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**Unspeakable inequalities: Postfeminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity
and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers**

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Abstract

Work in the cultural and creative fields is marked by stark and growing inequalities relating to gender, class and race/ethnicity. Yet the same fields are also characterised by an ethos that celebrates openness, egalitarianism and meritocracy. This paper explores this paradox, focusing in particular on gender inequalities. It argues that there is a need to move beyond the standard conventional explanations for women's underrepresentation within the creative workforce, which point to female childbearing and childcare as central. Whilst not disputing the significance of motherhood to women's career trajectories, the paper suggests that the repeated focus on maternity is problematic, and may close down other areas of potential investigation and critique.

The paper suggests that three alternative foci would repay attention in understanding inequalities in the cultural and creative industries (CCI). First, the new, mobile, subtle and revitalised forms of sexism in circulation urgently require further examination. Secondly, the power of the dominant postfeminist sensibility which, in suggesting that 'all the battles have been won', renders inequality increasingly difficult to voice or speak about, demands critique. And thirdly, the new forms of labouring subjectivity required to survive in the field of cultural work may themselves be contributing to the inequalities in the field, by favouring an entrepreneurial individualistic mode that disavows structural power relations. These three aspects of life in the field of cultural work merit further attention, and suggest that gender inequality has a variety of different causes, not all located in women's childbearing abilities. Moreover, the paper argues that the very myth of egalitarianism at work in the CCI may itself be a key mechanism through which inequality is reproduced.

Introduction

For those interested in equality, diversity and social justice, the cultural and creative industries present a paradox. On one hand all the available evidence points to fields such as advertising, broadcasting, design, film and new media as being marked by stark and persistent inequalities, in which women, people from minority ethnic groups and from lower socio-economic backgrounds are dramatically under-represented, paid less and concentrated in more junior or less highly valued areas, compared with men, white people and the middle and upper classes. Yet on the other hand these same fields of endeavour present themselves as 'cool, creative and egalitarian' (Gill, 2002), hostile to 'rigid caste systems' (Florida, 2002), open, tolerant and based upon democratic and meritocratic principles. As I was told on numerous occasions doing fieldwork among media workers: 'it doesn't matter if you're male or female, black or white, gay or straight, as long as you're creative'. Why, then, with such a powerful myth of inclusivity and egalitarianism circulating amongst cultural workers, is the reality of work in these fields so different?

In this article I aim to open up this paradox and to explore how such an ardently embraced myth of work in creative fields can co-exist alongside a reality that is so at odds with this picture. The work focuses on gender but is informed by a feminist 'intersectional' (Crenshaw, 1991; Brah & Phoenix, 2004) ethic, which seeks to understand the connections between multiple axes of oppression and exclusion, on the understanding that these are not simply 'additive' but constitute distinct experiences and subjectivities. It has taken a long time for inequalities in the cultural and media industries to be documented with rigour but there is now a growing number of sources of evidence which paint a consistent –if bleak – portrait of the unequal landscape of these fields. In the UK, the most significant are Skillset's research, audits and labour force surveys, which highlight the persistent patterns of inequality in cultural and creative industries (CCI) (Skillset, 2010).

In relation to gender, conventional understandings of this point to women's roles as childbearers and childcarers as the key explanatory factors, and cite the exodus of women from the media and cultural industries in their late thirties and early forties as evidence. Depending upon the political convictions of the researchers, this may be framed either as a 'choice' made by women themselves (e.g. Hakim, 2000) or as an indictment of industries that need to create more 'family friendly' policies to prevent a major 'talent drain' (Skillset, 2008). These messages are mainstream, media friendly and play well with policy audiences, but here I want to interrogate the status of self-evidence they have taken on. The significance of parenting is not in dispute, nor is the difficulty of combining caring for children with work, like that in the CCI, which is precarious, demanding, and does not fit neatly into a 'normal' working day. However, the constant reiteration of mothering as 'the issue' is problematic, reinforcing rather than challenging the idea that children are women's responsibility. As feminists we face a dilemma: we need to recognise the reality that women are still responsible for the vast amount of childcare. Yet in so doing we threaten to perpetuate the very definitions of women as 'domestic' workers (Wajcman, 1998). Such claims obscure the fact that men as well as women are parents, yet are able to thrive in the world of media work, even after they become fathers; they further ignore the fact that large numbers of women – almost certainly the majority - working in these fields do not have children, yet are still under-represented in positions of seniority and power. I am disturbed by the way in which such arguments have taken on an almost hegemonic status as the 'acceptable face of feminism', one of the effects of which, I want to argue, has been to close down other areas of potential investigation and critique.

In this paper, then, I seek to shift the debate to examine some of the other factors that may produce the profound gender inequalities that are evident in the cultural field. In particular, I seek to highlight three different foci that I believe would repay greater attention in understanding inequalities. First, I want to argue for a new and revitalized understanding of sexism, at a moment in which it takes new and more subtle forms that are both harder to recognise and more difficult to challenge. Sexism itself, I will argue, is increasingly dynamic, mobile

and agile, requiring more nuanced vocabularies of critique. Secondly – and relatedly – I seek to contextualise this within the contemporary neoliberal and postfeminist sensibility in which ‘all the battles’ are supposed to have been won, and accusations of sexism come always-already disenfranchised: been there, done that, it’s all sorted! I will contend that, in this postfeminist moment, gender inequality has become if not unspeakable, then, extremely difficult to voice. I will argue that this is connected to the myths of equality and diversity that circulate within media and creative fields, as well as to a more pervasive ‘gender fatigue’ (Kelan, 2009a). Finally I will suggest that claims of meritocracy and egalitarianism – and, correspondingly, the repudiation of sexism as a factor that might help illuminate the reason for the small numbers of women – should themselves become part of the field – the object - of critical inquiry. They constitute a key feature of the entrepreneurial mindset demanded of contemporary cultural workers – a new labouring subjectivity partly organised around individualism and the disavowal of structural power relations – whose gendered aspects remain under-explored. Moreover, looked at in this way, rather than seeming paradoxical they are revealed as one of the very mechanisms through which inequalities are reproduced.

In what follows, each of these arguments is elaborated in three dedicated sections, drawing on research conducted in the UK, the Netherlands and (earlier) several other European countriesⁱ, which has focussed upon people working in web design, radio, film and television postproduction, computer games and advertising. First, though, it is important to outline the broad contours of the inequalities in all these fields – which form a backdrop for the arguments presented here. Inequality characterises the entire labour market, but it cannot be assumed that it has the same dynamics across all spheres, and it needs to be understood in greater specificity. Some of the distinctive features of the CCI include the small, temporary, precarious, informal, reputation and network-based nature of most creative enterprises. There is thus a need to explore what Joan Acker calls the ‘inequality regimes’ in the CCI, ‘the inter-related practices, processes, action and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and race inequalities’ (2006:443)

Inequalities in cultural work

As many have argued (eg Peck, 2011; Oakley, 2013) the UK's by now famous cultural and creative industries (CCI) policy was partly rooted in attempts to pluralise culture, focussing on 'visible minorities'. The 'buzz' about creative businesses, here and elsewhere, with their 'Bohemian' (Lloyd, 2006) 'work as play' (Ross, 2003) 'club to company' (McRobbie, 2003) atmosphere might reasonably lead one to expect a workforce characterised by diversity across gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality – particularly given the equally passionate attachments found to be widespread among cultural workers. In fact, however, the composition of the workforce in these fields is far from representative of the wider population – let alone living up to aspirations about offering particular space to marginalized groups. The under-representation of people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups is well documented (Skillset, 2009; Randle et al, 2007; Holgate & McKay, 2007), and is getting worse. Given the concentration of cultural industries in London, a global city in which 32% of the population is from a BAME group, the 5.4% representation (Skillset, 2012) is shocking, failing even to reflect minority ethnic groups' presence in the UK population as a whole, and getting worse rather than better year on year (dropping from 6.7% in the previous Labour Force Survey). While non-white groups make up more than one in four of London's workforce, they represent fewer than one in ten of London's media and cultural workforce – a disparity that has led to accusations of 'institutional racism' in the sector (Thanki & Jefferys, 2007).

The class profile of the cultural and creative industries is also highly skewed. The Sutton Trust (2007) has documented the steady increase within the field of journalism of people educated at private schools (54%, compared with 7% in the general population) whilst of those who went to University over half (56%) were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge – an elite bias also markedly visible within the BBC and other major cultural institutions. The social and cultural capitals seemingly 'required' to work in Britain's media are further increasingly underscored by the economic capital needed to support long periods without work or in unpaid internships – an increasingly common practice across the

cultural and creative industries (Perlin, 2012; see <http://www.internaware.org/>; <http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/>)

In terms of gender, there is a more complex picture. In some industries (e.g. computer games) women are barely present at all – averaging 5% across the different component fields (online, multimedia, etc). In others the issue is one of occupational segregation. In the film industry, for example, women dominate in wardrobe and make-up yet constitute only a small minority (average 15%) in key creative roles such as directors, screenwriters and cinematographers (Lauzen, 2012). In television, women's representation is better, but primarily at more junior levels. Overall, women working in the media and cultural industries are significantly better qualified than their male counterparts, with a greater proportion being graduates and an even more significant difference in the numbers of women, compared to men, with higher degrees (Skillset, 2010). Moreover, women are significantly more likely to have undertaken industry-specific training. Nevertheless, they earn on average 15% less than their male colleagues and are much less likely to be promoted or to make it into senior positions (Skillset, 2010). This marked pay inequality holds true even when other factors are adjusted (controlled for) e.g. the lower age profile of women in the workforce.

More complex patterns of intersectional inequality seem to be developing, in which gender effects are mediated by other factors – such as age or parental status. In a debate hosted by Women in Film and Television in 2010 Kate O'Connor (2010) noted that the TV industry was better at recruiting women than at keeping them, leading to a distorted age profile in which 70% of men in the TV industry are over 35, whilst the largest proportion of women is in the 25-34 age group. One interpretation of this might be that a once male-dominated industry is now recruiting younger women, who have simply not yet had chance to work their way into the older age categories. However this benign reading is not borne out by the evidence which notes the youthful and junior profile of female industry entrants, but does not see them progressing in line with their male

peers. The Global Financial Crisis has disproportionately impacted women in a variety of different ways, among them job losses (Rake, 2009). The UK TV industry contracted dramatically between 2006-9, leaving many in a vulnerable position. However, women bore the brunt of this, losing their jobs at a rate of six times that of men (O'Connor, 2010). Women's employment improved somewhat following this and in the 2012 Skillset Labour Force Survey they represented 36%.

Yet inequalities in cultural labour have been underexplored—particularly those relating to gender—almost as if academic research priorities are reflecting the wider postfeminist complacency that regards gender inequality as a thing of the past. A consensus has emerged that attributes the relative under-representation of women in these fields to women having and caring for children. A Skillset report, reviewing the evidence, concludes: 'it has been impossible to avoid the hypothesis that women have been leaving the industry because of difficulty reconciling a career in the creative industries with raising a family' (2010:2). Whilst this is almost certainly accurate, I want to suggest that it only tells part of the story, and, moreover implies that change could be relatively easily-achieved, with perhaps the introduction of some 'family friendly' policies and an injection of good female 'role models'. In fact, however, what is at issue is far more profound and far reaching than this, and relates to the very nature of work in the cultural and creative industries, and to the new labouring subjectivities that are required to survive it. To highlight this is to point to the fact that inequalities are neither accidental nor incidental, but are produced by the labouring conditions themselves. This is explored below, before moving on to examine the dynamics of the 'new sexism' evident in the field and the unspeakability and repudiation of any critical vocabulary for engaging with it.

Working in the cultural and creative industries: new labouring subjectivities

Creative workers are routinely identified as being in the vanguard of socio-cultural change. In utopian and policy writing they are figured as central to

economic growth, urban regeneration and social cohesion and inclusion (Florida, 2002; Hartley, 2005), whilst also seen as offering meaningful self actualising work – albeit ‘on the cheap’ (see Ross, 2009; Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). In critical accounts, they are positioned as exemplars of a rapprochement between art and commerce, a move to a thoroughly ‘cultural economy’ (du Gay & Pryke, 2002; Amin & Thrift, 2004), as immaterial labourers par excellence (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Weeks, 2005), and forerunners of a ‘Brave New World of work’ (Beck, 2000).

Whilst labour itself was long ignored in the ‘hype’ about the CCI (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009), a growing body of research has now begun to document the experiences of working in the cultural and creative industries. This research offers a remarkably consistent set of findings—albeit with differences of emphasis and interpretation. Almost all notes the attraction of the association of the work with artistic labour in the Romantic tradition, and the intense and passionate attachments people have to ‘the work itself’ (McRobbie, 2007), be that in fashion, web design, film or television. As one of my respondents, working in new media, put it, capturing a widely held view, ‘it’s like being paid for your hobby’. The expressive qualities of the work are much celebrated (Banks, 2007; Taylor & Littleton, 2012), as is the informality of ‘creative’ workplaces, with their emphasis upon ‘work as play’ and the autonomy they may extend to workers. The opportunities to choose one’s own hours, and be one’s own boss (in some cases) are highly valued (Gill, 2006).

Against this, in what Angela McRobbie has insightfully dubbed the ‘pleasure-pain axis’ is the experience of profound and chronic insecurity, occasioned by irregular and short-term patterns of work, usually counted in days or weeks rather than months (Blair, 2001; Randall & Culkin, 2009). The dominance of freelancing and other ‘irregular’ forms of contract have led cultural workers to become known as the poster children of ‘the precariat’ (Neilson & Rossiter, 2005; Standing, 2011), haunted by anxieties about paying the rent and where the next pay cheque will come from, and left alone to bear all the ‘risks’ of working in the new economy. Worries about becoming ill and growing old were a palpable feature of my interviews with new media workers in London and Amsterdam,

leading to second–or more usually multiple–jobbing, frequently in the teaching and hospitality industries.

A further characteristic of work in the CCI are the long hours and ‘bulimic’ (Pratt, 2002) patterns of working – feast or famine, stop-go, long periods with little or no work followed by intense periods of having to work all the time, in some cases barely stopping to sleep. These distinctive working patterns have also been accompanied by a general marked intensification of work across the cultural and creative field so that patterns that were once associated with ‘crunch times’ – such as getting a game into production or finishing editing a film – are increasingly normalised (de Peuter & Dyer-Witheford, 2006). As workers told us, ‘all the time is crunch time now’.

If work has intensified, it has also extensified (Jarvis & Pratt, 2006)–spread out over time and place, facilitated in part by mobile information and communication technologies that make it possible to be ‘always on’ (Gregg, 2011)–working from cafe, playground or bed. The affordances offered by smart phones and other mobile devices quickly went from representing the possibility of connection/availability to producing a work of subjectivity in which this was normatively demanded, as all of life becomes a ‘social factory’ (Tronti, 1966; Hardt & Negri, 2004; Weeks, 2005; Morini, 2007). Notions of a ‘separation of spheres’ (e.g. home and work) or even of a ‘work-life balance’ have been superseded by what one social media company executive calls ‘the merge’. As the 4G mobile companies would have it, we are in an era of ‘everything everywhere’, and the demands of work can colonise each and every space¹.

It is my contention that neither feminist nor labour movement scholars have kept pace with this extraordinarily rapid shift which, in so profoundly blurring the boundaries between work time and all other time (‘the time of life’ as autonomous Marxist theorists call it), challenges conventional labour politics, as well as the legislation–e.g. European Working Time Directive–put in place to

¹ Indeed, it is interesting to note the growing number of travel companies promoting out of reach holiday destinations in which there is no mobile coverage

'protect' workers. It is clear that the new –largely non-unionised–working cultures of the cultural and creative industries pose a challenge to parenting, caring, and indeed having any major commitments, responsibilities (or even interests) beyond work. Thus the consensus identifying an incompatibility between working in the CCI and 'raising a family' is not misplaced. What it has neglected, however, is to explore the processes or mechanisms that create this difficulty or incompatibility. As Angela McRobbie (2010) has argued, the influx of women into the labour force has not produced gender equality. The political potential of higher numbers of women in the workforce has instead been pre-empted 'by the intense forms of biopolitical governmentality which constantly address women and their bodies (through media and magazines in particular) so that earning power is inextricably tied up with consumer culture and the promises of personal satisfaction therein' (McRobbie, 2011: 72). Referring specifically to the features of women's participation in the cultural and creative sectors, McRobbie argues that these intensified forms of governmentality produce new realms of pain and injury.²

I am interested in how contemporary work in the CCI produces (and demands) new labouring subjectivities that –for example–take for granted that all of life's time should be available for work, or that the 'risks' of cultural work should be borne entirely by the individual. It is only by thinking about the shift in subjectivity that one can make sense of comments such as the following, taken from Skillset's (2008) research on 'balancing children and work in the audiovisual industries':

'You can't turn round on a drama shoot and say, actually, can I leave early 3 days a week. You know, you'd be laughed out of the room'

'When my second child was born I was back at work within 24 hours. I was directing a show. I didn't have any choice.'

In the first of the two quotes above, power operates not by top-down managerial imposition, but through the internalization of a felt knowledge of workplace culture that makes it quite literally laughable to choose something different. In

² I am grateful to Christina Scharff for drawing my attention to this point.

the second case, returning to work within hours of giving birth is clearly a choice, yet is experienced as 'no choice', despite long-standing legislative protection for women in this situation. Again, this indicates the way in which power and compulsion operate psychosocially, through a remade worker subjectivity that is hyper-conscientious and 'responsibilised' –but also, it should be added, profoundly anxious and fearful of being displaced. In Skillset's (2008) research, numerous respondents worked—even unpaid—during maternity 'leave', and numerous others concealed pregnancies or did not divulge their parental status.

In all these instances, power is working not from 'above' in the traditional sense, but in and through the subject, who must be vigilant, attentive and self-governing. Work in the CCI calls forth a 'self managed' (Gill, 2010), 'upgraded' (Ashton, 2010) subject who must be flexible, adaptable, sociable, self directing, able to work for days or nights at time without sleep, and must be mobile, agile and without encumbrances or needs. This new labouring subjectivity is as yet underexplored (but see Ursell, 2000; Krings, 2007; Gill, 2010), yet its contours appear to feature an entrepreneurial 'can do' spirit, an individualistic and meritocratic ethos, and ability to thrive on risk, and to create a 'DIY biography' in conditions of radical uncertainty, that include the impossibility of imagining one's own future. This subject must be 'reprogrammable' (1996), self-reinventing, and capable of 'keeping up' (Kotamraju, 2002) and reskilling constantly (in his or her own time and at his or her own expense).

Far too little attention has been paid to the gendered nature of this new labouring subjectivity, but it is clear that in its injunctions never to be ill, never to be pregnant, never to need time off to care for one's self or others, it may pose particular challenges for women. Interestingly, in management texts, the kind of subject one has to become to survive and flourish in the new economy is hailed as female: flexible, adaptable, good at multi-tasking and negotiating. Hanna Rosin's (2012) book The End of Men and the Rise of Women is typical in claiming that the future of work is female, and arguing that social media companies such as Twitter and Facebook are in the vanguard of bringing this about.

What this gendered entrepreneurial subjectivity also seems to require is repudiation of sexism and a conviction in meritocracy. In the next two sections I will develop this argument further. First I will argue that sexism is itself becoming more flexible, agile and mobile, is itself innovating, making it harder to recognise, to critique and to resist. Subsequently I will explore how gender inequality is – in parallel to this trend - becoming increasingly ‘unspeakable’ in a postfeminist, individualist, neoliberal climate in which the new labouring subjectivity seems to demand a repudiation of structural inequalities.

New sexism

It is striking how the term ‘sexism’ has disappeared from everyday use, as well as from (even feminist) academic analyses in recent years – although there seems to be an embryonic resurgence of the term in popular media. As the cultural critic Judith Williamson (2005) has argued, the term has a quaint, old-fashioned (and, I would add, perhaps also unsophisticated) ring to it – in a way that is strikingly not paralleled by notions of racism or homophobia, which retain their critical force. This is certainly connected to the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2007) in circulation in contemporary culture - a constellation of ideas and beliefs about the ‘pastness’ (Tasker and Negra, 2007) of feminism, which stress that ‘all the battles have been won’ and use an individualistic language of ‘choice’ to account for any differences between men’s and women’s experiences. However, it is also perhaps in part the outcome of a hitherto dominant framing of sexism in terms of a stock of relatively stable ideas and stereotypes and easily-recognisable practices. Against this potentially rather static conception I want to argue for a view of sexism not as a single, unchanging ‘thing’, but instead reconceptualise it as an agile, dynamic, changing and diverse set of malleable representations, discourses and practices of power.

Over the past two decades I have examined the shifting forms which expressions of sexism take in the cultural field. This work is indebted to analyses of the changing dynamics of racism, which illustrate how verbal expressions of racist sentiment transformed in the wake of anti-discrimination legislation to take on forms that were more subtle, frequently located in accounts of ‘culture’ (rather

than biology), and constructed in terms of explicit disavowals of racism (Barker, 1981; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Romm, 2010). This work on 'new racism' highlighted, for example, the prevalence of the use of disclaimers such as 'I'm not being racist but...' which preceded the expression of something that could readily be heard as racist. Michael Billig's (1978) research on extreme Right, neo-fascist organisations found that even members of the National Front were keen to present their views as 'reasonable' and non-racist, occasionally even couching them in terms of appeals to fairness.

Building on this work, writing 20 years ago about the lack of female broadcasters on pop music radio in the UK, I coined the term 'new sexism' (Gill 1991; Gill 1993) to try to capture the apparently novel ways in which gender discrimination was practiced. None of the producers or radio station bosses I interviewed argued that women were not good enough, or that their place was in the home – or any other 'traditional' expression of sexism. On the contrary they produced accounts that stressed their great admiration for women and their genuine desire to hire them. However through subtle discursive moves they also simultaneously put forward persuasive justifications for why they actually employed so few female DJs (in many cases not a single one): women didn't apply, the audience preferred men, women who went into broadcasting wanted to be in news not entertainment, etc. What fascinated me about this pattern of accounting was how it quite literally 'did discrimination in new ways. Like 'new racism' (Barker 1981; Wetherell & Potter 1992) it appeared to be a mutation in the way that sexism was practiced—designed to seem to take on board feminist arguments and to anticipate and rebut potential accusations of sexism. Disclaimers were common—'I'm not being sexist but...'—as were expressions of great admiration for women. This was sexism with a reasonable, pleasant, postfeminist face: 'unequal egalitarianism' (Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987), 'enlightened sexism' (Douglas, 2010).

More recently, a growing body of research has contributed to an understanding of how inequalities in the cultural and creative industries are reproduced (Perrons, 2004; 2007; McRobbie, 2011; Kelan, 2009b), highlighting the dynamism, flexibility and agility of sexism as a set of practices (Gill, 2011; Douglas, 2010).

For example, Elizabeth Kelan's (2009b) work in ICT companies showed how women are systematically dis-credited for displaying skills and expertise that are deemed to be 'feminine'—in a way that had no parallels for men. Thus, men who were deemed 'good communicators' received extensive credit and appreciation from colleagues and managers, whilst women with similarly good communication skills did not, since this was seen as a natural part of a feminine skill set. In such subtle ways, men's professional prowess was systematically enhanced, while women's was dis-credited – without this being regarded as in any way sexist by anyone involved.

In my own research (Gill,2006) I explored how a taken for granted notion of 'men as technical' and 'women as social' was put to work in accounting for and justifying the lack of women in web design. Whilst at first sight, this appeared to be a very traditional form of sexism in which contrasting qualities were insistently inscribed onto differently gendered bodies, what was striking was both the dynamism of this construction, and the fact that it was predominantly deployed to construct women as 'superior'. Thus, in a far-from obvious or self-evident manner, women's essential 'well-balanced' and 'competent' natures became a reason for not giving them the highly regarded (technical) jobs. Men by contrast were disparaged, even attacked, for poor communication skills, bad taste, appalling hygiene, etc, yet were naturalised as the inhabitants of such positions – as seen vividly in the extract below, which illustrates some of the complexity of how sexism was practiced discursively:

'Well, I have found it hard to find women. They try, but many women who are programmers leave early since they don't want to sit in between the men. These men do not have any social skills, you know. One can't have a normal conversation with them. The jokes... just terrible. They look bad because they just don't care, they don't wash and they don't get haircuts. And then they group together... One develops what one is good at. Girls just don't have it... Beavis and Butthead are the ones that remain. Women become the project manager instead.' (Elisabeth, web designer)

The informality of cultural and creative industries also significantly contributes to their inequality, becoming a space in which subtle forms of sexism can flourish, outside any requirements for accountability. Informality is the structuring principle on which many small and medium-sized new media companies seem to operate: finding work, recruiting staff, getting clients, are all seemingly removed from the formal sphere governed by established procedures, equal opportunities legislation or union agreements, and located in an arena based on informality, sociality and 'who you know'. Research shows that people find work primarily through friends, colleagues and a 'contacts culture' (Thanki & Jefferys, 2007). A clear finding of research in the CCI is that women fare better in larger organisations in which there is greater accountability and more stable employment patterns (Skillset, 2010)

There is a dearth of research about how informal reputation economies such as those in film, television, advertising and new media operate, but they are clearly based on recruitment via personal networks (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2009). 'Hansard's law' (Franks, 1999) frequently operates – in which the clubbier and more informal the context, the more likely people are to appoint in their own image. Reputational decisions are not necessarily based on outright discrimination, but are more likely to be based in a web of largely tacit judgments about who is trustworthy, reliable and good to work with. 'He's a good bloke' or 'He's a safe pair of hands' – and myriad other warm assessments like these become the forms that sexist preferences take, a major conduit for the reproduction of the predominantly white, male and middle class social order. This produces what Deborah Jones, Judith Pringle and Sarah Proctor-Thomsonⁱⁱ have named 'unmanageable inequalities' – unmanageable because they exist and operate entirely outside of and beyond the interventions and management strategies invoked to challenge such injustices – eg Equal Opportunities programmes, diversity policies and anti-discrimination law, which literally do not touch these practices (see also Holgate & McKay, 2009).

The 'compulsory sociality' (Gregg, 2010) of such workplaces, in which working has become 'networking' (Adkins, 2005) and work and lifestyle are collapsed (Deuze, 2007) becomes another major force in the reproduction of inequalities,

based around homoplily – that is, preference for interaction with others who are similar to oneself on given attributes such as race, sex and class (Clare, 2012). This is evident in relation to gender, with many workplaces I have visited as a researcher organized around traditionally masculine pursuits such as drinking, gaming and football – in a way that meant there was no dissonance between a certain kind of masculinity and workplace culture itself. Table football, large screens on which to watch Sky Sports packages, and so on, have no parallels in relation to traditionally feminine interests – yet it was striking how the gendered privileges this bestowed to men (even those not interested in football) remained largely invisible.

Karenjit Clare's research in London advertising agencies revealed how much business was conducted on golf courses and in cigar clubs, in a way that worked to exclude women, and thus deny them access to key clients and key accounts. Moreover, when women moved on to different companies they would be disadvantaged because 'employers may hire for networks as well as recruit through networks' (Clare, 2012: 19, emphasis in original). Sean Nixon (2003:148) notes the rise of elite clubs within the world of advertising, 'modelled on gentlemen's clubs' they are 'notably distanced from the more polymorphous space of Soho'. The growing 'respectabilization' of sex clubs in the last few years has further entrenched these relations, as lap dancing and table dancing clubs become increasingly 'legitimate' and mainstream venues for business (Banyard, 2010). In Clare's research one female creative tells how she was asked to be taken off a key account by a client: 'Apparently, he didn't feel he'd get the best client service from a woman... I suspect this roughly translates as "a woman is hardly likely to take me to Spearmint Rhino"'. Interestingly, the woman's annoyance in this case was not at the expectation that business would be conducted in a sex club, but at the 'one dimensional view of what a modern woman might find acceptable when it comes to client jollies' (quoted in Clare, 2012: 20). This reflected a widespread acceptance of the idea that women simply have to become like men in order to get on. Rather than criticising the fact that (net)working was practiced in traditionally and sometimes exclusively male spaces, women were much more likely to take a view that can be summarised as:

'you have to learn to play golf, then'. As I discuss below, this type of response seems itself to be part of the very unspeakability of inequality and gender privilege, and needs to be understood as such.

Unspeakable inequalities and the repudiation of sexism

A striking finding of much research on work in the CCI concerns the absence of any talk of structural inequalities. This could be a disconcerting experience for a sociological researcher: to find herself confronted by a sea of predominantly male and predominantly white faces, yet to be told repeatedly how 'diverse', 'open' and 'egalitarian' the workplaces were. This finding resonates with Sara Ahmed's discussion of the lack of mention of racism in her interviews about diversity; she noted it was 'unspoken', except on two occasions. In my own research the affective dissonance of being told in one large, seemingly exclusively white, new media company how 'fun and multi-culti' the workplace was still haunts me, and urgently needs to be theorised. There are a number of ways one might interpret this. One reading might be that the notions of diversity and egalitarianism may be referencing something other than identities tied to 'race' or class or gender – may in fact be being called on to signify something about the unconventional, Bohemian, and informal atmosphere, rather than structural identities. In this sense, funky haircuts and the styles associated with different youthful 'tribes' stand in for a diversity or 'multi-culturalism' based on relatively stable structural identities. Another reading, supported by the literature on homophily in the workplace, is that occupants of privileged groups simply do not 'see' their privilege – a fact underscored by the literature on whiteness (e.g. Frankenberg, 1993; Ware & Back, 2002, etc), and evident in the responses of white respondents to my questions about whether they felt that any particular group was under-represented. In one interview-based study with 34 new media workers only one white interviewee claimed to have noticed the whiteness of his work environment. Moreover, he struggled uncomfortably to articulate this, and was evidently much relieved when he could pass on to an optimistic assessment that things were 'getting better' and 'it will level out in the end' (Liam, web designer). Perhaps this is an example of what Ahmed (2012) calls 'happy talk' about diversity. It is also an example of a more general

'progress talk'. As Edley and Wetherell (2001: 450) have pointed out, 'This "progressive" view of history is a common frame of reference in which society is seen as moving from a state of relative ignorance, barbarism and injustice towards increased enlightenment and civilization.' One consequence of such a view is that any need for social movements and struggles for equality is disavowed, since progress is assumed to happen as a matter of inevitability.

In cases where members of minoritised groups themselves claim not to 'notice' the lack of women or people of colour, other dynamics still may be in play. Here the not speaking about this may be a strategic decision. Female cultural workers I interviewed, sometimes explicitly voiced the opinion: 'you don't talk about gender if you want to get on'. Similarly, Thanki and Jefferys (2007) quote many black media workers who took the decision never to mention experiences of racism for fear this would backfire on them. One explained: 'I left the industry because of psychological pressure... you are in a workplace or you are trying to get into the industry and you are being discriminated against and you cannot talk about it because if you do you get blacklisted or probably no one is going to believe you'. In both these instances inequality and injustice are felt and experienced but not discussed based on a pragmatic assessment of the likely – extremely negative – repercussions. A disturbing finding and one which requires further analysis – and all the more so for cultural organizations that pride and congratulate themselves on 'equality and diversity'.

More than this, however, at least in relation to gender inequality, the lack of discussion of gender on women's part often seemed occasioned not by a strategic decision, but by an absence of a critical vocabulary for talking about it. This seems particularly marked in studies of younger women. Christina Scharff (2009) argues that young women often confront traditional gender inequalities such as the difficulty in gaining respect, the lack of female managers, and earning less than male colleagues. However rather than seeing gender as a potential explanatory factor for the experiences, they attribute it to age and experience (Scharff 2011). In Karenjit Clare's research, too, the younger and more junior

women in advertising were much less likely to name gender as relevant to their experience, whilst older and more senior women expressed frustration much more readily with the masculine homosocial culture- for example the routine ways in which meetings could be interrupted by long discussions of football.

Elisabeth Kelan (2013, forthcoming) has focussed on the experiences of 'Generation Y' (born between 1977 and 1985) and found that there was a strong sense of optimism about gender equality having been achieved. Kelan found that there were three distinct ways in which gender is talked about as relevant to work. First it may become relevant if a woman chooses to have children. In this case the woman's free choice is emphasised: 'these accounts suggest that women could, if they wanted, climb to the top of organisations but are not doing so because they decide to have children' (ms p. 13). Secondly gender was talked about in terms of women being in a numerical minority – women frequently talked about the workplace being organised around a male orientation (e.g. golf), but this could frequently then be glossed as an advantage to women, since they would 'stand out'. Finally gender was talked about in terms of generational change in which sexism was consigned to the past, in typical postfeminist style- an 'overing' (Ahmed, 2012) - with frequent references to the bad old days 'back then' and comparisons with their parents generation.

What is so striking about Kelan's findings – and resonates with my own – is the way in which sexism was actively disavowed at every turn. Thus for example, in stressing the dominance of social outings dominated by golf, respondents were keen to stress that this was not a problem – it simply meant that one of the requirements of the job was learning to play golf. Similarly, although women sometimes found comments upon their appearance tiresome they were keen to stress that there was no sexism, and that the 'jokes' and comments are 'just on the informal side' ... it's not that they don't treat them as equals 'when it actually comes to getting down and doing the job' (quoted in Kelan, 2013). As Kelan comments, 'what is achieved in all of the accounts is to present sexism in their workplace as an unlikely occurrence and it is up to the women to make themselves heard and to construct themselves as useful to avoid this treatment' (ms, page 17)

As in Kelan's study, work environments in the CCI are presented as gender-equal and gender neutral, and, I want to argue, sexism is actively repudiated, even by women who articulate experiences that could easily be named in such a way. Christina Scharff's (2012) fascinating study of young women's repudiation of a feminist identity is relevant here, in pushing us to ask questions about what is going on in this vehement disavowal? In Scharff's study, this was understood in various ways as performative and connected to class, race, and to heterosexualised femininity. It seems likely that many of the same dynamics are present in the repudiation of sexism in the CCI. However, it is also worth thinking about the repudiation of sexism as being connected to an investment in preserving the myth of egalitarianism and meritocracy. Thus the repudiation of any kind of inequality or unfairness itself becomes a key part of the labouring subjectivity required –one that is organised around individualism and entrepreneurialism and creativity, and requires the elision of broader structural inequalities in favour of an emphasis on working hard and working on the self. In this way rather than seeing the myth of egalitarianism as paradoxical in relation to workplaces that far from live up to such ideals, it becomes possible that contemporary labouring conditions in the CCI demand the unspeakability of sexism (and of racism and perhaps other structural patterns of discrimination too). Without this, the neoliberal mythology would be punctured and perhaps also the speaker's intelligibility as an entrepreneurial subject/cultural worker. Thus the myth of equality and diversity becomes part of the very mechanism through which inequality is, in fact, reproduced.

Conclusion: on not saying the 'S' word

In order to understand gender inequalities in the cultural and creative industries it is necessary to understand the ways in which contemporary work is changing, the postfeminization of culture, and the shifting neoliberal and entrepreneurial subjectivities required to survive and flourish in the current moment. In this paper I have located persistent gender (and other) inequalities in relation to three features of contemporary capitalism. First, the new forms of work and new labouring subjectivities developing rapidly, in which the CCI are at the forefront. Second, the dynamism of contemporary sexism as it mutates in postfeminist

climate and the new forms that sexism takes in these 'cool', informal, 'Bohemian' workplaces. Finally, the seeming paradox of a profound belief in and attachment to equality and diversity in work organizations that remain dominated by men, white people and the middle classes, particularly at senior levels.

It is both striking and depressing that we are witnessing an intensification and worsening of gender inequality in the CCI in parallel with the erosion or disenfranchisement of a critical language for engaging with inequality, indeed, at a moment when we are repeatedly told that all the battles have been won, that the need for feminism resides in the past. Subtle yet virulent forms of sexism are becoming entrenched in 'creative' workplace cultures at precisely the moment when a critical vocabulary – let alone a political movement – for contesting them is being eroded and rendered unspeakable. As I have tried to argue, however, this may not be the paradox it first appears, but rather the attachment to the myth of equality may be one of the key mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced. The challenge is how to 'interrupt' and resist this dynamic, located as it is not in mere stereotypes but in the very labouring subjectivities needed to survive in the brave new, decidedly unequal, world of cultural work.

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ⁱ In 1999-2000 I conducted research on digital artists and new media workers in six European countries: Ireland, Germany, Spain,

ⁱⁱ This formulation is found in their call for papers for a stream on cultural work at the Gender Work and Organisation conference June 2010 see

www.wiley.com/.../Call-for-papers-GWO2010-Creative-Industries.doc