

## **The gendered impact of caring responsibilities on parents' experiences of working in the film and television**

Caring responsibilities are often cited as a key reason for continuing gendered inequalities across the film and television sector (Wreyford, 2018; Wing-Fai et al, 2015; Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016). However, there is little detailed analysis of precisely *how* caring responsibilities impact upon parents' experiences of work in this field. Further, in a context in which women are disproportionately affected by caring responsibilities, it is not surprising that existing studies on the issue of care have tended to focus exclusively on women and motherhood. This female centricity risks replicating the essentialist notion that care is or should be a women's responsibility and obscures the fact that many men working in the sector are also parents (Gill, 2014). By drawing on one-to-one interviews with both men and women who work in Scottish film and television, this article will explore the specific gendered dimensions of the ways in which men and women discuss the impact of childcare on their experiences of work.

Keywords: production cultures; parenting; gender inequalities; creative labour

### **Introduction**

This article explores the gendered impact of caring responsibilities on parents' experiences of working in the Scottish film and television industries. In recent years, there has been growing research around gendered work in the wider media sector (Wing-Fai et al, 2015; Wreyford, 2018; O'Brien, 2019). Across this research, childcare responsibilities – typically equated with motherhood – are often identified as a key explanation for women's under-representation in the sector, particularly aged 35+ (Skillset, 2010: 2). However, feminist media scholars have also been keen to stress that assumptions about childcare providing a “rational” reason for gender inequalities obscures the fact that many fathers continue to thrive in the sector, and that child-free women remain under-represented in senior positions (Gill, 2014; Wreyford, 2018). While the reasons for gender disparities across the sector certainly extend beyond childcare, nevertheless, caring responsibilities remain vital to address. The small body of feminist scholarship on the impact of parenting on experiences of work in the screen

sector highlights the inherent incompatibilities between the industries' working cultures and caring responsibilities (Wing-Fai et al, 2015; Wreyford, 2018). This scholarship also illustrates how gendered perceptions of women as "inevitable mothers" have a significant impact upon *all* women's opportunities and experiences of working in the sector, regardless of whether they have children (Wreyford, 2018: 112). This work focuses on women and motherhood when addressing parenting, which is unsurprising given that the evidence base reveals women to be disproportionately affected by caring responsibilities compared to men. In Creative Scotland's (2016) Screen Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion survey, women were 75% more likely than men to cite caring responsibilities as a barrier to their work in the screen sector. This statistic is despite more men identifying as parents across the survey overall, presumably because many women with caring responsibilities had already left the industries. However, the dearth of equivalent research into the impact of caring responsibilities on fathers' experiences of work in the sector risks reinforcing essentialist associations of women with childcare, and further makes it difficult to say anything wider about gender relations and inequalities.

This article seeks to address this imbalance by drawing on the findings of interviews with both mothers and fathers who work, or have worked, in Scottish film and television. As much of the scholarship on gender inequalities in the sector has, unsurprisingly, focused on London where UK media production is dominated, the significance of geography to gendered experiences of work in the sector has received little attention. However, Scotland also has sizeable, city-based film and television industries. The largest city, Glasgow, is home to two broadcasters, BBC Scotland and Scottish Television (STV), as well as several independent production companies, and this is where the majority of interviews took place. Although there is a growing push towards decentralising UK media production, evidenced by Channel 4's location of a Creative Hub in Glasgow and the recent launch of a dedicated BBC Scotland channel, the aforementioned Creative Scotland survey found that geography was the second most commonly perceived barrier after gender for Scottish screen workers (2016: 32). Indeed, many of the issues identified in wider research as being particularly problematic for parents working in the industries, such as the need to travel and the emphasis on reputation, are arguably exacerbated in the Scottish context due to the smaller size of the sector, the high reliance on word-of-mouth recruitment strategies, and its geographical distance from London (Creative Scotland, 2016).

This article recognises that women typically face more significant challenges than men in terms of negotiating childcare with work. However, a comparative analysis of interviews with both mothers and fathers enables a fuller understanding of the specific gendered nature of discourses around these negotiations. Moreover, the qualitative approach of this research offers an alternative to recent quantitative industry reports and initiatives that have attempted to capture the numbers of parents who work in film and television, and identify the practical challenges posed by childcare (Raising Films, 2016; Creative Scotland, 2016). This data collection is vital, however, a qualitative approach allows for a more in-depth perspective on the different, and highly ambivalent, ways in which men and women describe the impact of childcare on their experiences of work in the sector.

### **Gender Inequalities and Caring Responsibilities**

There is a growing body of feminist media scholarship on gender inequalities in the film and television industries, which examines the relationship between the sector's working practices and women's under-representation, especially in senior and decision-making positions and "masculine" roles and genres (Banks and Milestone, 2011; Gill, 2014; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015; O'Brien, 2019; Wing-Fai et al, 2015; Wreyford, 2018). The deregulation and casualisation of the sector and, in turn, the informality of its hiring practices, have been identified as particularly problematic for women entering the industries or trying to develop their careers (O'Brien, 2014; Wreyford, 2018). The lack of formal avenues for workers to report experiences of gender discrimination, coupled with competitive neoliberal and postfeminist working cultures, has rendered these inequalities both "unspeakable" and "unmanageable" (Gill, 2014; Wing-Fai et al, 2015). In turn, gendered stereotypes and perceptions of skills continue to play a significant role in restricting women's career opportunities (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015; O'Brien, 2014, 2019).

Broader scholarship on gender inequalities often identifies caring responsibilities as a key – but not the only – reason for women's under-representation across the sector (Banks and Milestone, 2011; O'Brien, 2014; Wing-Fai et al, 2015; Wreyford, 2018). In particular, inflexible working cultures, often characterised by an expectation to work long hours and to be constantly available, are viewed as incompatible with childcare (O'Brien, 2014). Several industry reports and initiatives

highlight the negative impact of childcare on parents' career opportunities and retention (Creative Scotland, 2016; Raising Films, 2016). 79% of respondents to Raising Films' (2016) 'Making it possible' survey into parents and carers working in UK film and television viewed caring responsibilities as negatively impacting on their work, with women much more likely to face this impact than men. A report by Skillset highlighted the lack of women aged 35+ working in UK television, concluding that "it has been impossible to avoid the hypothesis that women have been leaving the industry because of difficulty reconciling managing a career in the creative industries with raising a family" (2010: 2). This report found that only 23% of women working in television have dependent children living with them, compared to 35% of men (2010: 5). A recent internal review into women's experiences of working for the BBC revealed that almost a third of women had left the organisation following their last period of maternity leave (2018: 5).

Despite the increasing attention to care in these reports and wider academic scholarship, there is little work that exclusively focuses on this issue (Banks and Milestone, 2011; Gill, 2014; O'Brien, 2014; Dent, 2019). Partly this lack is because of an awareness of the way in which mainstream understandings of gender inequalities use normative associations of women with childbearing and childcare to "rationalise" the sector's disparities, framing them either as a result of women's individual choices or as a need for the industry to adopt more "family-friendly" policies (Gill, 2014: 510). Feminist scholars often advocate moving beyond a focus on childcare as the primary reason for the sector's gender imbalance in order to counter these normative explanations and expose other important avenues of enquiry (Gill, 2014; Taylor, 2011). As Rosalind Gill observes, in focusing on motherhood as the primary reason for women's under-representation in the industries, the feminist scholar also risks perpetuating essentialist views that women are, and should be, responsible for childcare as well as overlooking the fact that many fathers continue to progress in the sector and that child-free women remain under-represented in senior positions (2014: 511).

Unsurprisingly, when feminist media scholars have focused specifically on parenting, it has typically been in relation to women and motherhood. In her study of uneven gendered and classed values attributed to mothers and fathers in the wider creative media industries, Tamsyn Dent (2019) exclusively draws on interviews with women. Leung Wing-Fai et al (2015) draw on interviews with women and men, but their attention to parenting privileges women's responses, arguably because both their

male and female participants frequently equated childcare with women. In her research into gender inequalities amongst screenwriters, Natalie Wreyford (2018) also interviewed women and men, yet her chapter is entitled “The impact of *Motherhood* on Screenwriters” (my emphasis). While the majority of the men she interviewed lived with children, she found that it was far more common for women to discuss how they navigated the demands of childcare. Conversely, most of her male participants were enabled to work by partners that did the childcare (2018: 126).

There is a dearth of research into the impact of fatherhood on men’s experiences of work in the creative sector, which this article seeks to address (see Marianne Cooper’s (2000) study of fathers working in Silicon Valley for a notable exception). Wing-Fai et al argue that, “we need to remain attentive to the question of why parenting does not negatively impact on men’s careers in film and television in the way it does on women’s – and guard against this becoming an unquestioned assumption, because it is precisely in the realm of taken-for-grantedness that sexism becomes invisible and naturalized” (2015: 59). This article shares this unease that in only talking about motherhood when exploring the impact of caring responsibilities on experiences of work in the sector, we risk both reinforcing essentialist associations of women with childcare and obscuring wider gender inequalities. Further, the focus on motherhood risks marginalising the small number of men who are primary caregivers, or who share these responsibilities equally with a partner. While recognising that women are disproportionately affected by childcare, this article draws on interviews with both fathers and mothers to illuminate further the gendered dynamics at play, as well as the striking ambivalence, in their discussions of negotiations of work and childcare in the Scottish film and television sector.

### **Methodology**

This article is informed by the findings of semi-structured interviews undertaken from May to December 2018 with a purposive snowball sample of 26 parents – 15 women and 11 men – who work or have previously worked in the Scottish film and television industries. The sample was collated through initial interviews with personal contacts, and through further snowball sampling via these contacts and social media. Some contacts shared project information via work mailing lists, as did Raising Films, an activist group who campaign to raise awareness of the challenges that parents and carers face working in the sector. Recruitment for the project was made easier by my dual

identity as a researcher and parent, enabling me to draw on both existing work and parent networks and use shared experiences of negotiating work and childcare to build a rapport with participants. As a mother, I found it relatively easy to identify with other women, but, equally, as someone whose partner is the primary caregiver for our children, I was also able to identify with several participants – all male – who worked full time and whose partners were primary caregivers.

Identifiable information has been removed, and participants are described by loose job descriptions only. Participants encompassed a range of roles in pre-production, production and post-production, and worked across diverse genres including sports, children's, drama and documentary. The majority of participants worked in television (20 in total), two worked exclusively in film and four worked across both. Ten participants were staff members, and the remaining 16 were freelancers, although some had previously held staff positions before moving to freelance roles. Two of the participants, both women, had permanently left the industries after having children, while a further woman had left temporarily while her children were young. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 56 years old, with the majority in the 35 – 44 year age bracket. All but two of the participants were white, and could be defined as middle class. Three of the participants – all women – were single parents, while the rest were married or in long-term partnerships. The majority of participants reported sharing childcare responsibilities equally with partners (seven of the women and eight of the men). The remaining eight women identified as primary caregivers, while the remaining three men identified their partners as the primary caregivers. Interviews took place at a location of the participant's choice and lasted on average 45 minutes. Several participants chose to be interviewed in their workplace, which was interesting given dominant scholarly arguments around the “unspeakable” nature of care in the industries. On three occasions with both men and women, participants' children were present at the interview.

Notably, women frequently had more to say about the challenges of balancing work with childcare than men. This finding may reflect women's disproportionate societal role as primary caregivers, and may also be partially due to the familiarity that women have “divulging personal details to a virtual stranger” when they first become mothers (Boyle, 2009: 263). As Karen Boyle explains of her interviews with new mothers in “watch with baby” cinema screenings:

There is an official aspect to this (as in encounters with health care and parenting professionals) but there is also a more pleasurable intimacy in

encounters with other mums who do not know each other outside of the baby context but who quickly and routinely strike up personal discussions based on shared experiences of childbirth, sleep deprivation and parenting anxieties (2009: 263).

While few of my participants could be classed as new parents, the interviews with women often had a similar intimacy. Further, the responses of women when contacted about being interviewed frequently stressed the salience of the issue and several female participants initiated contact having seen notifications about the project online. In contrast, it was more difficult to find men willing to be interviewed and comparatively, very few men initiated contact, which again may reflect the common equation of childcare with women. Instead, male participants tended to be drawn either through existing personal networks, or through recommendations from other participants. Nevertheless, these men were, on the whole, willing participants who were invested in the wider topic.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Common themes emerged in men's and women's discussions of the impact of childcare on their experiences of work in film and television. Reflecting broader creative labour scholarship, both men and women were keenly aware of the incompatibility between the industries' working conditions and caring responsibilities, with long hours, an "always on" culture and inflexible work schedules identified as particularly problematic when trying to accommodate childcare. Freelancers described additional challenges due to erratic work patterns, the importance of reputation and irregular finances, resonating with the findings of wider feminist media scholarship. As a result of these working cultures, the majority of participants described complex childcare arrangements, with a third of participants reliant on family members to provide additional childcare. A woman in a staff position whose partner works away from home described organising childcare as "a constant absolute nightmare". Nevertheless, the majority of male and female participants described the Scottish industries as broadly understanding of caring responsibilities, potentially challenging feminist arguments about the unspeakable nature of childcare. This attitude was often attributed to the smaller size of the industries in Scotland, where people generally know one another. Notably, though, this understanding was underpinned by an expectation, largely accepted by participants regardless of whether they were in staff or freelance roles, that parents will handle the

challenges of childcare themselves. A female freelancer commented that, “I don't feel I've ever hid the kids but I've always been a pretty hard worker and I guess that's my way of showing that I was committed. So I haven't hid but I've made it clear that...that my children are my responsibility and that that shouldn't get in the way of my professional life”. However, despite these shared themes, striking differences also emerged in men's and women's discussions, revealing that there are established, and distinctly gendered, discourses that men and women use when talking about their experiences of negotiating childcare with work. These discourses are highly ambivalent, at once reinforcing and challenging gendered socialised expectations around work and childcare.

### *Gendered discourses of work and care*

One of the most striking findings was the different language that men and women used to articulate childcare arrangements, highlighting the way in which childcare remains primarily viewed as a woman's responsibility. The majority of participants described sharing caring responsibilities equally with a partner, but women would overwhelmingly talk in terms of “I” rather than “we” when discussing childcare organisation. A woman in a staff job whose partner works freelance in the industries discussed how she negotiates work with childcare during school holidays: “So what I do is I book either Easter or Summer, depending on what our plans are, into a holiday club. The individual days I cover myself if my husband is not around and then I book my husband for Christmas. I put it in his calendar every year! ((laughs))”. While she described sharing childcare equally with her partner, notably *she* scheduled it in advance. Another woman who had recently left a staff job and also had a partner who worked freelance in the industries noted that, “Up until just over a year ago I used to have childcare in place as if I was a single parent, really”. Men would also commonly discuss women organising childcare. A freelance male, who described sharing childcare equally with his partner, explained, “I basically work in an ad hoc way with weeks of warning. [...] So that actually the most annoying part of my work pattern, is the fact that *she* has to account for me not being there” (my emphasis).

These latter examples may reflect the fact that due to erratic work patterns, it is harder for freelancers to commit to scheduling regular childcare. However, even in relationships where both parents were freelancers, women still disproportionately described organising childcare. Of the women I interviewed, only one, whose partner

also works freelance in the creative industries, explicitly acknowledged this gendered imbalance:

It's very split with us [...] It's probably been more him than anything actually, because I've had more work. But even then- [...] if he gets a job and I'm working, suddenly I have to deal with everything again. Even though we're both working! [...] I'm still the one, even if I'm working and my husband is not working, [...] that will still make sure that the childcare is in place and I do all the mental load that we talk about.

Instead, most female participants seemed surprised when asked if they had discussed how these care arrangements would work with partners, and said no. Women would often then stress how much childcare their partners did, but it was striking how much childcare arrangements were internalised as their responsibility in the language that they used to discuss it. The same was not true for the men I interviewed, who were more likely to joke about their partners being annoyed if they heard them describe sharing caring responsibilities equally. As one male in a staff job noted halfway through the interview, “even though I said earlier [that our childcare arrangements were] 50-50 [...] it has landed more on her, I would say, than on me. She'd probably be here going ‘it was *massively* more on me!’”

It was also striking that across the interviews women typically defined caring responsibilities more broadly than men. While many men described doing drop-offs and pick-ups, bath times and bedtimes, women would also voice concerns about the impact of their working on their children's emotional well-being. Moreover, women frequently referred to additional domestic labour, including cleaning, food shopping and buying presents for children's parties, often framing these discussions in relation to an awareness of wider societal judgements of mothers in particular. None of the men mentioned these tasks. This omission does not necessarily mean that men do not undertake this labour, but it points to differences in the way in which men and women define the remit of caring responsibilities. One female freelancer described going away on shoots, explaining that:

my husband is really, really good, he can totally do it but...I've scheduled....it's not my replacement because it is mainly my husband but [...] me being away from my homelife, there is an actual schedule for that, every day, who's going where, who needs what, who's picking up, what's for dinner, some of it's in the freezer, some of it's arriving in the shopping that I've ordered. I've replaced

myself before I come away [...] So before I've come away on this job, I've done a job!

Wreyford observed a similar tendency for female screenwriters to describe the mental labour of organising family life, which she attributes to broader gendered socialised expectations:

It is difficult for women to escape the role of having primary responsibility for children and family life, even when they are employed. There is practical and emotional work for women to do as they take on the burden of ensuring their children's activities live up to the child's and society's expectations, remembering commitments and continuing to smile as they juggle everything (2018: 122).

While Wreyford is centrally concerned with motherhood, my interviews reveal that men also experience difficulties in escaping gendered expectations. A common discourse emerging in the men's interviews was of the wider impact of intense working cultures on family life. One man in a staff role explained:

the work process means that sometimes you have to work late. [...] Which I don't like, I don't think that's healthy. But again you're sort of feeling it's short term, or there was a Sunday when I wrote scripts while my wife went out with our daughter. I was just like 'I need to write' so I would just write at home and get that done. And you know fine well-, actually those are the bits I do-, not 'resent' but I feel slightly compromised on because I'd much rather go to the park and play with my wife and daughter than sit at home writing a script.

The same man spoke of "feel[ing] bad" about not being able to take his child on holiday that year due to work. Another man in a staff position had changed roles after having children explicitly due to an awareness of the impact that his long working hours and frequent travel had on his time with his children. He explained:

the [new] job was attractive in itself but I was thinking actually, the not needing to go to London so much where the centre of the creative industries are. Not needing to be on the floor at seven in the morning and get back at eight and then still have to do emails and things and basically not seeing my kids. [...] Because I was just sort of missing them, massively, in their early years.

The familiar discourse of men "missing" family life due to work came through in women's accounts too. One woman whose husband works away from home commented, "I *do* feel for my husband because he does miss out". Another woman,

whose husband also works in the industries, had left her job after having children, explaining that her husband's hours meant that "he would definitely be missing bedtime every night. And so the kids really only had me during the week, but I thought that was really important for them to have that kind of stability". While the discourse of "missing out" was more commonly applied by/to men, one woman who described working long hours in the television industry, often facilitated by her husband's flexible hours, also commented, "I do look back and kind of think, you know, I've spent *so* many hours at work, when the kids are wee, and then have you kind of missed out a little bit on certain things because you've been at work?"

The different ways in which men and women described their careers in the industries further reinforced gendered notions of women being primarily responsible for childcare. Women often described anticipating the challenges of negotiating work and caring responsibilities even before having children, due to the lack of visibility of senior women who are mothers working in the industries. Almost half of the female participants reported having either changed roles or turned down promotions to stay in positions involving less travel and shorter hours in order to accommodate childcare. One woman, whose husband also works in the creative industries, recalled:

I stopped doing drama because drama does not work if you have a life, basically! [...] But drama directing, the hours are insane. Like 80 hour weeks, on set, and then [...] as a director you come back and maybe do two or three hours every night. So I did take a conscious decision to stop doing that when I had my son.

Five other women had moved to part time positions, and a further three had left the industries altogether after having children. One woman explained that, "it's basically not really possible to do that work with a baby. Or, I would say, with a nursery-aged child unless you have somebody else at home who is able to fill in all the time. So when my children were very small, [...] I thought my freelance telly career was over". The freelance dimensions of this work were identified as particularly problematic, with irregular working patterns and long hours making it impossible to schedule consistent childcare. Women were also more likely than men to speak of prioritising stability at work, viewing staff jobs as more conducive for balancing work with childcare. It was striking that, excluding single mothers, few women mentioned having had explicit discussions about the possibility of their partners scaling back their careers.

In contrast, men were much more likely to use the term “we” when discussing career decisions, stressing the importance of discussions with their partners. One man, who had recently moved from a staff to a freelance position, commented:

So everything was like-, got to be worked out with [my partner] and if she didn't have this job now that she works at home, I probably wouldn't have gone freelance when I did because I don't think we would have been comfortable with the set up or stability [...] And so far it's working you know, but it comes at a price, it's two people so we've got to work out what's best for her.

Another freelance male similarly explained, “Even when I get jobs now, [...] I'll run it by her as well because we're going to plan our next two weeks of childcare essentially so it's something that's a team effort, between me and [my wife]”. While the emphasis on “team” relationships potentially challenges normative, hierarchical gender relationships, at the same time, both of these examples are reflective of the gendered socialisation of breadwinner/caregiver roles, whereby men are supported by the “safety net” of partners who can share or primarily assume caring responsibilities. In turn, it was more common for men to describe embracing instability in their jobs, with four of the men moving from staff to freelance positions after having children, due to a desire to advance their careers and earn more money. Further illustrating this dynamic, a man in a staff position explained:

The industry, I would say on the whole, is quite accepting of people who have kids. [...] but I think it's partly because they know that on a shoot [...] they can't not be there. [...] But the flip side is, when the shoot is done and you're back in the office, if the person is nipping away early you know it's because they're making up with their partner for the time that during the week they were absolutely covering your ass because you couldn't get there!

Gender neutral language is used here, but very few women mentioned relying on partners in a similar way. As O'Brien explains of the media industries, “women are placed at a distinct disadvantage by a cultural norm of long hours”, where “men's capacity to perform” is “enabled by women having a greater proportion of care responsibilities” (2014: 1210). Men frequently acknowledged the toll that their working hours took on their partners in a way that was absent in the women's interviews, again reinforcing normative gendered associations of men with work and women with care.

Men and women also displayed different perceptions to the notion of caring responsibilities posing “barriers” to their experiences of work. While women were quickly able to recall many barriers they had experienced as a result of childcare, or more commonly, *perceptions* around childcare, several of the male participants were noticeably hesitant when posed this same question. This hesitation underscores the reality that women face far greater material costs to their careers as a result of childcare than men. Men most commonly reported not being able to work weekends and being restricted to working on local productions, however, they frequently reframed their experiences as a result of personal choices rather than structural obstacles. One male freelancer explained, “I think barriers for...in terms of barriers you put in your own way, that’s a different way of looking at your question but you don’t-, I don’t think I’ve said to myself ‘I can’t do this because I’ve got child care duties’ but you just have to think hard about what you can and can’t do”. The way in which the structural nature of barriers related to childcare remained unspoken by most of the men I interviewed, in sharp contrast to the women, further illustrates the entrenchment of distinct gendered relationships to work and care.

***“I love my kids, but...”: Challenging gendered discourses around work and care***

The interviews also often offered challenges to gendered discourses that position men as breadwinners, primarily committed to work, and women as nurturers, solely committed to children. For example, women frequently emphasised the pleasure of work. A freelance woman commented, “I would say that my work-life balance is definitely weighted in favour of the work, but I like it that way, to be fair”. Another woman explained, “if you’re a freelancer, you think ‘I’m only as good as my last job’. So you’re constantly wanting to prove yourself. And plus, I think kind of-, there’s part of me, a weird part of me, that really enjoys just putting a hundred percent into that”. Notably, here, enjoyment of work is framed as slightly abnormal. The same woman continued:

I love my kids, my kids are the best kids ever and I adore them, but I’ve never been particularly maternal. [...]If I didn’t work, it would drive everyone else crazy because I need that input, I need that creativity, I need that variety - especially the variety that TV gives you - and people. And I think hopefully I’m a better mum for it and can share that with the kids as well.

Describing her maternity leaves, another freelance woman similarly noted, “I took seven months, with both of them, so not much. But...to be honest I was happy with that

[...] I'm not really a baby person!" In this case, the length of maternity leave was framed as her choice, but may also be attributed to the lack of benefits afforded to freelancers working on short-term projects.

Several women spoke of preferring being at work to doing full time childcare. A woman in a staff job explained, "I *really* enjoyed my job when I came back to it after having my kids. I think because I'd spent quite a few months just cooing at a baby and everything and having to be on hand all the time". Another woman in a staff position similarly commented of her maternity leave that, "I was...not bored, that sounds really bad, I love my kids, they're amazing but I was kind of like 'is this it?!'". When asked if her feelings about work had changed since having children, she joked, "They should! ((laughs))", before going on to express her love for her job. Her laughter is significant here, highlighting the way in which enjoyment of work and acknowledgement of the monotony of childcare is framed as potentially in tension with normative constructions of motherhood. This emphasis on the "tediousness of childcare" was similarly identified by Dent, whose female interviewees rejected ideal, middle-class motherhood in favour of a need to feel valued as creative media workers (2019: 13). Women's recurring emphasis on the pleasures of work can arguably be read as an attempt to dispel dominant assumptions – often used to rationalise women's under-representation in the sector – that motherhood has diminished their passion for work (Berridge, 2019). Some women explicitly highlighted the pressures of refuting these assumptions. One woman, a single mother, explained:

There was a period where I felt like I was the only woman who had children  
 [...] I wanted to always show that I was capable and, this is maybe not the right attitude, but I didn't want them to think that it was a problem in that they wouldn't want to give me a job because I had kids because that meant I might need to take time off. So [...] while I would still be out that door at a certain time if I'd got to pick them up, I would always make sure that it was just never an issue.

Women were often keenly aware of their perceptions as "inevitable mothers" and the potentially negative impact this has on their career opportunities (Wreyford, 2018: 112). Some women, particularly freelancers who need to constantly pitch for work, recounted experiences of gender discrimination based on these perceptions. A female freelancer recalled an interview where "the second question she asked me was 'how are you going to manage your childcare?' And I thought 'you're breaking the law

in asking me that!”). She continued, “I’m hacked off that I’m the age that I’m at and I’ve got the responsibility that I’ve got but I’m living in a rented house and I’m still on a low income and I can’t see a way out of it. And I know that that’s because the children have been seen as a barrier that I haven’t necessarily felt has been there”. Two other freelance women recalled being turned down for jobs because it was perceived they wouldn’t be flexible enough due to caring responsibilities. Perceptions of women as “inevitable mothers” had implications for fathers in the industry too, positioning men who are primary caregivers or share caring responsibilities as abnormal. One freelance male recalled being mocked by colleagues for needing to leave work early to look after his child: “Naw, I mean, as a dad you get some jokes ‘aah you’re a stay-at-home dad’ and all that kind of stuff but I mean, it’s all quite well-meaning, most of the time, at least that’s how I choose to read it!” While he viewed this mockery in a light-hearted manner, his experience nonetheless highlights the difficulty that men and women face when trying to resist gendered social expectations around parenthood.

While women frequently denied that caring responsibilities were silenced by the industries, their awareness of gendered perceptions around caring responsibilities impacted upon who they chose to speak to about childcare, particularly in the case of freelancers who depend heavily on reputation. One female freelancer explained, “obviously you have a tendency to say ‘listen, I can’t do full time because I have kids’ you feel that it’s safer to say that to another woman who has children”. One man in a staff role with significant caring responsibilities also identified a female boss, and a feminine department more widely, as being particularly understanding about his need for flexible working. He explained, “it worked out well but it was luck. The sort of structure of my department-, I mean maybe it’s an upside of it being more feminine?”. Similarly, an internal review into women working in the BBC noted that, when returning to work after maternity leave, “quality of experience appears to be inconsistent based on what people referred to as a ‘line manager lottery’” (BBC, 2018: 6). These experiences suggest that support for parents is not necessarily built into infrastructures, but tied to individuals, and individual departments, in a way that is fragile and ultimately unsustainable. One freelance woman was particularly critical of the way in which the challenges of care are devolved onto individuals to deal with, noting that while her current workplace is “very women-based” and “supportive”, “a lot of it is down to *my* level of confidence to be prepared to walk out the door at five o’clock or come in at ten”.

Many of the women explicitly positioned their discussions within broader discourses of gender inequality, which none of the men did, again reflecting the existence of gendered predetermined frameworks for talking about this issue. (Indeed, to my surprise, a male participant commented that he liked my interview questions because “they weren’t very political”.) Several women spoke of being aware that they would be in more senior positions had they not had children. As a woman in a staff job commented, “I think it’s just your observation isn’t it, that men don’t have the same-, that I’m aware of, the same challenges”. Another female freelancer observed that men do not face the same difficulties as women in relation to their career progression:

there are men that were contemporaries of mine in that pre-children phase, lots those men now have children. And the simple fact - and it’s not about blame or anything - is that they have moved on because I had eight years out. So yes, I get the work because I’m good at my job and everything, but yeah [...] it’s obvious, my career took a hit because in the eight years when I was raising babies they were progressing and getting more experience and becoming more and more respected. Which *would* happen anyway because they’re men. So my [female] friends without children, who are the control group I guess, the men always get more points. And the men are allowed to be more capricious, or demanding, or unreliable or...And it’s always seemed to me, the only mode for women, is ‘lovely’.

In her interviews with mothers who are creative media workers, Dent identified a similar tendency for women to acknowledge their devalued status in the workplace compared to men even before having children (2019: 8).

Several women also acknowledged the number of women leaving the industries due to not being able to reconcile childcare with the working cultures, either mentioning specific anecdotes or wider statistics. However, despite this recognition of the structural nature of gender inequalities in the sector, few women occupied explicit positions of resistance, reflecting wider feminist scholarship on the way in which media industries demand that women (and workers more widely) internalise the challenges of neoliberal working cultures as their responsibility (O’Brien, 2019: 90). For instance, one woman in a staff job in film noted:

There’s just no care [in the industry]. That’s the problem. There’s just no care. Yeah...[...] Yeah I think what happens, is that working mums just fall out of the industry. If you do a report or some statistics, I’m sure there must be some- [...]

It must be like 80% or something- [...] That's crazy. And it is such-, I mean it's not about nine to five, you have to love it, you have to give it everything. So I can understand that. But there is nothing in place to catch those people.

Here, gendered barriers are acknowledged but reframed as a result of individual women's lack of passion for their job, thereby displacing structural critique.

The men's interviews also offered challenges to gendered socialised expectations, which position men as breadwinners, primarily devoted to work. In contrast to the women's accounts, men would often downplay the significance of their jobs in the industries and emphasise instead the pleasures of childcare. One freelance man explained, "we're not saving lives - to use a big cliché - [...] we're just making television". Another freelance male, whose partner also works in television, commented that, "I love being at home with [my child] and I get entire days with him sometimes, like most of the time when [my partner] is working, and it's great. And so...obviously I'd rather do that than work! ((laughs))". The laughter here echoes many of the women's accounts of enjoying returning to work following periods of maternity leave, again highlighting the tension involved in trying to break away from established gendered scripts. Some men also described talking openly about their children at work. One freelance male mentioned regularly showing photos of his child to colleagues, while another commented that, "A lot of Glasgow [...] or Edinburgh people know me and they know my life and so I will be saying 'I've had a kid and it's chaos and that's what I'm doing, back in two months' or whatever. [...] they know my family life and [...] so it's all part of our relationship...". The openness that men reported feeling in relation to speaking about children at work at once highlights a resistance to traditional gender roles, while simultaneously underlining the way in which fatherhood is not perceived as antithetical to work in the way that motherhood is.

A recurring discourse in the men's interviews was the importance of being physically present for their children. As one man explained, "you want to be that person who is there. Like when I grew up my dad was away working a lot, and that actually was fine with me, but I want to be at home as much as I possibly can". A freelance man directly connected being at home with "just being a good dad". Similarly, another freelance male noted that since having a child:

I'm a bit more of a stickler for getting home! ((laughs)) I used to not have any qualms about staying late and working overtime for a project or whatever, but nowadays, as soon as it's over I need to head and get my train home. I need to

pick [my child] up from the childminders or my mum's, I don't want to leave him all day with someone else and not get a chance to even just put him to bed or whatever.

Women also stressed the importance of being present for children. However, men and women had different ideas of what this presence entails. Men typically equated “being around” with their availability at children’s meal-times and bedtimes, which did not necessarily involve dramatically changing their working patterns, while for women, “being around” often meant reducing their hours at work or leaving the industries altogether. This stark gendered difference further reflects the difficulties of fully escaping traditional gender roles and the far greater material costs of childcare to women’s careers rather than men’s.

## **Conclusion**

This article contributes to a growing area of feminist research on women’s subjective experiences of working in the contemporary media industries, particularly focusing on their negotiations of work with childcare (Wing-Fai et al, 2015; O’Brien, 2019; Dent, 2019). However, by also considering fathers’ experiences, it offers a fuller understanding of the highly gendered and ambivalent nature of discourses around work and caring responsibilities in the Scottish film and television industries. Further research needs to be undertaken into the impact of other identities, such as ethnicity, age and sexuality, on parents’ and wider carers’ experiences of work in the film and television industries. While this article has focused on childcare, several of the participants – both men and women– described significant additional caring responsibilities for elderly parents. Moreover, more attention needs to be paid to the intersection of geographical location with experiences of balancing childcare with work, which my future work will develop.

An urgent challenge identified by feminist media scholars is the way in which new labouring subjectivities encourage women to internalise their experiences of gender inequalities in the sector, thereby displacing structural critique (Gill, 2014; Berridge, 2019; Dent, 2019; O’Brien, 2019). The interviews speak to this internalisation and specifically, the difficulty of escaping gendered socialised expectations around work and childcare, which in turn inform the sector’s normative-masculine working cultures and produce and reinforce gender inequalities (O’Brien, 2019: 83). Although I have identified moments where participants also challenge these expectations, these moments

do not necessarily translate into explicit resistance to or collective action around wider gender inequalities. In light of this internalisation, feminist research which highlights the *structural* dimensions of these inequalities is vital. This article offers a challenge to the pervasive understanding of the challenges of negotiating work in the industries with childcare as a personal problem, by highlighting recurring – and distinctly gendered – patterns to men’s and women’s discussions. Only by developing a deeper understanding of these subjective experiences, and their precise gendered dimensions, can we start to determine viable ways to effect change and make the industries more conducive to parents’ – particularly mothers’ – participation.

## References

- Banks, Mark and Katie Milestone. 2011. ‘Individualization, Gender and Cultural Work’. *Gender, Work and Organization*. 18 (1): 73 – 89.
- BBC (2018) “Making the BBC a Great Workplace for Women: A report on gender progression and culture for gender equality at the BBC”. Accessed 12 June, 2019.  
[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/reports/gender\\_equality\\_recommendations\\_2018.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/reports/gender_equality_recommendations_2018.pdf)
- Berridge, Susan. 2019 “Mum’s the word: public testimonials and gendered experiences of negotiating caring responsibilities with work in the film and television industries”. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22 (5-6): 646 – 664.
- Boyle, Karen. 2009 “Attractions and distractions: mums, babies and ‘early’ cinema going”. *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*. 6 (2): 260 –283.
- Cooper, Marianne. 2000 “Being the ‘Go-To Guy’: Fatherhood, Masculinity and the Organization of Work in Silicon Valley”. *Qualitative Sociology* 23 (4): 379 – 405.
- Creative Scotland. 2016 “Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion in the Scottish Screen Sector: A report on the findings of the Screen Equality Survey by Creative Scotland”. Accessed 17 June, 2019:

[http://www.creativescotland.com/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/35020/ScreenEqualitiesSurveyMay2016.pdf](http://www.creativescotland.com/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/35020/ScreenEqualitiesSurveyMay2016.pdf)

Dent, Tamsyn. 2019 “Devalued women, valued men: Motherhood, class and neoliberal feminism in the creative media industries”. *Media, Culture, Society*. Online First.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0163443719876537>

Gill, Rosalind. 2014 “Unspeakable inequalities: Post feminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers”. *Social Politics* 21(4): 509 – 28.

Hesmondhalgh, David and Sarah Baker. 2015 “Sex, gender and work segregation in the cultural industries”. *The Sociological Review* 63(S1): 23 – 36.

O’Brien, Anne. 2014 “‘Men own television’: why women leave media work”. *Media, Culture and Society* 36(8): 1207 – 1218.

O’Brien, Anne. 2019 *Women, Inequality and Media Work*. London: Routledge.

Raising Films. 2016 “Making it Possible: Voices of Parents and Carers in the UK Film and TV Industry”. Accessed 7 June, 2019. <https://www.raisingfilms.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Making-It-Possible-Full-Report-Results.pdf>

Skillset. 2010 “Women in the Creative Media Industries”. Accessed 17 June, 2019.  
<http://www.ewawomen.com/uploads/files/surveyskillset.pdf>

Taylor, Stephanie. 2011 “Negotiating oppositions and uncertainties: Gendered conflicts in creative identity work”. *Feminism & Psychology* 21(3): 354–371.

Wing-Fai, Leung, Rosalind Gill, and Keith Randle. 2015 “Getting in, getting on, getting out? Women as career scramblers in the UK film and television industries. *The Sociological Review* 63(S1): 50 – 65.

Wreyford, Natalie. 2018 *Gender Inequality in Screenwriting Work*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, thank you to all the participants who gave up their valuable time to be interviewed for this project. I was overwhelmed by their generosity, especially given how difficult it can be to find spare time when negotiating childcare with busy careers in the film and television sector. I would also like to thank the Carnegie Trust for funding the interviews that formed the empirical data of this article. Thank you to the two anonymous reviewers who provided insightful and supportive comments that helped greatly in refining this piece. Thank you to Karen Boyle for her insightful feedback on an earlier draft of this article, and to Katherine Champion for her valuable comments on a later draft. Thank you also to Sarah Neely and Maria Velez-Serna, who offered valuable insights on some of the ideas forming this piece, as well as those who attended a research seminar on this project. Thank you to Chelsea and Vicky for patiently helping me work through some of my thinking around gendered norms around childcare. Thank you to Marshall and Emmett, whose sporadic interruptions while working on this piece continually reminded me of not just the labour but the pleasures of caring responsibilities. Finally, thank you to Duncan for smashing gendered socialised expectations when it comes to childcare and being an all-round winner.