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Title: Mum's The Word: Public testimonials and gendered experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the film and television industries

Abstract

This article explores parents' published accounts of their (gendered) experiences of reconciling caring responsibilities with work in the film and television industries, paying particular attention to mothers. It is based on detailed analysis of the testimonials of parents who work in the sector, produced for and published on the website of UK activist organisation, Raising Films. As Wing-Fai et al (2015) argue, the new labouring subjectivities produced and demanded by media industries' working cultures are antithetical to those with caring responsibilities, in turn creating a climate in which the challenges of care are silenced. Recent reports and initiatives have sought to challenge this silencing, employing quantitative methodologies to identify the number of parents working in film and television that are affected by duties of care (Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016). What has been less attended to is the way in which these negotiations make cultural workers *feel*, and more specifically, the gendered dimensions of these inequalities. This article addresses this gap by offering a detailed analysis of the testimonials of mothers published on the website. I argue that women's testimonials contribute to challenging the silencing around issues of care in the sector. While at times women reinforce new labouring subjectivities that privilege self-regulation, they simultaneously critique the punishing nature of neoliberal working cultures, commonly reflecting on the industries' demand to suppress the challenges of care. These critiques are rarely framed as resistance to explicit *gender* inequalities. However, I argue that the testimonials' presentation – published collectively and alongside one another on the site – allow for recurring experiential patterns to emerge that makes it difficult to see these accounts as an individual woman's problem and, importantly, highlights the specific gendered dimensions of the emotional violence of neoliberal labouring practices.

Key Words

Film and Television Industries; Gender Inequalities; Care; Neoliberalism; Production Cultures; Parenting

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Introduction

This article explores parents' published accounts of their (gendered) experiences of reconciling caring responsibilities with work in the film and television industries, paying particular attention to mothers. Caring responsibilities are often identified as a key factor in the persistence of gendered inequalities in the film and television industries due to the inherent incompatibilities of childcare with the sectors' intense working cultures (Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016; Wing-Fai et al, 2015). While this article argues that caring responsibilities are not essentially gendered, women remain disproportionately affected (Creative Scotland, 2016). Despite this recognition, feminist media scholars have noted that the challenges of care – and wider gender inequalities – are rendered unspeakable in industries that are characterised by high levels of competition and precarity, and in a wider postfeminist and neoliberal culture (Gill, 2014; Wing-Fai et al, 2015). As Leung Wing-Fai et al assert, the costs of the unspeakable nature of care 'are borne heavily – often without support – by women, who often feel they must not talk about these issues' (2015: 61). This silencing is exacerbated by the new labouring subjectivities demanded by the film and television industries which promote resilience, independence and self-regulation, in turn, displacing structural critique onto the individual worker (Gill, 2014).

In the current climate, this silencing is increasingly being challenged. In relation to care specifically, recent industry reports and initiatives have sought to highlight the precise barriers that parents and carers who work in the industries face (Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016). Notably, this research has tended to focus on the *practical* challenges of care, employing quantitative methodologies to explore the numbers and percentages of people who view caring responsibilities as impacting negatively on their career. While these macro approaches are important in terms of identifying the scale of the issue, what has been less explored is the (gendered) experiential and lived consequences of these practical challenges for parents and carers. This article addresses this gap, by providing a detailed micro analysis of the testimonials of parents who work in the film and television industries that have been produced for and published on the website of UK activist organisation, Raising Films. Raising Films was established in 2015 to explore the challenges of reconciling work in the film and television industries with caring responsibilities[i]. As part of their activism, Raising Films solicit, invite and publish testimonials from film and television practitioners on their past and present experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the sector on their website[ii]. As these testimonials are overwhelmingly written by women, I focus predominantly on mothers' accounts.

The public testimonials – written in practitioners' own words – contribute to the wider challenging of silencing around issues of care in the film and television industries. Further, they enable a crucial insight into the emotional and gendered dimensions of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the sector, offering an alternative to the dominant focus on practical challenges of care in more recent reports. Individuals' subjective experiences of working in the wider cultural industries, and the links of these experiences to their well-being, have begun to be documented (see McRobbie, 2002; Ross, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and

Baker, 2011; Lee, 2018). More recently, significant academic research has emerged that explores the specificities of women's experiences of working in the film industry, including the AHRC funded Calling the Shots project at the University of Southampton (Cobb and Williams, et al, 2014 – 2018). This article explores a specific dimension of women's experiences, namely the *gendered impact of caring responsibilities* on the way in which women who work in the film and television industries *feel*. A widespread discourse in relation to exploring women's subjective experiences of working in the sector relates to assumptions around secondary socialisation and the role model question ('you can't be what you can't see'). This discourse is underpinned by a view that greater visibility of women working in the industries will lead to more women seeing this career path as viable. However, less attention has been paid to the specific ways in which women who work, or have worked, in the industries are prepared to talk about their lived experiences in public. I am not interested here in verifying the 'truth' behind individuals' testimonials – while I have no reason to doubt that contributors are offering honest accounts, I am aware that the public nature of these testimonials may impact on what is/is not said. Rather this article is concerned with identifying common, and potentially gendered, themes in women's discussions of their experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the sector, paying particular attention to their articulation of feelings.

Literature Review

Traditionally, the creative industries have been viewed as providing creative workers with high levels of fulfilment and self-realisation. However, recent scholarship complicates previously celebratory accounts of the rewards of creative labour, by highlighting the punishing and intense nature of work in these fields (Banks, 2006; Ross, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2016). While recognising that many creative workers find immense pleasure from their work, this scholarship focuses on more negative aspects of creative labour, such as long hours, erratic work patterns, low (sometimes no) pay, financial insecurity and an eradication of work/life boundaries. The film and television industries, like many wider cultural industries, are increasingly dominated by freelance workers and small independent companies, with the majority of workers on precarious, project-based, short term contracts with few benefits and little workplace protection.

Rosalind Gill asserts that, 'inequalities are neither accidental nor incidental but are produced by the labouring conditions themselves' (2014: 514). In recent years, several scholars have explored the relationship between neoliberal work cultures and the stark inequalities that characterise the cultural industries (Oakley and O'Brien, 2016; O'Brien, 2015; Gill, 2014; Wing-Fai et al, 2015). In relation to gender inequalities specifically, Directors UK' (2016) 'Cut Out of the Picture' report found that only 13.6% of working UK film directors over the past decade were women and that UK films were over six times more likely to be directed by a man, statistics that show little improvement. These inequalities are not related to a lack of interest by women in working in the media industries, with graduates from film and media studies courses closely balanced in terms of gender (2016: 8). And, yet, on entering the industry, gender inequalities flourish and women's career progression stalls. The situation is getting worse. In the past 6 years, there has been a fall in the number of films with female directors supported by UK based funding bodies – in 2008, 32.9% of films supported by funders were directed by a woman, while in 2014 this had dropped to 17% (2016: 36). These

findings echo those of the Celluloid Ceiling report in the US, which found that in 2018 women comprised just 20% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and cinematographers working in the top 250 grossing films, a 2% increase from 2017 but broadly comparable with the findings for 2001 (Lauzen, 2019: 1). The industry is also heavily segregated by sex, with women disproportionately found in 'feminine' areas, such as make-up and hair styling and costume design (Directors UK, 2016: 27). While women fare better in television, they remain under-represented in senior roles, and again segregation by sex is found in the genres of television programmes directed by women (Skillset, 2010).

There is little academic research that focuses exclusively on the impact of caring responsibilities on these gendered disparities (see Dent, 2017; Wing-Fai et al, 2015 and Wreyford, 2018 for notable exceptions), however, issues of care are raised repeatedly in wider scholarship on gender inequalities in the industries. Natalie Wreyford (2015) observes in her analysis of the recruitment practices of screenwriters that the growing shift towards informality in these industries further disadvantages those with caring responsibilities who are not able to do the necessary amount of networking needed to access job opportunities. Additionally, the increasing move towards freelance contracts intersects powerfully with women's opportunities to remain working in the industry, offering no maternity pay or parental rights. Women are seen to fare better in permanent employment (Morgan and Nelligan, 2015).

Despite the lack of creative labour scholarship specifically on the issue of care, in 2016, several industry reports and initiatives emerged that explored the impact of caring responsibilities on gendered inequalities in the film and television industries in more depth (Directors UK, 2016; Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016). While a consideration of care is not central to the Directors UK report on gendered inequalities amongst UK film directors, it draws attention to the 'un-family-friendly' nature of the 'permanent short termism' of the industry's working cultures (2016: 9). Creative Scotland's (2016) 'Screen Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion' report, based on a survey of over 500 practitioners working in the Scottish screen sector and looking at various barriers to access, includes a section on gender and parental responsibilities. It found that 39% of women viewed gender as a barrier to access the industries and, moreover, that women were 75% more likely than men to cite caring responsibilities as a specific barrier, despite more men identifying as parents across the survey as a whole (2016: 18-19). In the open questions, respondents cited systematic barriers to balancing career progression with parental responsibility, including limited parental leave and rights; the need to work long, irregular (sometimes unpaid) hours; the expectation to travel; costs and availability of childcare. Raising Films' (2016) 'Making It Possible' report is the most focused report to date on the impact of caring responsibilities on work in the UK film and television industries. This report, based on a survey of 640 parents and carers working in film and television, found that 78% of respondents were female and 21% were male, suggesting, unsurprisingly, that caring responsibilities are a particularly salient issue for women (2016: 4). An earlier Skillset report found that women in the film and television industries were leaving the industry due to difficulties reconciling caring responsibilities with careers in the sector (Skillset, 2010: 2).

Despite this gendered exodus and recent industry initiatives to explore the issue in more depth, several feminist scholars have argued that there is a silencing around the challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work, connected to the new labouring

subjectivities demanded by these industries (Gill, 2014; Jones and Pringle, 2015; Wing-Fai et al, 2015). Anne O'Brien argues that the self-regulation demanded by media workers means that there is a tendency for them to see subordination at work as 'an intrinsic feature of their creative labor' (2015: 260). This is not to deny these workers agency in terms of their understanding of the power of capital, but rather to argue that 'the disciplining power of reputation and the social dimension of working relationships at an individual level far outweigh any capacity of individual workers to address their own precarity, as well as any gender bias they endure' (O'Brien, 2015: 260). Further, the shift towards informal recruitment practices and hiring workers as contractors rather than employees has resulted in a lack of avenues through which to speak out against these inequalities and little to no protection against gender discrimination (Morgan and Nelligan, 2015: 67).

Scholars have explored the affective implications of neoliberal working cultures, arguing that the individualism and self-reliance demanded by these industries produce feelings of personal failure and self-blame, rather than structural critique (McRobbie, 2016). Gill (2014) argues that this silencing is exacerbated by a postfeminist context in which feminist battles against sexism have supposedly been won and are no longer relevant. In her interviews with women cultural workers, she detected a lack the critical vocabulary to speak out against gender inequalities, rendering them 'unspeakable' (2014: 511). Deborah Jones and Judith K. Pringle (2015) similarly found a lack of critical language for and willingness to talk about feminism or gender inequalities in their interviews with below-the-line workers in the New Zealand film industry, while in her interviews with key decision makers in the Irish Film Board, Susan Liddy (2016) observed that gender discrimination and inequalities were evaded or denied.

At time of writing, in the wake of allegations against Harvey Weinstein and the rise of movements such as #metoo and #timesup, gender inequalities in the film and television industries are increasingly becoming 'speakable'. However, even in this era of a heightened visibility of feminism, Gill convincingly maintains that postfeminism continues to exert a 'powerful regulatory force' on women in contemporary life (2017: 610). She draws on Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) influential notion of 'distinctive feeling rules' to examine the way in which postfeminist culture attempts to 'shape what and how women are enabled to feel and how their emotional states should be presented', outlawing certain emotions – anger, complaint, insecurity – while privileging others in a way that diminishes resistance to structural gendered inequalities (2017: 618). In the following section, I explore women's public testimonials of the challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work in the film and television industries in more depth. In doing so, I move beyond the quantitative and practical focus of recent reports, instead exploring both the emotional dimensions of how gendered inequalities related to caring responsibilities are experienced, but also how these emotions and feelings are articulated subjectively by women working in the sector.

Raising Films' Testimonials

There are currently 60 testimonials written by film and television practitioners and published on the Raising Films website, spanning an almost three-year period and varying in length between 300 – 1500 words. The first is written on 4th May 2015 and the most recent is dated 19th March 2018. The authors encompass a range of roles across the film and television

industries, including screenwriters, directors, producers, actors, editors, cinematographers, focus pullers and directors of photography. The majority are freelance (although this is not always explicitly stated) and based in the UK, although some are US based and others have worked transnationally. Of the 60 testimonials, 55 have caring responsibilities for children. (The remaining five testimonials include three written by childfree practitioners on their experiences of being children of creative parents, and two written from the perspective of family-friendly production companies. I do not explore these here). Of the 55 parents' testimonials, there are six by fathers, three that are framed as mother/father collaborations and a further testimonial written as a collaboration between two mothers that work together. As the overwhelming majority of testimonials are written by mothers – 46 in total – I focus predominantly on womens' accounts here, although I briefly touch upon some gendered differences that emerge in comparison with the fathers' accounts.

Significantly, the architecture of the site, with the testimonials presented alongside one another, encourages the user to see the testimonials collectively rather than in isolation. Throughout the writing of this article, the presentation of the testimonials on the site has undergone significant changes. At time of writing, the testimonials are accessed via a tab labelled 'Stories' on the website's front page. They are presented in a patchwork formation alongside other examples of engagement with parents and carers who work in the film and TV industries, including interviews and case studies. Each testimonial is clearly marked through a header, and typically accompanied by a name, date and an image of the author – usually at work and/or with their child or wider family. The user can then click on a specific testimonial to read in full.

There are no specific guidelines on tone or content when authors are writing testimonials, with an acknowledgement that all accounts are valid as long as they are honest. However, some potential questions to address are offered, including the way in which caring responsibilities have shaped or changed creative practices over time and thoughts on how to make the industry a more sustainable place to work for parents and carers. The implicit address is to other practitioners, with the aim of establishing a supportive community and offering advice. Contributors are given the option of having a short bio included, as well as requesting that their submissions are anonymised (notably, these requests are very rare). The testimonials are copy edited for clarity, and contributors have final approval and the opportunity to request small amendments after publication. However, as Raising Films view their site as a platform rather than a publication, this editing is extremely minimal.[iii]

Given the pervasive culture of silencing around the challenges of care in the industry, it is striking that almost all of the authors identify themselves by name and the majority illustrate their accounts with photos. These testimonials are published on a public website and are easily searchable, however, as I am using quotes selectively and framing them in ways the women may not have intended, I have not included names here. There are only two anonymous testimonials, which are particularly candid in their critique of the industry. My analysis involved categorising the testimonials in terms of date; sex of author; occupation; work status (freelance, self-employed, permanent); parenting status (mother/father/child; co-parent/single; primary caregiver or not); race and the country in which they were currently working. Not all of these details were readily available, but because the majority of these public testimonials are attached the named people with a public presence online, I was able to check some additional details through a quick online search. This enabled me to build a

picture of the dominant patterns in who were creating these testimonies, which were predominantly UK-based, white mothers. For this research, I have focused on gender and parental status, but further intersectional research needs to be undertaken to explore the significance of other identities. It is interesting to consider categories that were more difficult to identify. For example, all six of the fathers' testimonials explicitly referred to a partner and noted which was the primary caregiver, whereas relationship and caregiver status was much harder to identify in the mothers' testimonials. Only four women explicitly identified as single mothers, but half of the women's testimonials made no mention of a partner at all, suggesting women are more likely to view childcare as their personal responsibility.

Writing for a public, activist site, the women often directly state their intention to challenge the industries' silencing around care by sharing their own experiences. Over a quarter of the testimonials mention this silencing explicitly through discussions of their previous fears of disclosing pregnancy or care arrangements in case they ceased to get work. While feminist scholars have argued that this silencing potentially produces a climate in which these challenges are internalised, in contrast the women's testimonials frequently voice their frustrations with the industries' intensive working cultures and the barriers these cultures create for parents. And yet, the testimonials are highly ambivalent. These frustrations co-exist with public declarations of love for creative work and a reinforcement of certain labouring subjectivities. Complaint is frequently privileged over explicit calls for structural change. Further, the loose remit of the testimonials – to offer advice and support to other parents and carers in the industry – creates a context in which women offset their industry critiques with humour and warmth to enhance their relatability (Kanai, 2017). It is also notable that the *gendered* nature of the inequalities faced by women is rarely explicitly discussed. However, I argue that the collective presentation of the testimonials – published next to one another – foregrounds the structural nature of these gendered inequalities even if the individual content does not. In turn, the inclusion of a small number of testimonials from fathers allows for certain gendered differences to begin to emerge in terms of the emotional implications of negotiating caring responsibilities with creative work. Women are much more likely to discuss the impact of reconciling childcare with creative work on their self-identity than men, suggesting that the emotional violence of neoliberal working cultures is highly gendered.

Negotiating 'passionate work' and childcare

It is both motherhood and a love of working in the film and television industries that binds the community together and this dual mother/creative worker identity is a key source of ambivalence throughout. One of the most immediate findings is the way in which the women articulate a deep love of their jobs many in the opening couple of sentences. A screenwriter begins her testimonial by stating, 'I have wanted to be a Writer (capital W, always) my entire life'. Similarly, an assistant director who left the sector after having children, starts by saying, 'Having a career in the media was the only job I ever wanted to do'. Declarations of love for their jobs resonates with Angela McRobbie's identification of cultural work as 'passionate work', often described by workers as corresponding with childhood dreams (2016: 79). Related to this passion is a frequent mention of 'luck', indicating that many individuals see themselves as privileged to be able to work in the creative sector. Creative labour scholarship has revealed that a deep love for cultural work is not unique to female workers. However, notably none of the fathers mention this love, suggesting a specific tension exists between *mother*hood and work in the testimonials.

Despite public declarations of love for creative work, the advent of caring responsibilities acts as a catalyst for critical reflection on the unsustainability of the industries' labouring practices. Several women reflect back on a time (pre-childcare) when they tolerated the challenges of work, but with the benefit of hindsight and a palpable frustration with the incompatibilities of the industries' working cultures with family life. One woman notes that:

> Having spent the last 13 years working hard and gaining experience in an industry that I have always found to be very rewarding, I am now increasingly frustrated that the same industry is so unsupportive of parents.

Similarly, another comments that:

> I find it so frustrating that there isn't a balance to have this career and be a Mum. What if I were to call one morning and say I couldn't come in as one of my boys wasn't well? I can't imagine being employed again and word would soon get out that I was unreliable and uncommitted.

While having children may have prompted women to speak out, many women describe recognising the incompatibility between the industries' working conditions and caring responsibilities even *before* having children. Recollections of anxiety and fear are prominent across the women's testimonials, particularly in relation to what would happen to their careers if they got pregnant, highlighting the difficulty of getting back into industries that are so dependent on maintaining informal networks. A cinematographer notes that, 'People were positive about my pregnancy but there was a vague undercurrent of uncertainty – was I in danger of indefinitely dropping off the face of the planet and kissing goodbye to any meaningful career?' The questioning nature here speaks to a culture in which the challenges of care are frequently internalised, and in which few mothers at senior levels are visible. The way in which fear is commonly articulated by the women - and notably not by any of the men - also suggests that childcare is perceived, from the outset, as *their* responsibility. It is striking that the one testimonial written by a female, childfree actor shares more in common with mothers' testimonials in articulating similar fears of 'parenthood as loom[ing] as a frightening, destabilising prospect', than with the testimonials of fathers who are not primary caregivers. Similar fears are identified by Gill (2014) in her anonymised interviews with women cultural workers, yet in contrast to Gill's notion of 'unspeakability', it is striking that across the testimonials, women recall these anxieties *publicly*.

Challenging the denial of care and self-care

One of the most common themes recurring across the women's testimonials is denial, with women openly critiquing the way in which the sector's 'always on' cultures previously required them to suppress many aspects of care. This challenging of denial manifests in many different ways, including recollections of denial of pregnancies and postnatal needs, public denial of having children and denial of self-care. Women recall being 'in denial' about their pregnancies, for example, working right through them often with a highly detrimental impact to their well-being. One woman's testimonial offers an apt example:

> I was terrified, literally terrified about how motherhood would affect my productivity. How sad is that? I have wanted to be a mum since forever but I knew that I would have to get all my ducks lined up first so that I would have the machinery in place to get back to being me once baby was out. Pregnancy wasn't just a chance to stop and

enjoy the experience, to enjoy my body, it was a chance to write a play, to finalise treatments for the sitcom, that BBC drama.

In a similar vein, another recounts how a fear of diminishing future work prospects prompted her to physically hide her pregnancy:

> When I was pregnant I felt that I had to keep my bump hidden for as long as possible. Somehow I thought that having a baby would mean I would no longer be considered for any jobs. I often wonder if there is a bias against hiring a woman if she is a mum. Is there an unconscious warning bell on the part of the decision maker? In one of my first meetings back, a producer (a woman) looked at my CV and suggested the last couple of years showed a 'reluctance to work'. I was stunned. Is this really how maternity leave is perceived?

Childbirth is included in recollections of denial. A producer speaks of being in labour and 'still emailing suppliers, sorting things out. My brain had this surprising capacity to just ignore what was really going on'. She relates this experience to a pragmatic understanding of the impossibility of stopping production on a personal creative venture with no budget, again pointing to the punishing labouring practices of the industry where low (sometimes no) pay makes it impossible to schedule breaks in advance. Women also recount suppressing their postnatal needs. A writer describes a 'low point' of 'hiding in a TV exec's office, breast-pumping during a break in a story meeting'. Another recalls asking her aunt to sit with her 2-week-old baby outside in the car while she delivered a pitch, to avoid the executives finding out how recently she'd had a baby. The language here – 'hiding' and fearing being 'f[ound] out' – again foregrounds the way in which the challenges of care are continually displaced onto individual women.

The women reveal that the industries' expectation of denial extends to mentions of family life too. Discussing a colleague enquiring after her pregnancy, one woman reveals:

> Though he is genuinely interested and patiently waits for my response, I suddenly realise how guarded I feel about discussing the incredible new human being in my life. Why? It should be natural to volunteer this information, so why don't I feel free to gush? My daughter appears to have fallen in with the unmentionables: pregnancy, children and childcare, motherhood, a healthy romantic relationship…in fact any passion or commitment that could be perceived as preceding your passion and commitment to the job at hand.

The sector's 'always on' culture is similarly identified by a screenwriter as fuelling denial. She argues, 'there are never ANY concessions that you might have family commitments when you get notes on a Friday afternoon for a Monday morning delivery'. She sadly concludes that the industry expects workers to 'deny [their] children and [their] life. Be a robot'.

With the advent of digital technology, the boundaries between the private home and the public workplace are eroding even further. One woman recalls that, 'with my son I would panic and rush to the other end of the house if he cried while I was on the phone. I felt like one squeal from him would end my career'. Another woman recounts how:

> Work crept into my baby's bath and bedtime routine. Singing Frère Jacques while negotiating a budget change is very tricky. On one job, my mornings began with a stream of impatient e-mails on my phone from a client in New York. Not ideal when you're changing that morning nappy.

While some feminist scholars have pointed to the way in which this slippage may usefully allow women flexible working patterns, it also means that the need to deny care does not just apply to a physical place of work, but becomes much more diffuse.

A particularly lengthy testimonial reflects on this demand to display no emotion at work in the film and television industries:

> For the most part women are told if they want to be working in the film industry they must be really strong and not lose their tempers or cry at work. They need to do everything they can to prove wrong the cliched idea that women are too emotional and cannot separate their feelings from their day jobs.

This requirement of the industries to deny aspects of care recalls Hochschild's work on the way in which the management of emotion by institutional work cultures is inherently gendered: women are consistently more likely to suppress or deny their emotions than men (1983/2012: 173). The very fact that women are deemed to be more emotional than men is often used as a way to invalidate their emotions (Hochschild, 1983/2012: 173). Ultimately, she argues that the cost of this management of feeling is that it 'affects the degree to which we listen to feeling and sometimes our very capacity to feel' (1983/2012: 21). Speaking with the benefit of hindsight, the women's testimonials reflect on the highly negative implications of not listening to their feelings for their own self-care. One woman recalls her refusal to accept help after going back to work when her daughter was two weeks old for fear of people thinking that she 'was diverting attention or draining resources from the film'. As she describes, this resulted in her hiding her exhaustion and pain. Similarly, another recalls returning to work when her baby was very young:

> I was living the dream. I had it all…Except for my sanity. Because my baby didn't sleep and after a while I was shattered beyond comprehension and it was slowly dawning on me that my life actually had changed somewhat, in fact rather profoundly, and that this hard-core juggling act was utterly unsustainable and sooner or later, if I didn't stop for a moment, I'd drop the ball somewhere – or I'd drop the baby.

The expectation of the industries to suppress all aspects of care is further articulated by many women as creating a profound identity crisis, due to their intimate connection between self and work. This identity split is best illustrated by the distinction that several of the women make between their working lives pre-children and their working lives after, and their frustration at the way in which the industry's working cultures make it highly difficult to reconcile the two. As one recalls:

> so much of this is about me trying to juggle, feeling guilty, losing myself, unsure if I wanted to be a good mum or have a successful career, and nearly always feeling I was failing at both…My career had provided both my sense of identity and my self-worth and now I had neither. [on having children] I had absolutely no idea who I was any more. The only thing I was sure of was that I was a failure.

This rupture in identity is sometimes then articulated as leading to a decrease in self-confidence and self-worth. As a screenwriter notes, 'When I became a mother, I still had the purpose, arguably a more important one as the life-support system for another person. However, I struggled hugely with my new identity and my dwindling sense of self-worth and confidence'. Self-doubt is a common theme across the testimonials and operates in a vicious circle in relation to identity crises. As the women recognise, after having children they have less dedicated time and headspace to write, which fuels their lack of self-confidence, resulting in them working less, which feeds their loss of identity further. Many stress that they *need* to work – to do the job they love – to survive on a psychological level.

Mums make better workers

While the women's testimonials commonly critique the industries' demands to deny all aspects of care, at the same time, denial of self-care is also advocated as a *solution* by some of the women to reconciling creative work with caring responsibilities. A recurring piece of advice offered by women is to use time as effectively as possible in order to fit in more work. A producer director recalls that she used her pregnancy 'as a natural deadline to get a short film shot'. In a bullet pointed list of other pieces of advice for balancing creative work with childcare, she further describes using all available downtime as efficiently as possible – working while her children were napping; taking a notepad to the park to jot down ideas while her children played and letting her 'imagination wander while dozing, [m]using on a creative problem at the same time, using a different part of the brain (I hoped so anyway!)' Similarly, another admits, 'Granted, I have denied myself many naps I could definitely have done with, but for me, her sleep time is Mummy's writing time.' Notably, these solutions, while realistic and accessible, do not disrupt the 'always on' culture of the industries that many women also critique in their testimonials, leaving the onus for change firmly on individual women.

Indeed, many women are keen in the testimonials to dispel the dominant assumption that having children diminishes women's passion for creative work– a myth that is often used to explain away women's underrepresentation in the industries. Several of the women stress that caring responsibilities are not incompatible with the new labouring subjectivities demanded by neoliberal working cultures, instead reinforcing these subjectivities by highlighting the ways in which having children has made them better workers. This is exemplified by the testimonial below, which highlights the symbiotic relationship between parenthood and creative work:

> In this creative, grafting, collaborative industry we learn stamina, we learn will-power, we learn which battles are worth fighting, how to negotiate when you have nothing, and we learn how to really, actively listen. These tools are gold for parenthood – and parenthood reinforces them so you come back to work stronger.

Further, the public nature of the posts may also play a role in dictating how women frame motherhood and creative work. One woman's testimonial is explicitly addressed to industry:

> To producers, broadcasters, funding bodies, agencies and clients – raising a child makes you an amazing multi-tasker, a high-end communicator, an incredible project

manager, a fabulous collaborator and a unique storyteller, able to access deep emotions. Sounds like a director you might want to hire.

Many others articulate newly developed traits that fit neatly with constructions of the neoliberal model worker, such as flexibility, adaptability, heightened efficiency, increased stamina and enhanced negotiation skills. One argues that 'adaptability is certainly one of the skills you have to hone [after having children] – indispensable in creating a documentary film'. Other women comment on becoming better at saying no and being assertive and efficient after having children. As one woman notes, 'my new 'Tiger Mom' attitude works wonders. If I want something, I'm sure as hell gonna go for it now.' There are softer workplace benefits attributed to having children too, such as an ability to connect with colleagues and film subjects in a more intimate manner.

This reinforcement of new labouring subjectivities by cultural workers is in keeping with many of the findings of creative labour scholarship, which argues that these subjectivities – marked by vigilance, self-regulation and autonomy – operate to displace structural inequalities onto the individual (Gill, 2014; Lee, 2012). There is an overlap here with wider scholarship on neoliberal parenting cultures. In her study of parenting discourses under New Labour, Val Gillies found that mothers bear the brunt of initiatives designed to promote 'good parenting', where individual (women's) responsibility is stressed as the solution to addressing broader social problems of disadvantage (2005: 841). Despite the heightened visibility of a popular feminism (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2017) in more recent years, Gill argues that this individualisation remains, with an emphasis on self-confidence increasingly privileged over calls for structural change (2017: 618).

'Sorry this is all very 'woe-is-me''

Ultimately, the testimonials are highly ambivalent and highlight the emotional messiness of women speaking publicly about the challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work. On the one hand, they reveal critical awareness of the punishing nature of the industries' working cultures and the implications of these cultures for women's emotional well-beings. Notably, feelings deemed 'outlawed' by postfeminist culture, such as complaint and insecurity, are commonly and publicly expressed. Arguably, in the particular context of sharing experiences on an activist website, there is less of a need to adhere to hegemonic feeling rules. In this space, women often challenge the requirement of the industry to suppress certain emotions around care and the emotional labour of care itself. And yet, on the other hand, while feeling rules are rejected, they can still be seen to play a role in how the women negotiate their articulations of the challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work. For example, while a few testimonials advocate changes to the industries' working cultures or wider social structures around care, calling for shorter working hours, more job shares and an increase in state funded childcare, it is much more common for women to frame their experiences as complaint rather than as explicit calls for structural change. Further, rarely do the testimonials express anger, suggesting that other emotions – frustration in particular – are easier to voice.

Humour and warmth are also common in the tone of testimonials, as a way in which women establish a sense of community with other anonymous women (Kanai, 2017: 1). Women often joke about the daily trials of caring for young children - recounting stories of explosive nappies; awkward breastfeeding moments; endless pureeing of obscure vegetables – in a way

that arguably creates a sense of relatable community with other women. The below testimonial offers an apt example:

> It is 5am or thereabouts. I am typing this article one-handed, whilst feeding my 6 month old baby girl Melody some pureed parsnips that I cooked myself earlier this morning (not organic, but give me some credit, I did check them for mud). I am wearing sweatpants that I slept in and my hair is not so much an updo as an updon't. I need a wee. Desperately.

This testimonial's light tone resonates with Akane Kanai's analysis of the 'affective negotiations' of young women using Tumblr, in which she finds that women typically use humour to render their frustrations- in this context, with post feminist regulation – palatable by turning them into 'funny, bite sized moments' (2017: 1). Notably, though, humour in the testimonials doesn't resolve the central tension at their heart. Through deeper analysis, what becomes apparent is the unresolvable – and highly gendered – emotional violence inflicted by neoliberal working cultures, cultures that demand women deny all aspects of care/self-care with highly detrimental implications for their mental and physical well-beings. This unresolvable tension is hinted at in the final sentences of some of the testimonials, which strive and struggle to be upbeat. For example, one testimonial ends by saying: 'I'm not sure what path my documentary career will take next, but I know that I want to keep making films, and be actively involved in caring for my son. I hope I'll be able to find a satisfactory way of doing both…' Another ends hers by asking, 'it can only get easier, right? Here's hoping'.

It is also significant that while frustration is directed at the industries' working cultures, rarely are these cultures connected explicitly to *gender* inequalities. Only two of the women's testimonials explicitly mention feminism. An actor and screenwriter notes that 'feminism…has not slowed the 'motherhood' hamster wheel', arguing that men need to father more and women less. A screenwriter talks of 'an embarrassingly late feminist awakening', placing her experiences of workplace gender inequalities in the context of other high profile news stories about the eradication of women's reproductive rights and women being sacked for refusing to wear heels at work. Three other testimonials explicitly mention sexism and misogyny, two in the context of being asked inappropriate questions about family situations in interviews and another in relation to misogynistic representations of women and girls on screen. Only a handful of other testimonials explicitly note that women are expected to bear the brunt of caring responsibilities in contrast to men. For example, a single mother comments on gendered social expectations around childcare, arguing that, 'If a man says "I'm going off for six weeks to do a project in the States," no-one would question his ability as a father; if a woman said it, her relationship with her children would be questioned.'

'Would I think in these terms if I was a bloke?'

However, while gendered inequalities may not be explicitly addressed in the content of the majority of the accounts, the presentation of the testimonials – displayed collectively and alongside those of men on the Raising Films site– allows for gendered dimensions to begin to emerge. There are only six testimonials written exclusively by fathers – two identify as primary caregivers, one other talks about having an 'equal partnership' with his wife as both work full-time and the remaining three refer to their wives as the primary caregivers. This small number in itself suggests, unsurprisingly, that care is a more salient issue for women.

Due to the limited testimonials from men, it is difficult to make any definitive comparisons between how men and women articulate their lived experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with creative work. My next research project will explore these gendered differences further, by interviewing both fathers and mothers who work in the film and television industries about their experiences. However, it is possible to start to identify some gendered distinctions.

None of the men feel the need to mention their love of their work or comment on how fatherhood has made them better workers, suggesting less of a tension between fatherhood and creative labour even for the primary caregivers. All also explicitly mention their partners in their testimonials, often thanking them for their support, suggesting that they don't see care as their singular responsibility. There are distinctions between primary caregivers and non-primary caregivers. Notably, the three fathers who are not primary caregivers all speak of working on location in the roles of director, producer and production manager, suggesting that childcare is a particularly salient issue for parents in these specific roles. All three talk of the all-consuming nature of the 'always on' working cultures of the industries, framing this less in terms of their own identity (as the women's testimonials tend to do) and more in terms of the well-being of their family relationships. Unsurprisingly, the primary caregivers highlight the practical challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work, such as the inflexibility of nursery provision and the difficulty scheduling regular childcare with an erratic income. The testimonial of one father, who works in film production, is particularly interesting for calling attention to the gendered dimensions of inequalities around care in the film and television industries. He notes that, despite having an egalitarian relationship with his wife who also works full-time, 'as a man and as someone working in film production, there is an outward perception that the responsibility for care of our daughter should fall on her mother'. He recounts having a stressful negotiation over being able to attend his partner's antenatal scan and only being permitted to take one day off for the birth of his daughter.

The way in which Raising Films solicit and publish testimonials from both men and women could be seen to divert attention from the specific gendered dimensions of inequalities around childcare. And yet, if gender inequalities are often unspeakable in the industries (as found in interviews with creative workers conducted by feminist media scholars), then perhaps placing men's and women's accounts alongside one another actually creates a more conducive space for women to speak freely about the challenges they have encountered, divorced from a specifically gendered framework and framed more neutrally as the challenges of *parenting*. The inclusion of testimonials from fathers – albeit in small numbers with only 2 written by primary caregivers – also plays a minor role in challenging the essentialist notion that women should be responsible for childcare. At the same time, this inclusion begins to point to ways in which the emotional violence of neoliberal working cultures may be particularly gendered, as illustrated by the different experiences of women and men, where women are much more likely to articulate this violence on a personal level, bound up with their self-identity.

Concluding thoughts

At the heart of this article is a call for the importance of thinking about the gendered dimensions of well-being in relation to contemporary working cultures in the film and television industries and beyond. Without a radical overhaul of the working conditions in the

film and TV industries – and creative industries more widely – it is difficult to see how we can make strides towards a more inclusive and egalitarian sector. Recent creative labour scholarship has interrogated the important role that trade unions may play in addressing these issues (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; McRobbie, 2016). However, the intensely individualistic working conditions of the contemporary film and television industries, where individuals are required and expected to bear the brunt of any risk and where workplaces are no longer fixed entities, mitigate against collective action in the workplace (McRobbie, 2016: 20). These cultures encourage an internalisation of the challenges of work, and 'self-blame where social structures are increasingly illegible or opaque serves the interests of the new capitalism well, ensuring the absence of social critique' (McRobbie, 2016: 23). McRobbie continues that these contemporary working cultures can operate to reinforce traditional gender values, whereby women are forced to return to rigid gender roles by being excluded from the workplace due to caring responsibilities (2016: 30).

What is striking about the testimonials is the way in which, rather than internalising challenges, women frequently identify and complain about the incompatibility of the sector's working conditions with childcare as well as voicing their insecurities about the future of their creative careers. However, while a small number of women directly call for changes to the sector's working cultures – such as shorter hours or greater understanding of caring responsibilities – the majority frame their experiences more as complaint than as explicit calls for structural change. Further, very few of the women's testimonials explicitly mention feminism or gender inequalities. This finding resonates with wider feminist creative labour scholarship, which notes the tendency for individual creative workers to evade discussions of gender inequalities (Gill, 2014; Liddy, 2016; Jones and Pringle, 2015). In turn, the women's testimonials reveal a deep attachment to care, foregrounding the way in which childcare is seen as *their* responsibility. Few testimonials explicitly challenge the way in which care is essentialised. Ultimately, the ambivalence found within the testimonials points to the emotional messiness of women speaking publicly about the challenges of reconciling caring responsibilities with creative work.

However, while individual testimonials rarely explicitly evoke feminism in their content, their *collective presentation* on the Raising Films site allows for a structural picture to emerge of emotional labour that lessens the pressure on individual women. In this way, we can read the testimonials in part as a kind of consciousness-raising, akin to that of second-wave feminist practices of the 1970s, in which the personal is rendered political. There is power in giving voice to these experiences which typically remain hidden and silenced, making it harder to ignore the problem or to argue that gender inequalities are not an issue in these fields. As one woman notes in her testimonial, by not talking about these issues, there is a danger that 'we fuel the problems, the inflexibility'. Similarly, by only focusing on the practical aspects of care, rather than the lived experiences and emotional dimensions of care, we are only able to devise partial solutions.

The testimonials play only one small part of vital activism into addressing (gendered) inequalities around care in the film and television workforce. And yet, despite their relatively small number, they can be seen to play a role in the process of challenging individualisation and moving towards a recognition of the structural nature of gender inequalities around care. By placing individual testimonials in a collective space – testimonials that have unique inflections but in which recurring concerns and anxieties appear again and again – it becomes

difficult to see the challenges of care as a personal, woman's problem. While surveys and official industry initiatives have shown the scale of the problem in more recent years, identifying many of the practical challenges that parents and carers face, the testimonials offer a different perspective, underscoring the *emotional* implications of neoliberal working cultures on mothers in particular. Gender inequalities may remain largely unspeakable in this context, but they also become increasingly difficult to ignore.

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i More information on Raising Films can be found here: https://www.raisingfilms.com/

ii I am familiar with their activism having worked with them before, however I have not been involved in any way with the production or publication of the testimonials, which are publicly available.

iii Personal email correspondence with Sophie Mayer, independent scholar and one of Raising Films' founders. Date: 30.08.17.