2009; Casella, 2006; Francke, 1994).

The *job-queuing perspective* argues professions are ranked and men occupy those among the highest (Reskin & Roos, 1990). The highest-ranking professions of the early twentieth

century included the well-founded industries of insurance, banking, and manufacturing, consisting of more than 90% men during this period (Smith-Doerr, 2010). Screenwriting remained one of the lowest ranking professions, leaving the field widely open for women. Norden (1984) states that early screenwriting provided an appealing opportunity for women seeking a professional outlet, as some of the first screenwriters were able to work exclusively through the mail. The decentralized organization of early cinema gave screenwriters access to powerful decision-making roles, and many women in screenwriting experienced a fluidity of roles across production, direction, and writing (Conor, 2014). Early screenplays were often developed simultaneously with a film's production schedule, therefore active collaboration of screenwriters with directors, producers, and actors during production was crucial for a film's success (Banks, 2015; Francke, 1994; Smith-Doerr, 2010). Unlike any other professional industry during this time, women in Hollywood obtained power equal to men.

Unfortunately, the powerful influence of early women in screenwriting did not translate into powerful representation of women on screen during this time. The process of reward and punishment by Hollywood executives has historically and consistently influenced screenwriters to develop gendered narratives that conform to current media norms and expectations (Gregory, 2002; Lauzen et al., 2008). Many women in screenwriting participate in the "writing to gender" desired by major Hollywood studios. Some of the earliest gendered stereotypes of women in film are seen as "doting wives" or "burdened sister-in-laws," as well as many other relationally and domestically focused roles largely influenced by the early twentieth century's popular Victorian ideals (Casella, 2006). Gendered stereotypes such as these began the recurring appearance of gendered roles we still see on screen today.

Further, Conor (2014) states that rigid divisions of labor in screen production began to alter the perceived fluidity of roles and flexibility of the early screenwriting industry. As the film industry grew, processes of rationalization and standardization created a shift toward greater efficiency and a system of industrial screen production. As a result, the Hollywood studio era began to evolve (Banks, 2015; Conor, 2014). According to Conor (2014), individual production companies began to form in the late 1910s, and for new studio moguls, vertical integration of the production system minimized risk and increased profit. By the early 1920s, the fluidity of roles for screenwriters diminished and was replaced by early studio structures that strictly separated roles of writer, producer, and director. Additionally, the integration of sound in film production in the 1920s also created a turning point in screen production and further standardized the industry (Conor, 2014).

Harper (2000) argues that the introduction of sound in film production further allowed women to pursue screenwriting work due to the informality and disarray that followed this dramatic shift in screen work. Francke (1994) notes that women in the 1920s were often employed as screenwriters for women's films that primarily involved melodramatic narratives of romance and mystery. Further, by the 1930s, the American film industry also began to employ British women for one-picture screenwriting contracts, such as Evadne Price for Paramount and Elizabeth Meehan for Warner Brothers (Conor, 2014; Harper 2000). However, as the Hollywood industry continued to flourish, studio structures gained more power and women became increasingly disadvantaged (Conor, 2014).

Additionally, women in screenwriting were often glamorized in trade press during this time, but framed outside of masculine creative stereotypes for screenwriters, such as the maverick artist, and instead glamorized within domestic domains (Conor, 2014; Francke, 1994).

In the trade press, women in screenwriting were often referred to as "girls" or "boyish," and described not as screenwriters, but as secretaries or stenographers (Conor, 2014; Holliday, 1995). Such representations of women in screenwriting represent a shift toward greater exclusion and gendered organization in the Hollywood studio era. Conor (2014) describes:

> What is implicit in these histories, but no less intelligible are a number of other structuring devices - the increasingly gendered, misogynistic and exclusionary nature of the profession and an increasing hierarchization and stratification of the labor market - devices that are solidified within Hollywood's studio system. (p. 23)

The studio era rapidly consolidated by the 1930s and 1940s (Conor, 2014). Further, the studio era adopted a bureaucratic organization that awarded the majority of permanent and well-paid screenwriting positions to men (Conor, 2015). Mahar (2001) argues that the rise of the studio system meant increased patterns of exclusion for female screenwriters, as many women in screenwriting faced overt hostility from male studio heads. As a result, a fraternalist culture within the screenwriting industry began (Conor, 2014; Mahar, 2001). The once powerful influence of women in screenwriting faded as the film industry became increasingly lucrative and invaded by male screenwriters. Smith-Doerr (2010) describes the shift in the screenwriting industry as such:

> …large bureaucratic movie studios designed more specialized jobs for their long-term employees. Directors became the central authorities on films. Screenwriters worked hourly jobs on writing scripts, and after submission they would have no further input, not even in the editing process. This change from flexible work to routinized, stable positions was unfriendly to the prominence of women writers in the industry. (p. 18)

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As a result, very few of the women who were prominent early screenwriters maintained work in the industry during the studio era (Conor, 2014). The studio era is marked by increased hierarchization and exclusion in the industry, however some women were able to maintain a level of marginalized work in screenwriting. Conor (2014) explains, "Women were hired to write within certain genres designated as women's genres but the perceived egalitarianism of the silent period had largely receded" (p. 26).

Following the studio system, Conor (2014) argues that another shift in screenwriting began to develop as workers in film and television production began a process of unionization, leading screenwriting to a new Hollywood era. As a result of unionization into organizations such as Writers Guild of America West (WGAW) and Writers Guild of America East (WGAE) that remain prevalent today, the industry experienced a shift in employment relations. Instead of long-term, permanent screenwriting positions that were common in the studio era and continuously awarded to men, screenwriters began to work in short-term job contracts and navigated their career with relative freelance status (Conor, 2014; Scott, 2005). As a result, the screenwriting industry's current professional culture of networking and short-term contracting began to form and remains today.

However, the transition to a new Hollywood era has not diminished the continuation of gender exclusion and inequality within the screenwriting industry. In the late twentieth century, Bielby and Bielby (1992) found that women screenwriters earned between 11-25% less throughout their careers compared to men. Additionally, Bielby and Bielby (1992) argue that five characteristics of production organization sustained gender inequality within the screenwriting industry during this time. These characteristics include employment based on short-term contracting, quality and visibility of work evaluated only post hoc and not by

measurable features, career success largely dependent on a small group of brokers who match creative talent with projects, reputation based on current fashionable styles and genres, and an overwhelming majority of male decision-makers. According to Conor (2014), many of these characteristics persist in the screenwriting industry today.

Further, Mahar (2001) argues despite early perceptions of screenwriting as an egalitarian profession for women, the film industry was born masculine. Conor (2015) states that early advertising for film technology depicted exclusively men as camera operators, owners, and exhibitors. Further, as the film industry became increasingly specialized, sex-typing increased and discrimination against female professionals seemingly erased the power of early women in screenwriting (Mahar, 2001). Consequently, such processes have led to the largely male-dominated screenwriting industry we see today (Mahar, 2001). Therefore, screenwriting provides an interesting case study in terms of the transformation of a profession once characterized by highly successful female screenwriters, to the male-dominated screenwriting industry we see today.

Current screenwriting industry. According to Conor (2014), the current screenwriting industry is exclusionary, gendered, and accessible to very few. Current women in screenwriting face disparities in both recognition for their work, as well as the ability to maintain work within the film and television industry. The bureaucratic hierarchy of the enormously male-dominated Hollywood industry poses a collection of challenges for women. Further, masculine depictions of the ideal screenwriter in how-to screenwriting manuals also provide a possible explanation for the drastic disparity of women we see in contemporary screenwriting (Conor, 2014). Similar to the earlier discussion on gendered creative labor, Conor (2015) states:

The organization of the Hollywood film industry and its film and television labor markets

build gender stereotyping and discrimination into everyday working practices and then

sustains them via the reliance on personal networks, reputation-based hiring and firing

and mainstream marketing strategies. (p. 122)

Conor (2015) argues that the screenwriting industry is masculine, fraternalist, and homophilic, mirroring the trends seen across many modern creative industries. The neoliberal new cultural economy creates strong individualistic values within the creative professional world, resulting in further inequality across creative industries including screenwriting. Neoliberal, individualistic views dismiss inequalities and challenges experienced by women and minorities as issues to be overcome by the individual rather than the organization (Allen, 2013). The challenges of screenwriters within the industry are deemed trade pains rather than organizational inequalities which make these discriminatory challenges virtually invisible and irrelevant to the organization (Ball & Bell, 2013).

This extreme gender disparity in the screenwriting industry is significant because of its implications regarding how male-dominated Hollywood affects on-screen gender representation. In Lauzen's (2015) study on the Top 100 grossing films of 2014, within films that employed at least one female director or screenwriter, female characters comprised 37% of all speaking characters. Comparably, within films that employed exclusively male directors and screenwriters, females comprised 28% of all speaking characters. Referring to the same sample, out of the films that employed at least one female director or screenwriter, 39% of protagonists were female. In comparison, out of films that employed exclusively male directors and screenwriters, only 4% of protagonists were female. Therefore, the lack of women in Hollywood

production is simultaneously being reflected by the lack of women on movie and television screens.

Additionally, women in screenwriting also face lower levels of compensation as well as total screenwriting jobs in comparison to their male counterparts. According to Conor (2014), statistics from WGAW report that white, male screenwriters experienced an increase in earnings of 18.4 percent between 2000 and 2007. However, during that same time, the gap between the employment of women and men in screenwriting grew. Further, gender disparities are also reflected in international film and television industries. Interestingly, in 2011, the British film industry held 18 percent of its films written by women, which reflected the same statistic as women writing American films during this same time (British Film Institute, 2011; Conor, 2014). In comparison to the American film and television industry, the British industry is characterized as elite, small-scale, structurally fractured, and dominated by American production (Conor, 2014). Therefore, many British film workers find themselves bridging between American and British production. However, in comparison to American screenwriters, British screenwriters experience more fluidity across mediums in which they create content. Conor (2014) explains, "British screenwriters routinely pursue writing on multiple platforms - theatre, film, television, radio and online content - not unlike the multivalent, flexible scenarists of the earliest days of Hollywood" (p. 34). American screenwriters do not experience the same fluidity across mediums in Hollywood, and consequently television production often experiences higher levels of women screenwriters and show runners than film (Conor, 2014).

In comparison to film, television production is considered a feminized medium (Jermyn, 2006). Although television production experiences the same employment culture of network and contract-based hiring, television screenwriters experience relatively more stable seasonal

employment providing a more formal professional environment for women (Conor, 2014). However, in both film and television production, "writers continue to be isolated and hierarchized depending on their industrial position and past success is no guarantee of continued or future success and recognition" (Conor, 2014, p. 31). Therefore, both male and female screenwriters continue to experience high levels of job insecurity in both television and film production. However, in an industry that reflects discriminatory practices within everyday processes and is characterized by high levels of informal hiring practices, women are continuously more disadvantaged than men when seeking screenwriting work (Conor, 2014; Conor, 2015).

Beyond screenwriting, it is significant to examine the career sensemaking of women in order to identify potential influences that contribute to professional off-ramping and the disidentification of women with their careers. Within the context of male-dominated, creative industries, women face a potential for heightened organizational and relational factors that can further disadvantage women and affect how these women make sense of their work and career identity. Therefore, this study is significant because it examines career sensemaking within one of the most disadvantageous professional environments for women today.

Existing research covers the nature of career sensemaking, male-dominated industries, gendered creative labor, and screenwriting, however there is no existing research connecting all four elements. Factors such as gender bias and discrimination that are common to male-dominated, creative industries have the potential to significantly influence a woman's career sensemaking. This is because sensemaking evolves from extracted cues of social interactions and organizational factors experienced throughout an individual's career (Weick, 1995; Canary & Canary, 2007). The screenwriting industry is characterized as both male-dominated and creative

labor, therefore examining the screenwriting industry provides an ideal opportunity for analyzing how women make sense of their careers within such environments. Therefore, this study analyzes the public career sensemaking of popular screenwriter Phoebe Waller-Bridge, a woman who has recently risen to screenwriting stardom for critically and popularly successful, female-helmed projects such as *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve*. This study asks the following research question:

> RQ: How does Phoebe Waller-Bridge publicly make sense of her career in the male-dominated screenwriting industry?

Chapter 4: Methodology

This study focuses on Phoebe Waller-Bridge because of her relevance in the screenwriting industry today. In a short period of time, Waller-Bridge's screenwriting success and name recognition in Hollywood has skyrocketed. Waller-Bridge began her writing career as a playwright for her London theatre company DryWrite but her life forever changed after taking her play *Fleabag* to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2013. After the festival, Waller-Bridge sold two of her plays into television series, *Crashing* and *Fleabag*, and has become a widely sought-after screenwriter in Hollywood ever since. Now, Waller-Bridge is credited as a screenwriter on projects such as Emmy-nominated series *Killing Eve* as well as the upcoming James Bond film *No Time to Die* (2020). Due to Waller-Bridge's current relevance within the industry, as well as her reputation for female-helmed projects and commercial viability in the post-#MeToo Hollywood era, she provides an ideal example for analyzing the public career sensemaking of a woman within the male-dominated screenwriting industry.

This study examines Waller-Bridge's public career sensemaking through a qualitative, iterative analysis of Waller-Bridge's interviews in both public and trade press. The sources in this study's sample include interviews of Waller-Bridge in trade publications such as *Broadcasting Cable*, *The Cut*, *Gold Derby*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, and *Variety* in order to understand how Waller-Bridge publicly engages in career sensemaking to industry peers. Additionally, this study also analyzes interviews from popular press such as *GQ*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *National Public Radio* (*NPR*), and *Vogue*. It is significant to consider the specific industry culture of screenwriting in regard to this sample, as public interviews are often considered part of a screenwriter's labor due to the highly public nature of the Hollywood industry. Interviews are an integral part of the screenwriting industry's process of networking

and hiring, therefore we must consider certain economic imperatives behind Waller-Bridge's performance in such interviews. Additionally, Waller-Bridge's self-presentation during public interviews should also be considered in terms of the differences in which an individual may make sense of their career publicly in comparison to a private, anonymous environment. However, using a multiplicity of sources, this study was able to identify common discursive themes Waller-Bridge uses while engaging in public sensemaking of her screenwriting career during these interviews.

In order to find interviews of Waller-Bridge for this study, I conducted a Google search of "Phoebe Waller-Bridge + Screenwriting" to create a sample in which she talks about her experiences in Hollywood specific to screenwriting. Additionally, I conducted the same "Phoebe Waller-Bridge + Screenwriting" search on YouTube in order to include video interviews of Waller-Bridge in reference to her screenwriting career. In order to identify the interviews most relevant to this study, I discarded any interviews that only talked about Waller-Bridge in reference to acting or playwrighting. However, I included interviews that referenced her acting and playwrighting in relation to her screenwriting. Also, I discarded any interviews that were significantly edited or including only excerpts of Waller-Bridge's quotes in order to ensure I was able to understand Waller-Bridge's quotes within the context she intended. Due to Waller-Bridge's rise in screenwriting being relatively recent, none of the interviews used in this study are dated before 2010, with the vast majority of interviews dated after 2015. However, my interview search did not include any specific date constraints. In total, this study includes 22 interviews of Waller-Bridge in reference to her screenwriting career.

From there, I fully transcribed each video interview into individual word documents. Additionally, I transcribed all written interviews into my own word documents in order to

maintain organization, while also saving a pdf of each interview as presented on the website I retrieved it from. From there, I printed each transcribed interview and organized the interviews in a binder first alphabetically, then by date. With each printed interview, I then started underlining the significant quotes and key words that emerged repeatedly throughout the sample in order to begin an iterative thematic analysis.

Using Tracy's (2013) iterative thematic analysis method, I alternated etic explanations of career sensemaking, women in male-dominated industries, and creative labor from the literature with emic discursive themes found within Waller-Bridge's public career sensemaking practices for my results. In order to identify discursive themes throughout Waller-Bridge's interviews, I first underlined significant quotes in which she referred to her career as a screenwriter, as well as key words that emerged repeatedly from these quotes. Once I identified and underlined each significant quote and key word from an interview, I then organized the quotes into a document labelled with the article or video's title followed by a list of the key words from that interview. Additionally, after listing the quotes and key words from the interview, I also listed the key takeaways from each interview in order to begin to connect dots between the sample of interviews.

As I began to identify common key takeaways across interviews, I narrowed the information I collected into the most significant quotes from the interviews that were representative of the common themes seen across the sample. After identifying the most significant quotes, I then organized these quotes into a separate document in order to see the information collectively. Using these quotes, as well as the common key words I previously identified across interviews, I began to interpret the information and identify the most prevalent discursive themes seen across Waller-Bridge's interviews.

Initially, I found six common discursive themes across Waller-Bridge's interviews. These themes included Waller-Bridge expressing that the things said between her and her female friends were never seen on screen, a desire to write characters as authentically and truthfully as possible, a love for writing dangerously and surprising her audience, constantly feeling like she needs to rewrite a scene and if a project fails she is the one who failed it, automatically being labelled a feminist show if she writes about women and sex or from the female perspective, and wanting her work to speak for itself and not wanting to talk about what it is like to be a female artist. After bringing this information to Dr. Larson, we were able to connect several of these themes and narrow my results into four common themes seen across Waller-Bridge's interviews.

Interestingly, by connecting these discursive themes, we realized that Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking was most evident when she responds to common topics that were repeatedly brought up to her in these environments. These topics include interpretations of her show as a feminist show, public critiques of her work as sexually explicit, discussions of her gender, and gender bias in Hollywood. Through Waller-Bridge's responses to these topics, she begins to reframe her career narrative within her public sensemaking as well as construct her career identity as a screenwriter.

Chapter 5: Results

In the context of public interviews, Waller-Bridge primarily engages in career sensemaking in response to several topics that are repeatedly brought up to her within these environments. As a result, her career sensemaking can be seen through the way she responds to these topics. These topics include interpretations of her show as a feminist show, public critiques of her work as sexually explicit, discussions of her gender, and gender bias in Hollywood. It is in the ways Waller-Bridge responds to public interpretations of her work that her career sensemaking is most evident.

Interestingly, in her responses to these topics, Waller-Bridge does not talk about being a woman in a male-dominated industry in the ways one might expect. When her show is called a feminist show, she rejects the characterization and says although she is feminist herself, she does not want a political agenda forced upon her work. When asked about her show being overly sexually explicit, Waller-Bridge responds that her writing is simply truthful and authentic to the women she knows in her real life. When Waller-Bridge is asked to discuss what it's like to be a woman in the industry, she negates that her gender has anything to do with her work. Lastly, when asked about gender bias in Hollywood, Waller-Bridge denies ever experiencing bias firsthand despite hearing about it from others. Waller-Bridge's responses are surprising due to the nature of the screenwriting industry as both male-dominated and creative labor.

Through Waller-Bridge's responses and denial of her own experience with common issues faced by women in male-dominated careers, Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking can be examined. The following section will proceed with a discussion of four themes seen across Waller-Bridge's responses to these topics, including: "It wasn't so much that I was a writer, it was that I was a feminist writer," "It felt like such a risk to say the things that I really thought

women say privately to each other," "I'm more inspired listening to female artists talk about their art than female artists talking about what it's like being a female artist," and lastly, "I hear a lot about it but I don't experience it firsthand."

"It wasn't so much that I was a writer, it was that I was a feminist writer."

Throughout *Fleabag*'s run, audiences have picked up on feminist messages scattered throughout the two seasons (Blyth, 2019; Fey, 2019; Frank, 2016). In *Fleabag*'s very first episode, Waller-Bridge's character Fleabag and her sister Claire attend a feminist lecture in which the lecturer asks the crowd, "Who would trade five years of their life for a so-called perfect body?" to which Fleabag and Claire are the only audience members to raise their hands (Waller-Bridge, 2016). However, Waller-Bridge has expressed mixed reactions in response to projects such as *Fleabag* being referred to as a feminist show. Significantly, in her career sensemaking she expresses an inherent tension between her own personal feminist ideology and not wanting her work to be defined by that same ideology. During a roundtable interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Waller-Bridge describes her reaction to her show *Fleabag* being referred to as feminist:

A lot of the time when I was being asked about the show it was through a prism of feminism. One that [was] a very important part of that show for me and the confusion the character felt, but it was like one strand in the story of this character. And there were so many other themes in it that I was grappling with and so many ways that I was trying to fuck with the genre and all of that kind of stuff but it was always that, always that, always that, always that. And, um, I was just sort of feeling like I was suddenly being moved into a different position. That it wasn't so much that I was writer, it was that I was a feminist writer. Which I am, of course I am. And I'm a feminist person. But it was- that became a

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category of writing and, um, and I felt that made me want to have three glasses of wine

and rail [at reporters] because that's not, that's not what I'm trying to do. (The

Hollywood Reporter, 2017)

Through this sensemaking, Waller-Bridge expresses an inherent tension between her personal

feminist ideology and not wanting her projects to be labelled feminist shows. Waller-Bridge

became frustrated that her show *Fleabag* was labelled feminist when that was only one strand of

what she was trying to do with her character. In the same interview, Waller-Bridge shares, "I do

think especially with female writers who write honestly about women and their experiences, I

feel like it's like, oh that's a feminist show. You know?" (The Hollywood Reporter, 2017).

Therefore, Waller-Bridge expresses that her show is seen in a feminist light solely because she is

a woman writing about women. Waller-Bridge shares a similar thought in an interview with *The*

Cut, "If you go into the mainstream with a female perspective that seems to resonate with a lot of

people, you have a political agenda imposed on you, you are told that you are a feminist"

(Malone, 2017, para. 2). The tension Waller-Bridge expresses here is ironic because although she

claims herself as a feminist, she does not want a feminist label imposed on her.

Rather than writing with a feminist agenda, Waller-Bridge expresses that her goal is

solely to write female characters truthfully and authentically (Backstage & Amazon Prime

Video, 2019; Blyth, 2019; Evans, 2019; Hall, 2014; Saraiya, 2019; Wiseman, 2018). In an

interview with *Deadline*, she explains, "It's just about truth and truthfulness and honesty and, to

be frank, entertainment" (Blyth, 2019, para. 29). Despite her intentions, Waller-Bridge expresses

that because she is a woman her work is received in relation to a feminist agenda. In response,

Waller-Bridge reframes the narrative surrounding her work toward a goal of truthfulness and

entertainment in order to avoid a political agenda. Simultaneously, she separates her personal ideology away from the construction of her career identity.

Additionally, Waller-Bridge discusses the precarious career implications that follow a feminist label in Hollywood. In the already masculine and fraternalist screenwriting industry (Conor, 2014; Conor, 2015), Waller-Bridge expresses that being labelled a feminist writer could affect a screenwriter's career longevity. In an interview with *The Cut*, Waller-Bridge explains her experience after being type-cast a feminist writer:

> Since you said those things about women, therefore you are a role model and an icon and you can't fuck up now because you have to be sensitive to something political. And everything a comedian wants to be is funny. Attaching something political to someone whose art has nothing to do with politics is fucking unfair. It's like putting rocks in the pockets of somebody who's just gone for a nice swim. They're going to fucking drown! That's why all women in the media sink eventually, because if they aren't sinking, they've been drowned! (Malone, 2017, para. 2).

Essentially, Waller-Bridge argues that being labelled a feminist writer in Hollywood causes women in the industry to be placed in a position in which their work becomes political and can no longer be seen simply for its entertainment value. Waller-Bridge claims it is not her goal to speak for all of womanhood or feminism within her work (Fey, 2019). Consequently, Waller-Bridge separates political agenda completely from screenwriting work. Waller-Bridge claims that screenwriting has nothing to do with politics and therefore attaching a feminist agenda to her work is unfair. She rationalizes that her work is not feminist despite her own feminist ideology because screenwriting has nothing to do with politics. Therefore, she enacts a screenwriting

career environment in which her feminist ideology is insignificant. In an interview with *GQ*, she continues her discussion on being labelled feminist in the screenwriting industry:

> You can feel as if there's a clickbaity, kind of hot button stuff around it where they want to trap you. They want you to say something controversial. The idea that you can be a role model is already baiting people. You're baiting the press to try and flip you. And that's the depressing thing: they want to constantly reveal you as being the enemy of women, because you don't have a perfect answer. But I feel like so many people are part of the good fight now, in the industry anyway. And it's more about complexity than hammering agendas. (Fey, 2019, para. 105)

This quote is interesting because although Waller-Bridge expresses that feminist labels trap her into a political situation that has potential to damage her career, she ultimately minimizes the underlying gendered issue by referencing a movement for change in the industry. This is significant because Waller-Bridge is minimizing a gendered issue within screenwriting, which remains a prevalent pattern seen throughout her career sensemaking. Further, Waller-Bridge does not deny that there are feminist tones in her work, she instead rationalizes that they are just insignificant to her overall career. In an interview with *GQ*, Waller-Bridge sits down with American screenwriter and comedian Tina Fey, during which Fey asks, "Do you feel pressure as your actual self to be an exemplary feminist? Do people try to pressure you to get your take on issues?" To which Waller-Bridge responds:

> Yeah. I feel like on one level, *Fleabag*'s done me favors because she articulates it. She's indecisive, confused and feels under pressure herself as an individual, and that she might be a bad feminist. I think that was the best articulation of how I feel about the conversation. Actually writing the play and realizing how important it is to show women,

specific women, I'm never going to be like: this is womanhood. I want to show specific

women with specific stories that hopefully people can relate to. The act of writing that

play and the act of writing *Killing Eve* and all these characters and *Fleabag* and the TV

show as well, that is my articulation of how I feel and what I want to see and I work it out

through those things. And I feel like sometimes, when I'm asked questions about it, I just

want to point at that work and go, "That. That's what I feel about it." But I'm also really

proud that the work has led people to ask me questions like that. (Fey, 2019, para. 104-

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Here Waller-Bridge points out that on one hand, she is proud that her work is interpreted as

feminist and wants to talk about it. However, on the other hand, a feminist agenda is not her

intention (Blyth, 2019; Fey, 2019). Waller-Bridge expresses that she wants her work to speak for

her views on feminism, but beyond that she does not want to speak about her feminist ideology

in relation to her career. Again Waller-Bridge experiences a tension between her personal

ideology and her work because when a political agenda is attached to an artist's work, the artist

becomes an icon for that agenda and faces the challenge of never saying the wrong thing (Fey,

2019; Malone, 2017). Therefore, Waller-Bridge repeatedly deflects a career identity as a feminist

writer, despite being proud of her feminist ideology (Blyth, 2019; The Hollywood Reporter,

2017; Fey, 2019; Malone, 2017). Ultimately, Waller-Bridge is strategically constructing her

career identity apart from her personal ideology in order to avoid facing repercussions for being

a feminist in the screenwriting industry.

Waller-Bridge discusses additional imbalances in how her work is interpreted because of

her gender, specifically in relation to sex. Not only did Waller-Bridge's female perspective shift

her show into a feminist position, but also her representations of women and sex on screen. *The*

Cut shares a conversation Waller-Bridge has with two of her close collaborators and friends, Vicky Jones and Amy Morgan, in relation to sexual content in her work:

> Jones tells [Waller-Bridge] what she's missed. "We solved feminism! I've never thought of it more clearly than I have in this conversation." "Funny women on TV have been around for ages," says Morgan. "But if it's not about a woman having sex, it's not called feminist, it's called a sitcom." "Because people, not just men, are afraid of women talking about sex," Jones continues. "And so it's a backlash, effectively." Waller-Bridge nods. "It's also a way of simplifying a whole conversation by putting one blanket over it." "And simplifying women's stories, which is so fucking horrifically ironic!" says Jones. "Vicky always said to me, when I was getting into the darker side of *Fleabag* and I was like, 'Oh God, this just is a show about sadness,' she was like, 'No, never forget, at the end of the day, this is a show about the glory of being a woman,'" says Waller-Bridge. "And in the glory of being a woman, the darker bits are involved." (Malone, 2017, para. 23)

Here Waller-Bridge's conversation exemplifies how her sensemaking is affected by social interactions in terms of her career identity construction. Through the discussion with her colleagues about feminism and comedy, Waller-Bridge begins to construct her identity not as a feminist screenwriter but just a screenwriter. Together, they rationalize that the only reason Waller-Bridge's work is labelled feminist is because she writes about women and sex. Therefore, Waller-Bridge applies meaning to interpretations of her show as feminist through the justification it is because of her gender. As a result, Waller-Bridge repeatedly constructs her career identity apart from being a woman.

Relatedly, Waller-Bridge repeatedly denies the importance of a writer's gender and expresses the need for authentic portrayals of both men and women on screen (Blyth, 2019; Fey, 2019; Hall, 2014; Hattenstone, 2019). In an interview with *17percent*, Waller-Bridge says, "I think it's important that women are written about as truthfully and with as much natural complexity as possible. Whether it is a male or female writer shouldn't really matter" (Hall, 2014, para. 26). In a different interview, Waller-Bridge claims, "I want to afford male characters the same vulnerability that women are afforded" (Blyth, 2019, para. 21). Here Waller-Bridge minimizes the importance of a writer's gender as well as the gender of characters she writes. The minimization of gender is a pattern that is seen repeatedly across Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking. Perhaps this is in direct response to her frustration over how gender has affected the reception of her own work. Through minimizing gender Waller-Bridge begins to separate the importance of gender from screenwriting work and her career identity. As a result, she enacts a career environment in which gender does not affect her work.

Waller-Bridge's minimization of gender mirrors her frustration over being labelled feminist because she is a woman writing about women (Malone, 2017; The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). Interestingly, many of the comedians and writers Waller-Bridge claims as creative inspiration are men, including Louis C.K., John Steinbeck, and Shakespeare (Collins 2019; Hattenstone, 2018; Jacobsen, Montgomery, & Wloszcyna, 2019). Additionally, many of the shows she claims as creative inspiration are not associated with feminism or a female perspective, including *Game of Thrones, House of Cards,* and *Alfie* (Jacobsen et al., 2019). Out of Waller-Bridge's inspirations listed above, Louis C.K. is the only to be publicly associated with feminism (Feldman, 2017). Ironically, later in his career, C.K.'s jokes became seen in a different light after he was accused of sexual misconduct by multiple women in comedy

(Sblendorio, Durkin, & Dillon, 2017). Nonetheless, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Waller-Bridge shares how C.K.'s female perspective in his comedy provided inspiration for her own work:

> He seemed to see the world through a female perspective, and so much of his comedy was about how gruesome men are and how many women have to deal with gross guys. No one was talking that way at the time – you know the idea that a man goes on a date and thinks he might not get laid; a woman goes on a date and thinks she might be murdered. (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 21)

This is significant because Waller-Bridge discusses C.K.'s work much like her own, not as feminist, but as showcasing the female perspective. Additionally, she is demonstrating that the female perspective can be portrayed by any writer regardless of their gender. Although C.K. was associated with feminism in his earlier career, he did not face the same obstacle women in the industry face of being confined to women's work (Blyth, 2019). However, as a woman writing from a female perspective, Waller-Bridge expresses that she faces both being labelled feminist and being confined to women's work. Therefore, as Waller-Bridge avoids being labelled a feminist writer, she is simultaneously pointing out that both men and women can write from the female perspective, ultimately minimizing the importance of gender to her work. Further, Blyth (2019) describes Waller-Bridge's thoughts on the idea of women's work in relation to her career in screenwriting:

> The female accolades have arrived in spades. She's often asked about what it feels like to be a female writer and producer in this climate; what inspires her to write about whole, complex women. Her female characters' sex lives are bold and liberated and she writes well-rounded women with all the detail that male characters have traditionally enjoyed.

All of these things are of course enormously valuable, but in some ways, does focusing

mainly on their femaleness, and on Waller-Bridge's own femaleness, feel reductive? Is it

another conciliatory dish for the children's table? Waller-Bridge smiles wryly at the

question, "It's a way of containing us and controlling our work," she says, "and

immediately being able to almost tie a bow around our collective work and go, 'That is

women's work.' It's a trap because we want to talk about it, and each other, and the

experience, and share it and make sure it's something that is articulated well." (para. 17)

Here Waller-Bridge acknowledges the injustice surrounding the concept of women's work

within industries including her own. Waller-Bridge explains that although she wants to talk about

her work with other women about the characters she has created, she believes falling into

women's categories is a containment of her work within the broader industry. Therefore,

although Waller-Bridge feels pride in the fact that her work is interpreted as feminist, she avoids

defining her work in relation to being a woman or a feminist. In Waller-Bridge's public

sensemaking, she continuously constructs a career identity that disregards any significance to her

gender or personal feminist ideology.

Further, Waller-Bridge rejects when her shows are referred to as women's shows. For

example, Waller-Bridge discusses her brother's initial reaction to *Fleabag*. "He said, 'I think

you're going to scare a lot of men with this show. It's going to freak them out.' And I was like

'Fucking good, it's about time'" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 27). Similarly, in an interview with

17percent, Waller-Bridge shares. "The most infuriating question that I am often asked is, 'Will

men enjoy Fleabag?' Fucks sake. Really?!" (Hall, 2014, para. 22). Once again, Waller-Bridge

minimizes the importance of gender in relation to her work. In her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge

extracts common cues from her career development in which her work has been defined by her

gender or limited to being only women's work. Therefore, it is a common theme in her sensemaking that she extracts experiences of limitations in regard to the ways the public interprets her work because she is a woman. In response, Waller-Bridge continuously denies that being a woman has anything to do with her work.

Conclusively, through her career sensemaking, Waller-Bridge rationalizes a rejection of her work as feminist despite her own feminist ideology because of the implications it may have on her career. She rationalizes that her work is labelled feminist solely because she is a woman writing from the female perspective, and that attaching the feminist political agenda to women's work in Hollywood is unfair. This is significant because although Waller-Bridge expresses feeling pride that her work is interpreted as feminist, she does not want to label her shows as feminist because she feels as though it is a trap and that she will be contained within a subsection of women's work. She repeatedly extracts cues in her sensemaking in which her show is called feminist or her work is defined by her gender as significant events in her career. Consequently, in her interviews Waller-Bridge continuously denies that gender has anything to do with her work as a screenwriter. As a result, Waller-Bridge continuously minimizes the importance of gender in relation to her work as well as screenwriting work in general and therefore enacts a career environment in which her gender is insignificant. Therefore, through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge constructs a career identity separate from her gender and feminist ideology in response to the limitations associated with being a woman in the screenwriting industry.

"It felt like such a risk to say the things that I really thought women say privately to each other."

The next topic often presented to Waller-Bridge publicly is the interpretation of her show as sexually explicit. However, in her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge rationalizes that it is not the

content that is exposing in her work such as *Fleabag*, but rather the way women are talking to each other on screen (Fey, 2019). Waller-Bridge expresses that the characters she writes present women in a way that is not often seen on screen but is authentic to the women in her own life. She constructs a career narrative in which her goal is to write complex female characters in order to fulfill the limitations she felt in terms of roles available to her as a young actor. Therefore, by responding to interpretations of her work in relation to her goals as a writer, Waller-Bridge continues to construct her career identity. She repeatedly expresses a desire to represent her characters truthfully and to write the things that feel dangerous and unsaid. Therefore, through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge reframes the narrative surrounding her work away from explicitness and toward authenticity.

Additionally, Waller-Bridge often refers to rage as an early inspiration for her work. Ironically, Waller-Bridge cites the over-sexualization and objectification of women in the media as a source of this rage. This is significant in relation to public interpretations of her current work as sexually explicit. In an interview with *NPR*, Waller-Bridge discusses her feelings of rage regarding the over-sexualization of women in the media that began in her 20s:

It's just like, why are we always naked everywhere? And which – you know, which I struggled with, as well, because, you know, I don't believe that – I don't – I'm not a prudish person, and I'm not – and I never want anyone to feel, like, censored, and I never want to be censored myself. But I just felt like it was being commodified, like the female body and the female – and not for our – not in any way that was healthy or made anybody happy. And that really, really frustrated me. It made me kind of angry and rage-y in my 20s. And so I think that's where a lot of that feeling came from (Gross, 2019, para. 27).

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Here Waller-Bridge demonstrates a tension between her personal identification as someone who does not want to be censored but who also experiences a negative reaction to excessive nudity of women on screen. Across interviews, she repeatedly emphasizes this sexualization as a source of her rage. In an interview with *The Cut* she shares, "I was starting to see women in a different way. Just shamelessly objectifying them on the tube" (Malone, 2017, para. 17). She further explains, "I couldn't open a newspaper, and it would just be women in their bras, like, advertising mortgages" (Gross, 2019, para. 25). Waller-Bridge expresses beginning to feel rage as a result of the over-sexualization of women in the media and how that made her feel as a woman in society and in her career (Evans, 2019; Gross, 2019; Hattenstone, 2018; Malone, 2017). Candidly, Waller-Bridge shares, "Basically, to be fucked or not to be fucked is the ultimate demise of any female character in comedy" (Fey, 2019, para. 61). Conclusively, Waller-Bridge repeatedly expresses feeling rage due to the over-sexualization of women on screen and cites this rage as inspiration for her work. Through this sensemaking, she constructs an identity in relation to experiences during her earlier career. As a result, she begins to reframe the narrative surrounding her current work through her public sensemaking.

On multiple occasions, Waller-Bridge mentions a past experience in which she was first told she had the gift of rage. This experience represents a cue Waller-Bridge repeatedly extracts as a significant event in her career development. She explains, "Good things can come out of rage. It's galvanizing. A director once said to me, 'You have the gift of rage' and it really stayed with me" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 28). In a separate interview, she further explains this same experience and its effect on her career:

> He said, 'It's because you have the gift of rage.' I realized that's what I'm always looking for, because I don't think it necessarily has to be a negative thing. I think rage can be

something that motivates and galvanizes and changes things, and I think that's what's

happening now … [Rage] has a forward motion to it. When I was in my 20s I used to

have these rage flashes all the time, I would just get really, really rage-y for, like, five

seconds, and then it would pass. And it was always a weirdly positive feeling. I think

rage can be harnessed. I find it exciting in women. That's something that goes through

my work, for sure. (Wiseman, 2018, para. 8)

As a result of this event, Waller-Bridge explains how she began to use rage as inspiration behind

her work. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Waller-Bridge specifically connects her

feelings of rage from her early career to her current work. She explains:

When I was in my 20s and feeling quite frustrated by my position in the industry by just

wanting a job. That was pretty much it. But also in life as well, just feeling my place in

the world as a woman and as a woman who wanted to write and act and how I felt about

myself physically and what my power was, all that kind of stuff was going on at the same

time, I did feel this real rage underneath it all. But I didn't ever want to express pure rage

to people so I think it came out as jokes. *Fleabag* was the expression of the kind of

'ahhhh' that came out. (Evans, 2019, para. 7)

Here Waller-Bridge connects her rage with additional feelings of wanting a job in her 20s.

During interviews, Waller-Bridge often describes feeling limitations in her early acting career in

relation to the roles that were available to her as a woman. She explains, "I felt the limitations in

terms of the work I was reading and the parts that were available; they were always quite two-

dimensional" (Clarke, 2019, para. 18). More specifically, Waller-Bridge reveals feeling

restricted upon graduation from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), "I had felt

pressure coming out of drama school to be a sort of princess. Either like a sexy princess or a not-

sexy princess that was like the two things and one way or another she's a princess you know no matter what the story is" (Backstage & Amazon Prime Video, 2019). Waller-Bridge explains that she was tired of passive princess parts and questioned the lack of complexity in female roles. "I was like 'Why can't I do a role where she's an agent of her own violent destiny? Where are those parts?" (Wiseman, 2018, para. 7).

As a result, Waller-Bridge began writing the roles that she wanted to play. She explains, "I needed to see that character. And I wanted to act that character. And then I discovered I could write that character" (Evans, 2019, para. 2). In an interview with Backstage & Amazon Prime Video, Waller-Bridge states that in terms of her early writing career, "It came out of a need to play someone who was complex" (2019). Through retrospective sensemaking, Waller-Bridge consistently reports that her motivation to write authentic female characters originates from the lack of complexity in female roles available to her as a young actor. Therefore, Waller-Bridge makes sense of her current work in relation to a fulfillment of past limitations she faced.

Additionally, Waller-Bridge continuously expresses that she writes from the point of view she wants to watch as well as act. She explains that in terms of her writing, "I'm always satisfying my own appetite. So I guess that means transgressive women, friendships, pain. I love pain" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 9). Waller-Bridge shares, "I really, *really* wanted to write about female relationships with other females and things. Two women who are so different" (Saraiya, 2017, para. 13). Further, Waller-Bridge continuously expresses a goal of authenticity and truthfulness in relation to her writing. Instead of the two-dimensional female characters from her early acting career, she consistently expresses a desire to write female characters as authentic as the women she sees in her real life. Consequently, Waller-Bridge repeatedly extracts feelings of writing the "unsaid" during her early career (Cox, 2019, para. 3).

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In relation to Waller-Bridge's early beginnings of *Fleabag* as a play, she describes, "It felt so unsaid when I did it the first time – totally said between me and my friends and how we would talk to each other privately, but not, literally, on a stage" (Cox, 2019, para. 3). As a result of bringing truthfulness to her writing in order to make female characters more complex, Waller-Bridge expresses that her work felt like something that had not yet been articulated on a stage or on screen. Waller-Bridge describes her early experience writing *Fleabag*:

> What was really authentic in the beginning and I wrote, it was originally a play, was the humor and the terms and phrases that the particular character would have because that's the kind of stuff that was cracking me up at the time and the stuff that I hadn't really seen that much in a character. (The Hollywood Reporter, 2017)

Waller-Bridge continuously extracts experiences from her early writing in which she felt like she was writing something never before seen. She describes, "It felt like such a risk to say things that I really thought women said privately to each other" (Backstage & Amazon Prime Video, 2019). However, she expresses that through this truthfulness, she felt as though she could unleash some of her rage. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Waller-Bridge explains how it felt to write a female character as complex as her character in *Fleabag* for the first time:

> I feel a sort of burn when I'm writing something that feels truthful and a bit dangerous and writing the play was just a big ole burn. And it was driven by that sense of rage. What if I just said onstage what I say to my friend? Or if I just express some of the rage that I have but turn it up? (Evans, 2019, para. 2)

Additionally, Waller-Bridge describes using her feelings on the over-sexualization of women as comedic material in her work. In the original *Fleabag* play, her character jokes that her pizza is a dirty little slut, describing the pizza as, "Very slutty pizza. The bitch is dripping and that dirty

little crust wants to be in me" (Malone, 2017, para. 2). She explains that her inspiration for the joke came from feelings in her 20s that her sexual allure was her power. She explains, "The 'pizza is a dirty little slut' bit is something I find really funny but it was rooted in her just thinking that's how you value everything, and that's how she values herself" (Malone, 2017, para. 16). Therefore, through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge applies meaning to her work by relating it to her experiences when she was younger.

As she applies further meaning to her work, Waller-Bridge uses her experience with the over-sexualization of women in media as more reason to bring authenticity to her characters. Waller-Bridge avoids writing the same stereotypical and two-dimensional characters that made her feel limited as an actor in her 20s. Instead, in reference to her work, she expresses being less interested in the physical appearance of her characters and more interested in the dark innerworkings of their minds (Hattenstone, 2018). Therefore, Waller-Bridge continues to apply meaning to her current work in relation to her rage and the limitations she felt in her early career. She explains in an interview with *The Guardian*:

> We sexualize women all the time in drama and TV. They are objectified. But an exploration of one woman's creative desire is really exciting. She can be a nice person, but the darker corners of her mind are unusual and fucked up, because everyone's are. (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 11)

Conclusively, Waller-Bridge uses her rage regarding the over-sexualization of women in the media as a way to apply meaning to her current work and the characters she writes. However, surprisingly, early press coverage surrounding her show *Fleabag* repeatedly criticized Waller-Bridge for *Fleabag*'s "awful lot of nudity" and "gratuitous sex" (Gross, 2019, para. 46). As a result, these public interpretations of *Fleabag* as sexually explicit present incongruity for Waller-

Bridge's overall career narrative and identity. This represents an incongruous event in Waller-Bridge's career for two reasons. First, over-sexualization of women in the media is a concept Waller-Bridge refers to consistently as a contributor to the rage she uses as inspiration for her work. Second, *Fleabag* contains no explicit nudity and does not portray sex in a graphic nature. As a result of this unexpected interpretation of her work, Waller-Bridge is forced to make sense of an incongruous event. Here Waller-Bridge explains her initial reaction:

> The first series of *Fleabag,* when it came out in the UK, the British press were like, 'This is the filthiest, most overly exposed, sexually exposing show ever.' They made out like I was naked the whole way through. I was like, 'There is not a moment of nudity in the series.' I just say stuff about my arsehole straight down the barrel. I think that makes people feel so naked, but the language was more naked than the actual performance (Fey, 2019, para. 81).

Here Waller-Bridge rationalizes the public interpretations of *Fleabag* as sexually explicit by attributing it to the candid language used by her characters regarding sex. Across interviews, Waller-Bridge expresses that part of her truthfulness in writing female characters relates to real women's relationships with sex (Gross, 2019; Hodge, 2019). However, she also expresses that audiences are not used to seeing women on screen in this way, and that until now what she writes feels "unsaid" on screen (Cox, 2019, para. 3). Therefore, she attributes public interpretations of her show as sexually explicit to her female characters dialogue surrounding sex. Additionally, Waller-Bridge explains, "What's interesting is that when women write about sex, suddenly sex becomes the headline, the theme of the whole show" (O'Connell, 2019, para. 22). This relates to the previous theme in which Waller-Bridge discusses that women in comedy are only labelled feminist after including sex in their work. Therefore, she expresses that the public is only

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focusing on the sex in her show because she is a woman, and not because of the actual content. Waller-Bridge further explains public reactions to *Fleabag* regarding sex:

> I remember when *Fleabag* first came out and the idea that she was – 'cause a funny reaction [that] happened to *Fleabag* was – the TV show – was that people were talking about it like there was an awful lot of nudity in it or very gratuitous sex in it. And actually, there's no nudity in it. And you don't see any sex. Like, you don't see it very graphically. But the language is very graphic. And the fact that, I think, I'm looking straight down the barrel of the camera and that you stay on her, she's talking you through these moments. (Gross, 2019, para. 45)

Waller-Bridge rationalizes that her work is not overly explicit, but instead portrays women in an authentic way rarely seen before, including their sexual candidness (Cox, 2019; Gross, 2019; O'Connell, 2019). As a result of this authenticity, Waller-Bridge ultimately resists writing the two-dimensional representations of women common to her in her early career. One of the scenes in *Fleabag* that caught public attention due to its sexual provocativeness is a scene in which Waller-Bridge's character masturbates to a video of Barack Obama. However, she rationalizes that this scene only caught attention because it was a woman masturbating instead of a man. Therefore, she continues to apply meaning to interpretations of her work as a result of her being a woman, and consequently continues to minimize the importance of gender in screenwriting. She explains in an interview with *NPR*:

> So when there's a moment when I'm masturbating with my boyfriend next to me. And it just feels like really, really intimate, I think, because we held on it. But then the show was written about like it was the filthiest, most, like, exposing, like, couldn't believe how much nudity there was in it. I had – kept having to correct everybody like, no, no, I

haven't. And I can't – like you say, I cannot count on my fingers and toes how many

scenes I've seen of, like, men on TV [masturbating] since I can remember. I mean,

especially in comedy. But it just seems like this thing – that it's just like an everyday

occurrence for men. And, you know, for women, it's this, yeah, transgressive act of, you

know, of something naughty or in some cases dirty, I think. You know, the – that a

woman pleasuring herself was like a deeply selfish act, whereas a man having to do it

was just he had to get something off his chest or wherever else it comes from. (Gross,

2019, para. 46-48)

Here Waller-Bridge rationalizes the sexual activity of her character by comparing it to the

accepted norms of male sexuality on screen. Waller-Bridge explains that although male

masturbation is common in the media, a woman masturbating is not easily accepted by the public

and is viewed as a transgressive act. However, in her own sensemaking, she does not interpret

her work as explicit and instead compares it to her own experiences and openness with sex.

Waller-Bridge shares, "I was always really open about sex and how I was feeling about it. In

every relationship I went into, I was like, 'We are going to be honest about this! Was that all

right for you?" (Hodge, 2019, para. 1). Through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge attributes the

sexual content in her writing to authenticity rather than explicitness, reshaping the narrative

around her work. She resists the norms that are common to female representation on screen in

order to portray what she believes is authentic representations of women. Therefore, she enacts

an environment in which women are portrayed as authentically as men on screen in relation to

sex. Waller-Bridge shares that a lot of inspiration for her writing comes from real conversations

with other women. For example, she shares in an interview with *NPR*:

Well, I think that idea came from a lot of conversations I was having with friends of mine and – about how what their relationship with sex was. And actually, often with the women I'd speak to, when I was really boiling it down with them – and through my own experiences, as well – it felt like the most sort of important part of it was the validation a lot of the time, and less of, you know, what the woman herself desired and more about the feeling of being desired. And I just thought that was a really – it was kind of sad how many women I spoke to felt like that, and that I could relate to that, and that I felt like that, certainly through my 20s. And I just sort of thought that that would really key in – that'd be a really quick way to kind of key into this character. (Gross, 2019, para. 20)

In *Fleabag*, this conversation is translated through her character's line, "I've spent most of my adult life using sex to deflect from the screaming void inside my empty heart" (Sturges, 2019, para. 1). For Waller-Bridge, the actions and conversations of her female characters are not shocking and explicit, but instead are real and authentic. Waller-Bridge describes writing her own character in *Fleabag*:

I wanted to write about a darker side of female psychology as I saw it then. Putting front and center someone who sexualized everything to the point of her own exhaustion; someone who seduced and dismissed people, chasing the affirmation of their desire then scarpering before it turned into love or rejection; someone who believed that her worth really was measured by her sexual power, and that she knew this as the truth no one else was brave enough to admit. (Sherwin, 2016, para. 12-13)

This quote is significant because it relates to the experiences she repeatedly discusses from her 20s. For example, "Throughout a lot of my 20s, my sexual allure and power was one of the most important things about me, my currency. I did really panic and found myself just moisturizing all

the time" (Malone, 2017, para. 16). Here Waller-Bridge specifically uses events she discusses from her earlier career as meaning behind her current work. Additionally, she fulfills her goal of creating authentic, complex female characters through applying the truthfulness of her own experiences in her writing. Consequently, she evokes meaning in her career as well as constructs her identity and career purpose.

Therefore, Waller-Bridge expresses fulfillment in her career through integrating her past career with her current writing. Now, Waller-Bridge expresses a goal of having the women acting her characters to get excited over the complexity of the roles they get to play. She shares, "As an actress, I very rarely had that feeling early in my career. That brings me much pleasure, knowing that I'm giving that to an actress" (Blyth, 2019, para. 7). Recently, Waller-Bridge was hired to polish the script of the newest James Bond film, *No Time to Die* (2020). In an interview with *Deadline*, Waller-Bridge expresses her goal in regard to the characters played by Lashana Lynch, Léa Seydoux, and Ana de Armas in the film. She explains:

> It's just about making them feel like real people. I always think the test for me as an actor, whenever I'm writing anything, is: would I want to play that role? And so I'm coming into this polish thinking, I just want to make sure that when they get those pages through, that Lashana, Léa and Ana open them and go, 'I can't wait to do that.' As an actress, I very rarely had that feeling early in my career. That brings me much pleasure, knowing that I'm giving that to an actress. (Blyth, 2019, para. 7)

Despite early critiques of her work as sexually explicit, Waller-Bridge now experiences significant success in her screenwriting career. In response to her success, Waller-Bridge shares her relief that audiences relate to her work. She explains that when you're writing truthfully, "You can just hope that you're not crazy and everyone else connects with it as well. So it's a real

relief. It makes me feel like I'm not crazy, that people connect with it" (Tingley, 2019, para. 2).

Now that her success has caught on in Hollywood, Waller-Bridge expresses tackling her projects

with a new ferocity. In an interview with *Variety*, Waller-Bridge shares how it feels writing

truthfully for her female characters now, compared to when she first started:

> That's what felt so dangerous about it then. Whereas now it's a different kind of
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> fierceness I want to attack it with, because now I'm like, 'Yes, now it's articulating
>
> something that is being talked about already,' whereas before the ambition had been to
>
> articulate something that hadn't been. (Cox, 2019, para. 3)

Through this sensemaking, Waller-Bridge reveals that she believes her work has transitioned

from being something unsaid, to something that is speaking to audiences. However, Waller-

Bridge remains, "I always want it to be dangerous" (Collins, 2019, para. 38). Whether it's in her

representation of women, men, sex, or relationships, Waller-Bridge maintains that the most

important aspect of her work is to remain truthful. In an interview with *Vogue*, Waller-Bridge is

asked what would happen if she ever runs out of relatable truths to present in her writing, to

which she responds, "I've learnt that I just need to keep being honest. But if you're telling the

truth, you're likely to be frightened by it. I suppose that's when I'm enjoying it most" (Wiseman,

2018, para. 16). Despite now realizing success for what felt like a risk at first, Waller-Bridge

maintains that writing dangerously is important to her career and identity. Therefore, she

continues to connect her early career experiences to her current career identity.

Waller-Bridge expresses enjoyment in taking risks in her writing and shocking audiences

through the truthfulness in her characters (Wiseman, 2018). As a result, she disregards the

importance of misinterpretations of her work, such as those calling *Fleabag* sexually explicit.

She even pokes fun at such misinterpretations, for example, "I had this interview where this guy

was like, 'You were trying to grab people's attention with the nudity and explicit sex,'" to which she jokes, "There's a bit of Hugh Skinner's bum in the shower, but *come on*, give the people what they want!" (Malone, 2017, para. 30). Waller-Bridge insists that taking risks defines her work and identity. In fact, Waller-Bridge believes nothing is more dangerous than a joke, and she explains why she loves it:

> I feel like making a joke is a risk in any situation, which is why I love people that try. When you meet someone, for me anyway, working out what makes them laugh is one of the things that helps you figure out who they are. You know those things that humans can do that are just totally free? Like, outside of what clothes you wear, or what restaurant you're at, or what your upbringing was, or anything. It's just like sex is two naked people, a thing that people do, that happens everywhere all over the world. And what's glorious is that you realize that you're completely naked and you've used nothing, you've just used each other. And that's beautiful. (Collins, 2019, para. 31)

Ultimately, Waller-Bridge makes sense of public critiques of her work through the maintenance that she creates characters that feel authentic to her real life and that she enjoys taking risks in her career. She describes writing the things women say privately to each other as writing dangerously or taking a risk, however she now engages in her work with a new ferocity because she knows its articulating meaning to audiences. Additionally, she rationalizes that her work is interpreted as explicit by critics because she is a woman and because of the lack of truthful depictions of women on screen in relation to sex. However, she assigns little importance to these interpretations as it's the lack of complex roles that were available to her as a young actor that motivates her to write truthful, complex roles for women today. Therefore, through retrospection of the limitations in her earlier career, Waller-Bridge assigns meaning to her current work as a

screenwriter. Additionally, she reframes the narrative surrounding women and sex in her shows away from sexual explicitness toward her own goal of authenticity and complexity for women on screen.

"I'm more inspired listening to female artists talk about their art than female artists talking about what it's like being a female artist."

Throughout Waller-Bridge's career, she expresses that a lot of media attention has focused on the fact that she is a woman (O'Connell, 2019; Vogue, 2019). However, in response to the press, Waller-Bridge continuously denies that being a woman influences her actual career (Blyth, 2019; Brown, 2019). In her career sensemaking, Waller-Bridge constructs her identity not as a female screenwriter but as a screenwriter. Further, she extracts cues from press coverage regarding her gender as significant in her sensemaking, however she reframes her own career narratives as irrelevant to her being a woman. Through this pattern of sensemaking, Waller-Bridge expresses a sense of self-efficacy and exerts control over her work. Additionally, she uses social interactions within her career experiences as further meaning to her identity construction as a screenwriter not defined by her gender. As a result, Waller-Bridge enacts a career environment in which her gender is insignificant to her work.

Waller-Bridge expresses a general dislike for the media attention surrounding her being a woman. During an interview with *Vogue*, Waller-Bridge is asked, "What is a question you generally detest being asked?" To which she responds, "What's it like being a woman in comedy, what's it like being a woman in this industry, what's it like being a woman?" (2019). Through this response, Waller-Bridge simultaneously illustrates the attention she receives regarding her gender as well as her refusal of its significance to her. She therefore begins to

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construct her identity not as a woman in comedy or woman in the industry, but as a professional not defined by her gender.

Waller-Bridge also uses social interactions from her career to construct her identity through sensemaking. She questions why the press focuses on her gender if she doesn't see it play a significant role in her career life. Waller-Bridge explains, "My collaborators and colleagues don't refer to me as a female writer, like, 'Can you send in your latest female draft of that, please?" (Blyth, 2019, para. 19). In her interview with *Deadline*, she explains that her gender only becomes relevant during press tours (Blyth, 2019). Waller-Bridge applies the social interactions of her colleagues and their indifference to her gender as meaning for her career identity. She is also enacting a career environment in which she is not defined or constrained by her gender based on the cues she has extracted from her social interactions.

One of Waller-Bridge's recent projects includes the upcoming James Bond film, *No Time to Die* (2020). In response to her involvement with the film, Waller-Bridge's gender was brought to the forefront of public attention in relation to what it would mean for the future of the franchise (Dean, 2019; White, 2019). For reference, the Bond franchise is historically linked to critiques regarding its voyeuristic portrayals of women and misogyny (Neuendorf et al., 2009). Therefore, much of the public interpreted the news of Waller-Bridge's involvement to mean a feminist shift for the franchise, and some believed it meant a future female lead as Bond (Enck, 2019; Marine, 2019; Reilly, 2019). However, in response to this public attention, Waller-Bridge continuously minimizes her influence over the upcoming film.

Due to the amount of public attention caused by her work on the film, Waller-Bridge repeatedly explains that she was hired on the Bond franchise to polish the script, not to write the film. Waller-Bridge assigns the meaning of this public attention to the fact that she is a woman.

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As a result, she publicly minimizes her contributions to the screenplay and continuously credits other screenwriters who worked on the film as well as director Cary Joji Fukunaga. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, O'Connell (2019) describes, "[Waller-Bridge]'s cognizant and somewhat suspicious of the mild frenzy around her contribution," followed by a quote by Waller-Bridge in which she explains, "A lot has been made of me coming on board because I'm a woman, and that's wonderful. But also I can't take credit for the movie that was written. It's Cary's movie" (O'Connell, 2019, para. 30). Therefore, Waller-Bridge once again acknowledges the media attention surrounding her gender but assigns irrelevant meaning to what her gender actually means in terms of her career. Additionally, she attempts to diffuse gendered speculation surrounding her work on the franchise by minimizing her own contributions.

In an article for *The Guardian* titled *Phoebe Waller-Bridge: I Was Not Hired for Bond Because of My Gender,* Waller-Bridge describes the attention she received for joining the Bond project as manipulated by the press (Brown, 2019). She argues, "That's only really the press that have made that a thing, in terms of me being a woman, you can see it is a button pressing thing" (Brown, 2019, para. 5). Waller-Bridge continues to construct her career identity here as a screenwriter, not female screenwriter, through insisting gender only plays a role in press coverage. Due to her gender generating a lot of speculation over her influence on Bond, she repeatedly minimizes her work on *No Time to Die* (2020) as "a couple bits and pieces of my own" or "little spices," downplaying her influence on the script overall (Clarke, 2019, para. 4). Therefore, in order to publicly minimize her influence on Bond because she's a woman, Waller-Bridge reframes the narrative surrounding her work on the film. For further example, in an interview with *Deadline*, Waller-Bridge claims, "I mean, the script was there. It's already there. I think it's unfair to say that I'm writing the script" (Blyth, 2019, para. 6).

Notably, current James Bond actor, Daniel Craig, has also shared his thoughts over the publicity generated about Waller-Bridge's gender in relation to *Bond.* According to various sources, it was actually Craig's recommendation to *Bond* producer Barbara Broccoli that led to Waller-Bridge's hiring on *No Time to Die* (2020). During an interview with Craig for *The Sunday Times*, the actor expresses irreverence over the press attention regarding Waller-Bridge's gender (Bradley, 2019; Dean, 2019). After interviewer Jonathan Dean implies that Waller-Bridge was hired onto the film in order to make the franchise look more representative, Craig fires back, "Look, we're having a conversation about Phoebe's gender here, which is fucking ridiculous. She's a great writer. Why shouldn't we get Phoebe onto *Bond*? That's the answer to that" (Bradley, 2019, para. 2). Therefore, both Waller-Bridge and Craig publicly express the irrelevance of Waller-Bridge's gender in relation to her work and enact a career environment in which gender is insignificant.

Waller-Bridge further enacts this environment on the franchise as she discusses how she was hired onto the film. Waller-Bridge describes the process as casual and irrelevant to her being a woman. In addition, she also explains that there were no expectations for her to work exclusively on the film's female characters (Brown, 2019). Waller-Bridge explains, "The reality was I got a call from Barbara and Daniel saying, 'We like your work, can you come in and help us?' There wasn't ever really a conversation about can you come in and help us with 'the ladies'" (Brown, 2019, para. 6). As Waller-Bridge continues to assign irrelevant meaning to her gender in relation to her career, she also exerts control over her work as not only for female characters.

Waller-Bridge publicly frames her career narrative into one in which she expresses self-efficacy and control over how she writes. As she constructs her identity as a screenwriter, not

female screenwriter, she also expresses that her work is not limited to only writing complex female characters. As previously stated, she explains, "I want to afford male characters the same vulnerability that women are afforded" (Blyth, 2019, para. 21). Here Waller-Bridge expresses her goal for writing both male and female characters and therefore exerts control over what she writes. Through this statement, she expands her career identity as a screenwriter who is not limited to only writing women. She discusses her goal for writing male characters as resistant to the gender stereotypes that men also face, "It's the pressure of uber-masculinity, and feeling that you have to be the satisfier, the annihilator, the sexy man who can do it at the drop of the hat" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 26). Similar to the discussions of her female characters, Waller-Bridge shares she wants her male characters also to feel truthful and be portrayed in ways not commonly seen on screen. For example, Waller-Bridge shares that she has fun writing male characters as needy boyfriends, as these characteristics are often only portrayed in female characters. She says, "It's refreshing to see them, isn't it? You see it so many times with women" (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 25). Therefore, Waller-Bridge discusses her writing of male characters as similar to her writing of female characters. As a result, she continues to create her career identity as an identity undefined by gender through the ways in which she makes sense of her career.

However, despite her own identity construction, Waller-Bridge continues to face public interest regarding her work in relation to her gender. In a profession that consistently involves publicity, Waller-Bridge's work as a woman in the industry continues to garner regular press coverage. Ultimately, Waller-Bridge extracts such press coverage regarding her gender as significant cues in her career sensemaking, which implies that she recognizes these cues as significant to her career. However, Waller-Bridge reframes press narratives surrounding her gender in her own career narratives. In an interview with *Deadline*, Waller-Bridge concludes,

"I'm more inspired listening to female artists talk about their art than female artists talking about what it's like being a female artist" (Blyth, 2019, para. 18).

"I hear a lot about it, but I don't experience it firsthand."

Frequently, Waller-Bridge publicly acknowledges issues surrounding women and society, discusses her own feminist ideology, and exemplifies her awareness of persistent gendered inequality in the world today (Hattenstone, 2018). However, in discussions of her own career in the male-dominated screenwriting industry, Waller-Bridge remains relatively nonchalant. Consistently, Waller-Bridge denies facing obstacles in her career due to being a woman. This is significant because it contradicts existing research that reports increased obstacles and discrimination experienced by women working in male-dominated industries. Through her career sensemaking, Waller-Bridge extracts cues from her own experiences and social interactions that lead her to enact a career environment in which she experiences no gender discrimination. Due to its contradictory nature compared to previous research, this brings into question the factor of sensemaking that is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995).

As discussed in the literature, factors that are found to contribute to sustained gender inequality in the screenwriting industry include short-term contracting, post hoc evaluation of quality of work based on unmeasurable features, work assignments controlled by a small group of industry brokers, reputation based on current fashionable genres, and an overwhelming majority of male decision-makers (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Conor, 2014). In addition to these elements that disadvantage women in screenwriting, research finds that both men and women in creative industries face high levels of job insecurity compared to non-creative industries (Banks, 2015; Ross, 2009; Taylor & Littleton, 2012). Despite Waller-Bridge's denial of facing gendered obstacles in her career, she does report repeated experiences of anxiety and uncertainty over her

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work. These experiences of anxiety may indicate a relationship between Waller-Bridge's sensemaking and the job insecurity commonly faced by screenwriters, particularly women (Conor, 2014). However, through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge enacts an industry in which she does not face obstacles due to being a woman and exerts control over her work. Ultimately, Waller-Bridge makes sense of her career as unaffected by her gender while simultaneously demonstrating a thorough knowledge of current gendered issues.

To begin, Waller-Bridge's knowledge surrounding many of the obstacles faced by women today is apparent across numerous interviews. Additionally, as previously discussed, much of the inspiration behind Waller-Bridge's work comes from a sense of rage that she felt as a woman in her 20s. In her discussions of rage, Waller-Bridge brings to light several gendered issues in today's society, specifically in regard to the sexual objectification of women on screen. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Waller-Bridge provides a powerful quote that demonstrates some of her knowledge surrounding women's issues:

> I feel rage about casual and systemic sexism. I feel rage at how quickly the double standards could be balanced if men gave women the back-up they need to stop us having to shout into our own vaginas all the time. I feel rage about how many times I've Googled before and afters of chemical peels when I could have been working, when I know I've just been programmed to do that. But mainly I rage at myself for my own ability to let things slide because I'd rather be nice than stand up for myself in an uncomfortable situation. My characters have streaks of fearlessness. I get a rush writing women who don't care what you think. Probably to help me grow into being one. (Hattenstone, 2018, para. 30-31)

Here Waller-Bridge nuances the gendered implications of today's societal standards while also admitting her own feelings of defeat in being complicit to the pressure of these standards. Waller-Bridge expresses that she translates her feelings of being complicit to these issues by creating female characters that are not contained by gendered societal standards. In the narrative she constructs here, she fulfills ambitions for her own fearless womanhood through the creation of female characters in her screenwriting work.

Interestingly, Waller-Bridge's feelings of being complicit to current gendered issues may also relate to her career in screenwriting. When discussing her experience in the male-dominated screenwriting industry, Waller-Bridge remains noticeably nonchalant. In an interview with *GQ*, she describes inherent sexism in the industry as something that's easy to lose consciousness of (Fey, 2019). She shares, "I didn't even feel like it was aggressively sexist in the room when we got scripts like that. I think it was just the status quo. No one really knew, not even the people who are creating it" (Fey, 2019, para. 67). Here Waller-Bridge admits that sexism exists within the industry, however she minimizes the significance of its existence. Further, in an interview with 17percent, Waller-Bridge is asked about gender bias she has experienced in her career, to which she responds, "I hear a lot about it, but I don't experience it firsthand," (Hall, 2014, para. 22). Here Waller-Bridge demonstrates once again that her gender is not something that plays a significant role in her career. Therefore, through her sensemaking, she continues to construct her career identity as an identity undefined by being a woman. Simultaneously, she also avoids any discussion of gendered issues within the screenwriting industry.

Waller-Bridge's claim that she does not face gendered bias in the screenwriting industry significantly contrasts existing research of women in male-dominated industries. Therefore, it is significant to consider the cues she extracts from her experience when she makes sense of her

career. For example, existing research examines the gendered nature of television writer's rooms (Henderson, 2011). However, Waller-Bridge describes a different organization to her work in television. In an interview with *GQ*, she discusses her writing process:

> I have really close collaborators. So Jenny Robins, who's the story producer on *Killing Eve*, and Vicky Jones, who was in the first series of *Fleabag,* I hash everything out with them. I really need to talk things out. God knows, my team knows I need to talk everything out. I can't just dig a hole and go and write. So it's really them, even though it's not an official "room" room. I would love to experience that at some point, when people know how the system works. But there is a kind of chaotic order between me and Harry Bradbeer, the bit with the visual sentences. I do have my little mini room (Fey, 2019, para. 95).

Here Waller-Bridge extracts the collaborative nature of her work on *Fleabag* and *Killing Eve* as significant to her work. Although she expresses a desire to experience a writer's room, she describes her work as less formal. Therefore, Waller-Bridge does not make sense of any gendered disadvantages in her writing processes. Instead, she focuses on the collaborative social interaction between her and her colleagues and represents her writing process as consisting of no conflict. Further, Waller-Bridge often credits her collaboration with *Fleabag* director Harry Bradbeer for significant input to the series. For example, she shares, "The recurring image of Boo on the road that comes up every now and again? That was Harry Bradbeer's idea. When he told me about that image it's when I really kicked into TV world a bit" (Greene, 2017, para. 7). Waller-Bridge expresses a positive working relationship between her and Bradbeer, however before hiring Bradbeer, she describes a less seamless process of finding a director for *Fleabag*.

Malone (2017) provides a thorough description of the hiring process in an interview with Waller-Bridge:

> When Waller-Bridge was hiring directors for the TV adaptation, "we kept meeting all these young bucks who were like" – she begins a macho growl – "Hey, yeah, we'll put a camera up her ass. It's a sexy world she lives in." She switches to a higher-pitched, proper voice, an imitation of herself, "'No, no, no, it's very clean, very stylized.' I felt very panicky." She eventually hired "a bungling gent," married and in his 50s, who said to her, "Oh for God's sake, darling, I *am* Fleabag." (para. 15)

In this narrative, Waller-Bridge expresses an exertion of control over her work on *Fleabag*. She chose not to allow potential directors to change the vision of her show from what she intended. Therefore, her career sensemaking exemplifies an expression of self-efficacy, including her collaboration with *Fleabag*'s male director. Ultimately, Waller-Bridge associates no issues over the control of her screenwriting work as a woman. However, interestingly, Waller-Bridge repeatedly expresses experiencing feelings of ineptitude or anxiety in relation to her writing. Additionally, she describes increased feelings of pressure as an actor performing her own writing. In an interview with *Variety*, Waller-Bridge shares:

> There's so much cool shit that comes out of writing and performing your own character. But at the same time, it's a weird amount of pressure that you put on yourself, that isn't there when you're doing somebody else's writing. All you have to do is serve the truth of that character. *I will say the exact words that you have written down and I will say them with the most truth that I can possibly muster.* But when it's your own, I'm like: *That line sounded shit, I hate that line it makes no sense. I can't get my mouth around it, I want to rewrite it now!* That can happen, and it's just a constant self-doubt and loathing that as a

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writer you carry in your mouth all the time when you're acting it out (Saraiya, 2017, para. 20-21)

Here Waller-Bridge describes feeling less pressure when she's not the writer of a role she's acting. She attributes being a writer as a constant self-doubt and loathing, and describes the experience as consistently second guessing her writing. Additionally, Waller-Bridge shares that she feels anxiety over her writing because people are relying on her to deliver a good script. "You feel like if this sinks then I'm the ship that it sinks in," Waller-Bridge explains to The Hollywood Reporter, "*Fuck they're all so good and if I screw this up…* it's my friendship, it's my trust" (Saraiya, 2017, para. 22).

Waller-Bridge relates the feelings of anxiety over others relying on her to her belief that many of the actors who joined *Fleabag* agreed to be a part of her show because they were her friends (Saraiya, 2017). This demonstrates that Waller-Bridge doesn't attribute actors such as Olivia Colman joining *Fleabag* to her talent as a screenwriter. Waller-Bridge describes, "And I was like *if I stitch her up or stitch any of these actors up with bad writing I will never forgive myself,"* then continues, "And they're all turning up and then we'll rehearse a scene and then I'll be like [flustered] *I'm really sorry that, you guys were really great but I have to go and rewrite that scene right this second"* (Saraiya, 2017, para. 23). Through her sensemaking, Waller-Bridge consistently extracts experiences of self-doubt in her writing and feelings of panic. She also attributes part of *Fleabag*'s success to the willingness of her friends to do her a favor, and not her personal talent as a screenwriter. Through retrospective sensemaking, Waller-Bridge still assigns meaning to the uncertainty she felt about her writing with her broader career. Ultimately, this illustrates a broader anxiety over her screenwriting career which could relate to the insecurity of

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employment within the industry, especially for women. For further example, in a separate interview with *IndieWire*, Waller-Bridge explains:

> There were so many times where the scene was written and I'd turn up on set and even before anyone said anything I could just feel the script in the place and go, 'This is wrong. I have to rewrite it all.' (Greene, 2017, para. 12)

Through these examples of Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking, Waller-Bridge assigns significant meaning to experiences in which she felt significant self-doubt over her writing. Perhaps these experiences of anxiety are related to the increased job insecurity faced by screenwriters, especially women, which could provide explanation for the pressure Waller-Bridge felt in relation to delivering quality work. However, these examples of career sensemaking may reflect Mahar et al.'s (2011) utility of narrative construction in sensemaking that locates the self in time, makes meaning from interactions, and incorporates change into a unified self throughout the process of becoming. Through Waller-Bridge's reflections of these experiences of doubt, she reflects on her career during the time and space of the early production of *Fleabag*, considers her interactions and the way she felt, and incorporates these experiences into her continuously evolving sense of self within her career.

Beyond these experiences of uncertainty, Waller-Bridge persists that her career in screenwriting consists of little conflict, especially in regard to her being a woman. Waller-Bridge continues her dismissal of current topics surrounding gender and career in terms of her own experience. For example, when asked about equal pay in an interview with *Vogue*, Waller-Bridge responds, "My agents are very hot on that, and then they know that I feel really strongly about it. So, yeah, all those conversations happened" (Collins, 2019, para. 32). Although she acknowledges here that she feels strongly about equal pay, she rejects going into detail on the

topic as it pertains to her own career. Consequently, there appears to be a continuous deflection by Waller-Bridge in any discussions regarding her experience as a woman working in the screenwriting industry. As she deflects these conversations in the press, she continues to distance her construction of career identity away from her gender.

In conclusion, despite Waller-Bridge's knowledge about contemporary gendered issues, she denies experiencing obstacles in her screenwriting career due to being a woman. At most, she expresses anxiety over producing quality work, however she never explicitly relates these feelings to being a woman in the industry. Instead, Waller-Bridge continuously minimizes her own experiences in relation to common gendered issues, such as gender bias, equal pay, and job security. Consequently, Waller-Bridge enacts a career environment that is not influenced by her gender, as well as exerts her self-efficacy over her career in the narratives she constructs throughout her sensemaking. As a result, Waller-Bridge constructs her career identity as irrelevant to her being a woman and exclusively reflective of her work throughout her career.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Phoebe Waller-Bridge's public sensemaking is most clearly evident when she responds to topics that are brought up to her repeatedly during interviews. These topics include public labels of her show as feminist, interpretations of her work as sexually explicit, media attention surrounding her gender, and gender bias in Hollywood. In response to these topics, Waller-Bridge constructs a career narrative and identity through her sensemaking. In response to public labels of her show as a feminist show, she denies that her work is feminist despite her own feminist ideology. In response to interpretations of her show as sexually explicit, Waller-Bridge reframes the narrative surrounding her work toward authenticity rather than explicitness. When asked about her gender in interviews, Waller-Bridge denies that her gender has anything to do with her work. Lastly, when asked about gender bias in Hollywood, Waller-Bridge denies ever experiencing gender bias firsthand. As a result, through her sensemaking Waller-Bridge constructs a career identity that is not defined by her being a woman, as well as enacts a career environment in which she is not disadvantaged by her gender.

Additionally, Waller-Bridge frames her career narrative surrounding the limitations she felt during her early career as an actor and her feelings of rage that started in her 20s. Waller-Bridge expresses that her goal in writing is to create authentic, complex characters as a result of the princess roles and two-dimensional characters she grew tired of playing in her early acting career. Consequently, she expresses fulfillment in her career from providing authentic roles for women today. Interestingly, here Waller-Bridge does discuss the impact gender had on her early career and how it impacts her work today. However, when asked about her gender in relation to her current career in the screenwriting industry, she denies facing any gendered disadvantage or bias.

In relation to existing literature surrounding women in male-dominated, creative industries Waller-Bridge's sensemaking provides surprising results. From existing literature, one would expect experiences of gender bias to be salient throughout Waller-Bridge's sensemaking within a male-dominated, creative industry (Banks, 2015; Chens & Moons, 2015; Conor, 2014; Conor, 2015; Conor et al., 2015; Inzlicht et al., 2008; London et al., 2012; Pinel, 2004). For example, existing research finds that women not only experience discrimination, but also expect discrimination when entering male-dominated fields (Inzlicht et al., 2008; London et al., 2012; Pinel, 2004). However, Waller-Bridge consistently denies ever facing disadvantages because of her gender in her screenwriting career and never expresses any expectation of facing gender bias in the future. Additionally, research also finds that many women believe they are unable to obtain interpersonal power within male-dominated domains and therefore avoid such environments (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007). However, through narrative construction Waller-Bridge consistently exerts control over her work in screenwriting, suggesting interpersonal power within the industry. For example, Waller-Bridge exerts control in her narrative of hiring *Fleabag* director Harry Bradbeer over other male directors who wanted to change the vision of her show (Malone, 2017). Therefore, through her sensemaking Waller-Bridge breaks norms from existing research of women in male-dominated fields through her denial of gender bias and exertion of control through interpersonal power.

Research also shows that women in male-dominated fields are more likely to experience stereotype threat (Latu et al., 2013). Although Waller-Bridge denies experiencing gendered discrimination from her colleagues, she does repeatedly extract stereotypical interpretations of her work in the media caused by being a woman. For example, "I do think especially with female writers who write honestly about women and their experiences, I feel like it's like, oh that's a

feminist show. You know?" (The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). Therefore, she expresses that interpretations of her work as feminist are a direct result of her being a woman, insinuating a stereotype for women in screenwriting. Research finds that stereotype threat can lead to decreased quality of performance from women (Schmader et al., 2008), and can lead to women's negative career sensemaking and disidentification with the profession (Woodcock et al., 2012). Waller-Bridge discusses precarious implications of feminist labels for women in screenwriting. For instance, she explains that feminist political agendas attached to a writer's work are "why all women in the media sink eventually, because if they aren't sinking, they've been drowned!" (Malone, 2017, para. 2). However, instead of disidentifying with the screenwriting profession due to gendered stereotype threat, Waller-Bridge constructs a career identity through her sensemaking that disidentifies herself with being a woman.

Throughout her career sensemaking, Waller-Bridge continuously constructs a career identity in which her gender is insignificant. Waller-Bridge openly detests questions that regard her being a woman (Vogue, 2019), minimizes her contribution to the film *No Time to Die* (2020) due to press circulation regarding her as a woman on the James Bond franchise (O'Connell, 2019), and explains that she would rather talk about art than what it is like being a female artist (Blyth, 2019). In order to enact a career environment in which she is not disadvantaged by being a woman, Waller-Bridge disassociates her career identity away from her gender. This is likely a direct result of gendered biases that persist in the screenwriting industry today. Especially in regard to the public context of Waller-Bridge's sensemaking, her disassociation with gender suggests potential professional repercussions for discussions of gender within the screenwriting industry. Therefore, as Waller-Bridge publicly constructs a career identity separate from her gender, it is likely she is avoiding disadvantages in the industry associated with being a woman.

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These findings reaffirm Conor et al.'s (2015) argument that the screenwriting industry is masculine and fraternalist.

However, Waller-Bridge remains consistent in her public sensemaking that she has not faced gender bias within her screenwriting career. Through her sensemaking, she enacts a career environment in which she does not face disadvantages due to being a woman and often extracts cues from social interactions in order to construct this career narrative. For example, "My collaborators and colleagues don't refer to me as a female writer, like, 'Can you send in your latest female draft of that, please?" (Blyth, 2019, para. 19). Waller-Bridge often blames any associations of her career regarding her gender to the press and suggests that in actuality her work is unaffected by her gender (Brown, 2019). In regard to gender bias specifically, Waller-Bridge states, "I hear a lot about it, but I've never experienced it firsthand" (Hall, 2014, para. 22). Although Waller-Bridge enacts this environment through her sensemaking, it is likely that these constructions of her career dismiss actual gendered issues within the industry that persist.

One characteristic of sensemaking to consider is that it is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). In other words, Waller-Bridge can enact a career environment through her sensemaking in which she is not affected by her gender, however in actuality gender bias in her career may exist. It is possible that male-dominance is so deeply ingrained in the screenwriting industry that it is rarely noticed due to the industry's prevalent masculine hegemony. This relates to Waller-Bridge's quote from her interview with *GQ* in which she talks about common sexist themes found in Hollywood scripts. In the interview she shares, "I didn't even feel like it was aggressively sexist in the room when we got scripts like that. I think it was just the status quo. No one really knew, not even the people who are creating it" (Fey, 2019, para. 67). It is possible that masculine hegemony within the industry has caused women in

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screenwriting such as Waller-Bridge to internalize their own oppression. Therefore, Waller-Bridge's denial of experiencing gender bias in her career could be a direct result of this hegemony. Additionally, existing research suggests that inequalities within creative industries often persist under the disguise of industry trade pains (Ball & Bell, 2013; Conor et al., 2015). As a result, women may be further internalizing their oppression in the screenwriting industry because of this hegemony as well as neoliberal characteristics of creative industries that disguise gendered inequalities as industry trade pains.

Further, it is important to consider why Waller-Bridge is extracting certain cues from her career for sensemaking and not others. This is significant because if Waller-Bridge extracted different cues, she would subsequently make sense of her career differently. For instance, during career sensemaking one might expect an accomplished screenwriter such as Waller-Bridge to extract events from her career regarding her success, such as her collection of Emmy wins (Television Academy, n.d.). However, Waller-Bridge repeatedly extracts cues regarding public interpretations of her work rather than personal career accolades. These findings suggest that Waller-Bridge applies significant meaning to public interpretations of her work defined by her gender and feminism. Consequently, Waller-Bridge consistently rejects associations of her work with gender and feminism. This suggests that Waller-Bridge experiences a negative relationship with her work being defined by her gender and feminist ideology that is more significant within her sensemaking than her personal career success. Interestingly, associations of Waller-Bridge's work as feminist in the press are often complimentary, however she continues to deny feminist ties to her work as misattributions. From Waller-Bridge's repeated denial of these associations, one can infer significant negative repercussions for having work defined by gender or feminism in screenwriting, implying persistent gendered bias within the industry.

Additionally, it is possible that Waller-Bridge's definitions of her own shows such as *Fleabag* as not feminist are also driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). Waller-Bridge rationalizes that she did not intend to make *Fleabag* a feminist show, therefore public interpretations of *Fleabag* as feminist are wrong. However, she does admit that feminism is one strand of what her character in *Fleabag* struggles with and that she wants her show to speak on her views on feminism (Fey, 2019; The Hollywood Reporter, 2017). Therefore, through her sensemaking she denies feminist labels to her show as false, however simultaneously admits to her own feminist goals within the work. As a result, it is likely that her own definition of *Fleabag* through career sensemaking is driven more by plausibility rather than accuracy.

These findings make significant theoretical contributions to existing research regarding the depth of masculine hegemony within male-dominated, creative industries as well as potential coping mechanisms of women within these industries. Waller-Bridge's repeated disidentification with her gender in her public sensemaking implies a potential protective mechanism for women within these fields to construct their identities apart from being a woman. As Waller-Bridge constructs a career identity undefined by gender, she simultaneously avoids any professional repercussions for having her work associated with feminism or being a woman. These findings suggest motivation for women in male-dominated, creative industries to construct career identities apart from their gender, especially when engaging in public sensemaking. Ultimately, this implies continued gender bias within such industries. These findings reveal that in order to survive in the screenwriting industry, Waller-Bridge disidentifies herself from being a woman as a protective mechanism against gendered repercussions.

Through this disidentification, Waller-Bridge also enacts a career environment in which she is not disadvantaged by being a woman. However, this environment is driven by plausibility

rather than accuracy through sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Waller-Bridge's denial of gender bias within her career suggests an internalization of oppression caused by hegemonic norms within male-dominated, creative industries. In the wake of #MeToo, these findings suggest a shift in the screenwriting industry in which successful women in screenwriting are ignoring hegemonic norms that result in oppression. As a result, screenwriters may believe that gender equality has been achieved, meanwhile inequalities within the profession are able to persist.

Practical implications for these findings suggest a need for screenwriters to bring attention to gendered biases in the industry that result in successful women in screenwriting such as Waller-Bridge disidentifying their career identities from their gender. Similar to other creative industries, neoliberalism helps to disguise gendered inequalities within the screenwriting industry as individual challenges and industry trade pains (Allen, 2013; Ball & Bell, 2013; Conor, 2015). Therefore, existing views of such industries need to be reevaluated by both researchers and those entering such professions. Further, women entering the screenwriting industry should avoid engaging in protective mechanisms such as disidentification from their gender. Although this disidentification is used by Waller-Bridge as a way to avoid professional repercussions, it is important that women in screenwriting avoid patterns of disidentification from gender in order to fight unjust biases that persist within the screenwriting industry. Additionally, women in screenwriting should avoid an enactment of a career environment in which gender is insignificant and instead remain cognizant of hegemonic norms that result in gendered oppression within screenwriting. This is crucial in order to begin to alter the gendered climate of the industry for future women screenwriters.

Limitations to this study include the influence screenwriting's production culture may have on Waller-Bridge's public sensemaking, specifically regarding the nature of the industry's

networking and hiring. It is important to consider the economic imperative underlying public interviews in the screenwriting industry. In Hollywood, publicity is a crucial element to career, therefore Waller-Bridge has an imperative to perform well in these environments. Additionally, part of a screenwriter's labor consists of these interviews, as interviews are often tied into the nature of networking and hiring within the industry. When Waller-Bridge conducts interviews in the trade press, as well as public press such as *Vogue* and *GQ*, her audience includes potential employers and industry executives. Further, within a male-dominated industry, there may be an economic imperative for Waller-Bridge to not discuss gender in such environments. As Waller-Bridge constructs her career identity apart from being a woman, she may be simultaneously avoiding economic repercussions from allowing gender to define her career. Therefore, Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking in interviews may be significantly impacted by the economic factors tied to screenwriting's production culture.

Therefore, Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking in public interviews may differ significantly from her private sensemaking in her personal life. Her career sensemaking may differ significantly in these environments due to both economic imperatives to perform well in these interviews as well as her own self-presentation during interviews. Therefore, future research should look into non-public career sensemaking of women in male-dominated industries in order to avoid such influences.

In conclusion, Waller-Bridge's identity construction apart from her gender in public career sensemaking suggests a persistence of gender bias within the screenwriting industry. Additionally, as Waller-Bridge enacts a career environment in which her gender is insignificant, she consequently ignores hegemonic norms that continue to oppress women in screenwriting. Ultimately, Waller-Bridge's career sensemaking signifies a shift in the screenwriting industry in

which women are experiencing more success however ignoring persistent gendered issues in the industry today, rendering such injustices invisible. Historically, the screenwriting industry has seen a variety of changes since the early prominence of women screenwriters in the silent film era. Although the growth of screenwriting after the silent film era into the studio era led to the masculinization of the screenwriting industry we see today, women such as Waller-Bridge have made massive leaps for women in the industry both behind the screen and on screen. Therefore, it is important that women remain cognizant of gendered inequalities that persist within screenwriting's new era. This is crucial in order to promote the growth of women in male-dominated, creative industries so that one day women will not fear the repercussions of being defined by being a woman in screenwriting.

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