

Producing Television and Reproducing Gender

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Abstract

In a case study of Irish television, gendered production processes are created through the channeling of women and men into different types of roles where they receive differential rewards and opportunities from their work. Gender also impacts in complex ways on the routines of production, where it shapes the perspective applied to media content and expectations regarding the behavior of staff. Gendered production routines and role allocations become embedded over time and eventually form a gendered culture of television production that prohibits Irish women's equal participation. Despite the reproduction of gendered work roles, routines, and cultures, women offer evidence of sustainable and valued careers in production. However, women's adaptations to the constraints of gendered work processes and practices are founded on a neoliberal and postfeminist sensibility that denies the gendered nature of their work and refers responsibility for survival in the industry onto the individual worker, who in turn denies the relevance of gender to their careers.

Keywords

gender, roles, routines, culture, production, creative labor

Introduction

This article examines the work processes, practices, and culture through which a post-feminist and neoliberal gendered work context is created and maintained in Irish television production. The gendering of the production process occurs through the channeling of women and men into different types of roles where they receive differential rewards and opportunities from their work. Gender also impacts in complex

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ways on the routines of television production, where it shapes the perspective applied to content and expectations regarding the behavior of staff. Gendered production routines and role allocations become embedded over time and eventually form a gendered culture of television production that prohibits women's equal participation in the Irish industry and which serves to discipline and regulate female subjects. Despite their awareness of patterns of gendered work roles, routines, and cultures, women nonetheless articulate evidence of sustainable and valued careers in television, but they do not generally challenge the status quo in gendered terms. This study illustrates Gill and Scharff's (2013, 7) key point, "Could it be that neoliberalism is *always already gendered*, and that women are constructed as its ideal subjects?" Circumscribed by neoliberal and postfeminist subjectivities, Irish women television workers do not articulate work inequalities in terms of gender.

The "redundancy" of gender is important to understand because, as Gill (2002, 85) succinctly puts it, "What is not fully clear—and needs more study—is why a discourse (like those of feminisms) which makes gender visible is not deployed by the majority of the women?" While interviewees in the Irish television industry understand that gender is a feature that determines their working lives, they claim that they cannot challenge the gender bias they face because they rely on reputation and social connections to sustain their careers. The women cannot make claims on the grounds of gender bias because in postfeminist Irish society, such claims, regarding the relevance of gender to the workplace, are widely dismissed. Moreover, in a neoliberal society, the primacy of the individual to generate successful work and career outcomes is paramount. Therefore, any issues with "failure" at work become the responsibility of the individual worker rather than that of the organization or Irish society more broadly.

Because media workers function in this particular work context, their self-regulating practices mean that they fail to recognize their own subordination to work as anything other than an intrinsic feature of their creative labor. It is not that Irish television workers entirely fail to understand the power of capital to which they are subjected, nor do they fail to see their compliance within an exigent work regime, rather it is the case that the disciplining power of reputation and the social dimension of working relationships at an individual level far outweigh any capacity of individual workers to address their own precarity, as well as any gender bias that they endure. It is deemed more viable by the workers to be the perfect disciplined subjects, to self-regulate, and deny gendered practices than to generate discussion of the structural problems of gendered work in the Irish television industry. As one of the respondents put it, "You just can't be seen to make trouble, or you really won't work again" (Respondent P).

Television Production Work and Gender

A significant consequence of transformations in advanced capitalism has been the shift toward neoliberalism, which "creates policies and practices that embody the enterprising and constantly strategizing entrepreneur . . . [as] the ideal citizen" (Apple 2001, 196) Such transformations occur in new and old media industries in the form of increased tendencies toward individualization of risk, self-government, and

transference of responsibility for work onto the individual worker (Gill 2002; Gill and Pratt 2008; Perrons 2003). Feminist writers propose that media work is also characterized by a number of patterns of gender inequality that relate to informality, autonomy, and flexibility (Banks and Milestone 2011; Gill 2002). Gill (2002, 82), for instance, argues that gender impacts through differentiations in educational advantages, varied access to entry routes and contracts, a gender pay gap, and trends toward casual status for women. These same issues are very evident in Irish television production where women experience increasing informalization of the sector, a gendered work culture, and highly gendered employment networks that undermine women's progress in the industry (Allen et al. 2013; Blair 2001; Christopherson 2008; Ursell 2000).

As well as neoliberal and gendered trends in media production, Gill's (2002) work also names postfeminism as a further factor working against women achieving equality. Gill (2007, 147) describes it as a distinctive sensibility,

made up of a number of interrelated themes. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline; a focus on individualism; choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference.

Circumscribed by this sensibility, Irish women television workers are reluctant to understand their experiences of inequality as having anything to do with gender and are "caught" within a discourse that has the effect of individualizing their experiences, "making it difficult for them to use such experiences as a basis for solidarity or change" (Gill 2002, 84–85). Despite clear evidence of patterns of gendered career outcomes, interviewees frequently denied the impact of gender on their working lives. As McRobbie (2004, 260) puts it, "the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique." For Gill (2008, 432), the tension between neoliberalism and postfeminism is central to understanding contemporary media culture and finds significant application in the context of Irish television production; yet there is a dearth of understanding of how "the social or cultural 'gets inside' and transforms and reshapes our relationships to ourselves and others."

With the exception of Grindstaff (2002) and Banks (in Mayer et al. 2009), there is relatively little explicit connection made between creative labor practices and female subjectivity or agentic interpretations of the lived realities of media work. Mayer (2011) directly addresses this gap by examining how media work implicitly constructs identities in and through labor. Mayer (2011, 18–19) notes that female identified work supports labor relations, but this work "appears otherwise" as a natural form of production, whereas, simultaneously, capitalism profits from invisible inputs into formal production markets, organized on a principle of precarity. Mayer (2011, 19) describes the conjuncture of invisible labors and identity constructions and claims, firstly, that new relationships emerge between the material and symbolic dimensions of labor, opening new possibilities for identities. Secondly, the emergent subjectivities that capitalism now demands from its laborers continue to draw on the residual identities

that have corresponded to invisible labor in the past (Mayer 2011, 20). Mayer (2011, 21) notes, thirdly, that the role of worker's agency is relevant to how labor is articulated along gender lines. The latter two points, in particular, will prove key to understanding the findings from this analysis of the Irish context, described in further detail below.

Whereas Mayer addresses the links between gendered labor and identity, there still remains the question of the possibility, or indeed more pointedly in the Irish case, the impossibility of resistance to capitalist control and regulation of labor identities. Gill and Pratt (2008, 19) contend that subjectivity is always mediated by the meanings that people give to their experience and that this mediation does not exist outside of culture. It is in these mediated meanings that the accounts of refusal and/or compliance of subjectivities are to be found. In the analysis that follows below, the processes, practices, and culture that are central to the gendering of television production in Ireland are linked to the articulation of female worker's subjective identities on gendered lines. Their compliance with and/or refusals of these processes that gender the roles, routines, and culture of their work are outlined to give a clearer picture of the reasons for the absence of any potential feminist politics of Irish television labor.

Method

Data were collected in 2013 through semistructured interviews, with a purposive, snowball sample of twenty women who worked in Irish television production. Media workers were defined quite broadly to include an elite of creative producers, as well as middle-ranking operatives and low status administrative workers, across multiple genres of feature, news, children's, daytime, and talk programs. Gendering was defined in terms of "practices, that are perceived, interpreted and/or intended as about gender" and which contribute to the social institutionalization of gender (Yancey Martin 2003, 362). The sample was collated initially through preliminary interviews with informants who were personal contacts; thereafter, other potential respondents were named, and these avenues were subsequently pursued in further interviews. All information that could identify any of the individuals described in the study was removed or changed, apart from loose job descriptions. The women were all successful in conducting various types of work across a number of grades within the Irish television production industry for a minimum of five years.

Ireland is a particularly interesting case study of the gendering of television production work, because its record on gender equality in media work is so poor, relative to other European states. Television in Ireland began in 1961 and "both reflected and coincided with the opening up of Irish society to economic and cultural influences from abroad" (O'Connor 2012, 571). Currently, the broadcast sector has two dual-funded, public service broadcasters, RTÉ and the Irish language station TG4, and one commercial broadcaster TV3. Over 150 small- to medium-sized independent screen production companies are active in the industry. The communications industry in Ireland employs approximately 70,000 people, but women comprise only 30 percent

of that workforce (Eurostat 2013). Ireland lags behind the European average of 44 percent female employment in programming and broadcasting (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE] 2013, 16). Moreover, Irish women constitute only 12 percent of decision makers in media organizations, compared with a European average of 32 percent (EIGE 2013, 31).

Although the findings relate to the specifics of the Irish case, they offer insights into the qualitative nature of work in television production more broadly, as perceived by women employed in the sector. Also, the findings can shed light on the manner in which work is gendered in other sectors of creative labor, as well as on the ways in which women experience all types of work through the prism of gendering processes and practices. Moreover, the Irish findings are relevant to other European Union (EU) states, where women media workers are similarly underrepresented in decision-making roles, in particular Italy, Malta, and Greece. In addition, Ireland is not unrepresentative of European broadcasting insofar as it shares the typical structures of the European industry, albeit on a smaller scale. Irish women's media work is, thus, a specific case of persistent patterns of inequality in terms of underrepresentation of women that clearly illustrates the "workings of postfeminism in a neoliberal Ireland" (Sexton 2012, 211).

The Gendering of Production Roles

In Irish television production, gendered identity was intrinsically linked to labor practices through the allocation of roles within the production process. This was the case in various genres of program, across numerous department types, and varied with the status of work concerned. In traditionally male-dominated operations departments, traditional, cultural interpretations of what were considered "feminine" or "masculine" influenced role allocation. A female camera operator noted,

It's a very male-dominated industry and very clearly split. You'd never see male production assistants, and rarely see female directors; the roles are very clearly defined . . . as a camera-operator, I had to be "one of the lads" to fit in. (Respondent J)

A coordinator agreed, explaining, "A lot of it has to do with physical strength; trainees carry a lot of equipment, and they're reluctant to hire women because of the strength" (Respondent F). Sometimes, the women's experience of the gendering of roles was positive. "On shoots, I often encountered positive remarks about how great it is to see a female camera operator" (Respondent G). But, at other times, the gendering of roles was a clear barrier to women accessing work in operations roles, such as directing. A successful female director, with an impressive track record, noted,

I interviewed for a really nice drama, and one of the interviewers said, "we really should have a woman direct this," and it really struck me that he was looking at me and seeing a woman, not seeing my work . . . it's been an obstacle and that's difficult . . . It's been a huge impediment to my career. (Respondent B)

Gender was also patterned differently across high and low status roles. Women were disproportionately dominant in low status administrative work, while “Men are still dominant in higher management” (Respondent Q). A series producer estimated that “Roughly 10 percent at the junior administrative level is male” (Respondent D). For some workers, this created a self-fulfilling “natural” expectation that women were more inclined to enter the industry through low status administrative roles, but, equally, the gendering of this work potentially excluded men.

I do think there is a presumption that women will do the low status work, but perhaps some men would like to do this kind of work as it is an “in” to better roles, but they don’t get the chance, as it’s usually the preserve of young females. (Respondent Q)

One series producer commented on how men more usually took runner jobs as entry routes, from which they could progress faster by taking “a different approach—they tend to be risk takers and so will opt to offer their services as DV camera operator and such like, rather than going in at lower administrative levels” (Respondent D). The cultural entanglement of masculinity with risk taking benefited male employees, as the women observed that the price to be paid if risk did not pay off seemed to be lower for men than it was for women. One series producer noted “I think men’s mistakes are forgiven more easily. Women’s career progression is damaged if they are part of a program that is not a success” (Respondent D). The gendered pattern surrounding risk and reward in labor practices created a vicious cycle for women who took lower risk roles but suffered a slower career progression as a result, while men were punished less if they took higher risk roles and failed.

There was unanimous consensus among the women interviewed that production roles were also clearly gendered at higher status levels. Male workers disproportionately held senior management and decision-making roles. “In media work, more men than women seem to have senior decision-making roles. Fewer women work as executive producers” (Respondent P). One series producer commented “Gender balance all changes at the level above me—that is, management where men dominate” (Respondent D). Another journalist noted,

I think because men are more likely to be program editors or news correspondents, they formally hold more power than women . . . It’s also important to note that men are more likely to be in managerial positions; therefore, if a query about a production is pushed up the line, it is usually a man who has the last say. (Respondent H)

This absence of women from senior positions “may highlight for women their limited mobility and reinforce their lower status as women, [which] helps to shape the meaning and significance women attached to being female” in the workplace (Ely 1994, 213).

Some woman argued that because men dominated decision-making roles, it was more difficult for women to access those same key roles. One journalist put it succinctly, “Because the people at the top are men . . . they have a narrow view perhaps

of women and what they are capable of" (Respondent I). A director explained how masculinity, risk, status, and career progress were bundled together in the gendered perspectives of funders and commissioners, which impacted on the status of roles that women achieved in television production:

When you give creative control of something, you take a risk, and it's about who you trust, who is responsible enough, grown up enough, mature, able to manage the money, able to manage the talent, who can you trust with a project, and I don't think it's conscious. I think it becomes about recruiting in your own image, so it's "*he* looks trustworthy 'cause *he* looks like me, and I remember feeling and looking like him, so I know I can trust him." (Respondent B)

In this way, "gender identity may be seen as a force shaping and maintaining work structures, but also a consequence of established positions" (de Bruin and Ross 2004, 7).

It does not follow, however, that television production can be characterized as a simple gendered binary of men invariably reproducing privilege. Many of the women interviewed were successful in news genres, in operations roles, and in high status positions. Some, in fact, actively co-opted naturalized gender conceptions to their own end, to varying degrees and with varying levels of comfort in so doing. As one camera operator observed, "people aren't as intimidated by you because you're female" (Respondent G). Another explained, "They call me the one with the sharp elbows because in a camera scrum, I squeeze in and pop up in front, but you get away with it because you can use being female to your advantage" (Respondent C). Other times, women adapted to the gendered nature of roles, while remaining conscious that they were compromised in so doing. "Women in the media often have to either become, or pretend to become, more masculine in the way they negotiate their work . . . women have to fit a mold that may well not suit who they are as people" (Respondent I).

The gendering of roles was a subtle structural principle enacted in the labor practices of a community of workers, both men and women, to reproduce traditional ideas about gender and work and about women's roles in success, risk, reward, and capability within that work. As one director put it, "It's not a man-woman thing per se . . . it's a community of people who don't perceive women to be trustworthy, or a safe bet" (Respondent B). This underlying sense of women media workers as unsafe, as outliers, or not quite equivalent to the masculine "norm," was evident in role allocation practices but also embedded in the routines of television production. On numerous occasions, women experienced the routines of production, in the forms of assignment allocation, angles or perspectives applied to content, and the dynamics of teamwork, differently from men. However, the key issue here for understanding the gendering of labor practices is that women were expected to constitute the perfect neoliberal, self-disciplining, and postfeminist subjects by complying with male "normativity." Through role allocation practices and routines of production, women were positioned as outliers who had to adapt and conform to the male-dominated practices that remained normative and unquestioned.

Gender and Routines of Production

Observing the overall perspective of the media as it was applied in editorial meetings, some respondents concurred with de Bruin and Ross's (2004, 53) claim that:

The dominant point of view in the media was male, regardless of how many women attended meetings as senior editors. This male point of view refers especially to a vision of life (therefore, also of information) where public and private spheres are completely separated, and the relevant things are the ones that take place in the public arena.

One journalist observed that gendering evident in various social spheres, such as politics, economics, and education, was reproduced in production meetings and that the nature of gender relations in society more broadly were firmly embedded in media workers' perspectives and practices,

I find that men are more likely to be correspondents covering politics, business, or economics . . . I think part of the reason why men cover those subjects and women cover topics considered "soft," like health and education, is because men and women are more likely to work in those respective areas (i.e., there are more male politicians, and there are more female teachers) . . . However, [hard] stories are also rated more highly in terms of news value, and that gives the impression that stories covered by men are more prestigious. (Respondent H)

These observations do not argue for a complete dichotomization in terms of female and male journalism but the trend toward women being relegated to "soft" content meant that

Problems arise when the interests of male and female audiences are pigeonholed, so that editors believe women are more interested in "soft/emotional" issues, when in fact women may be more interested in the "hard/prestigious" issues if they were covered by women. (Respondent H)

Women's "different" take on hard issues was not accommodated by labor practices that facilitated women's presentation of those types of issues. Instead, there was a prevailing presumption that female audience's interests lay in soft issues, which became a barrier to women media workers' accessing "hard" and more prestigious assignments, thereby setting off a vicious cycle perpetuating the male-hard-female-soft "rule" of media production. One presenter was clear that gender had an impact very centrally on the work she was assigned to cover, on a daytime magazine program:

Because I was a woman, I was given items on fashion, flower arranging, cooking etc. to present . . . I was given the mundane, anemic, brain-numbing items to present on the live shows . . . All "serious, intellectual" items, or anything to do with current affairs or sport, was automatically given to the male members of the team to present. (Respondent I)

Similarly, for a film director, her work was determined by her gender:

I've seen that there's a kind of whole area of storytelling that doesn't seem to be accessible to female directors, because they don't seem to be seen to have access to their full humanity because of how women are seen. The big expensive movies . . . have never had a female writer or director, because these are male worlds, and there's a fear that you're not going to get full humanity if you're a female director. (Respondent B)

The gendering of the production team was also enacted physically according to traditional cultural notions of rewarding particular types of femininities. One presenter noted, "When I conformed to the way they wanted women to look on air . . . wore a certain type of clothes . . . maintained a certain weight and got the sleek bob haircut, I was offered more high profile work on air." (Respondent I). Gender also had an impact on behavior; women were expected in some cases to conform to certain stereotypical behaviors, most notably around the question of workplace self-promotion. One producer set the cultural context well: "I'm not sure Irish people are good at self-promotion, and it is not kindly viewed by others" (Respondent Q).

Regarding women self-promoting, a journalist commented: "In my experience, ambitious women are labelled as such, and it's not necessarily meant as a compliment. If a woman doesn't have children and is ambitious, I think she's seen as even more of a threat to competitive coworkers" (Respondent H). A director was equally clear on the negativity surrounding women's self-promotion in the workplace:

It's not cool for women to do it, [and] when you blow your own trumpet, as a woman, the feedback is poor. It's difficult to find a middle ground where you're doing the good work, you say you're doing the work, but you're not perceived as a harridan or as bossy. (Respondent B)

The outcome of the gendering of behavior was that women were less likely to self-promote—"most women I know don't tend to do much of it" (Respondent D)—with the obvious documented consequences of slower career progression.

Just as Mayer (2011, 18–19) shows that female identified work supports labor relations, but is rendered invisible as a natural form of production, interviewees agreed that, although not explicitly assigned to them, they nonetheless did a lot of the emotional work in productions, which was often dismissed as "background" work. Hochschild (1983) describes emotional labor as a form of work focused on inducing the right feeling in others, which is a necessary component of television program making. Much as Guerrier et al. (2009, 494) found in the Information Technology (IT) sector, there was "considerable evidence that gendered identities at work were being constructed in traditional ways drawing on women's perceived 'soft skills.'" The allocation of this type of work specifically to women usually centered on relationship building, which was crucial to the production process, but largely invisible to the team. One series producer observed,

I think women tend to do more cajoling and encouraging to get people to do their bit to get the program to air. Men tend to be more straightforward and less considerate of others—but they take a simpler approach, which is also effective in some cases. They do operate differently. (Respondent D)

Because of the invisibility of this emotional work, much of it was taken for granted and undervalued by the organization and so did not contribute to the advancement of women's careers. One worker commented, "People skills are underestimated in media and women have them" (Respondent P). Another presenter was more emphatic in arguing that emotional labor was not merely invisible but actually perceived as negative: "Emotion, caring about items or guests, was perceived as a weakness" (Respondent I). In this way, women were caught in a bind of being expected to do indispensable labor that was simultaneously unvalued or invisible and which served to free men from the requirement to do that part of production work. One journalist concluded wryly, "Often men don't realize that there is any emotional labor to be done" (Respondent H).

One woman was particularly clear that women needed to actively reject emotional labor, and the responsibility it carried: "Women worry about what people think, men don't care, we need to toughen up" (Respondent O). However, a simple solution such as "toughening up" belies the systemic nature of the gendering of the labor process, which was evident in the allocation of invisible work to women whereas the career benefits that should accrue from the conduct of this labor were nullified, all in the context of a postfeminist absence of gender as a relevant category for interpreting this practice. This pattern of systemic bias working through almost invisible, normalized cultural practices was evident in the broader culture of television production.

Work Culture and Gender

Women in television production in Ireland are expected to constitute the perfect neoliberal subject by subscribing to traditionally masculine practices of long working hours, a rigid separation of career and life, and a lack of workplace flexibility. For most of the women interviewed, long working days, antisocial hours, and weekend work were very normal. One woman commented,

I worked on rolling contracts starting at 4:00 p.m. I wanted to work in news and with presenters it's very competitive, so you have to be available . . . I was in work until 2:00 a.m. for six and sometimes seven days a week. (Respondent O)

Television work demanded a level of availability that was often impossible for women to give because they were also engaged with family responsibilities. Women were frequently responsible for the "second shift" (Hochschild and Machung 1990) of labor performed at home in addition to the paid work performed in the formal sector. In Ireland, women do 72 percent of all care work (National Women's Council of Ireland 2009).

My working days were like two days in one; I'd be up early at 5 or 6 to write . . . and I'd finish sorting out school uniforms and the like at 11 at night . . . the problem for women isn't just that they have to do the media work; it's also that they have to do everything else . . . Sometimes, I think that women would be better off leaving, because then at least they'd only have one job to do, not two, which is mad . . . I know. (Respondent M)

Some women adapted to the intensity by creating alternative, albeit tentative work arrangements. "I work a four-day week, which my genre head is aware of but doesn't really like. However, she turns a blind eye." (Respondent D). Flexibility was an option mainly just for women with proven track records and mostly those working for large broadcasters. For most workers, a strong culture of competition to get and keep work, as well as an understanding that every worker was replaceable, meant that oftentimes women did not seek to rearrange their work practices. In highly neoliberal terms, subjects noted "You dare not complain or suggest you couldn't do all the work; that meant that someone else would do it" (Respondent M). This was very much the case for freelancers:

You are constantly proving yourself. You are only as good as your last program. This means giving 110 percent all the time, not taking any time off etc. It is my experience that this is easier for men, as they tend to carry a lighter childcare burden. However, the freelance world is tough for both. (Respondent D)

The pressure to perform, to prove worth, or to risk replacement, was felt even by those who were relatively well established in their careers,

The more experience you have means you're more expensive, and companies are reluctant to hire you because they can get some slick young thing from college who'll do a crappier job, but for half the money, and also make the bosses feel like they're masters of the universe. (Respondent L)

Media work is demanding and intense, for both men and women. However, inflexibility and divisions between work and life responsibilities impact more severely on women, who have a disproportionate care burden. In a highly postfeminist and neoliberal vein, the industry fails to acknowledge women's care responsibilities, and women were expected to subscribe absolutely to the traditionally masculine norm of complete availability while rendering invisible their other commitments to care work. Despite the inequalities embedded in role allocation practices, in routines of production and in the wider television work culture, women claimed to find ways of successfully co-opting and inhabiting the industry. While the interviewees were frequently positive in their accounts of television production work, there is evidence of an underlying correspondence with self-responsible postfeminist subjectivity that challenges the positivity of the women's claims.

Positive Appropriations and/or Postfeminist Denials

Many women offered evidence of the various pragmatic ways they found to inhabit the industry, and the vast majority of interviewees spoke about the pleasure they derived

from working in media. Women commented on the personal fulfillment and rewards that they received for their work. “Essentially, I love the work I am doing, and I don’t want to give that up” (Respondent G). A studio producer said, “I was doing live shows, and it was wonderful; I really love working there” (Respondent A). Many women spoke of the value of the relational aspect of their work. A camera operator noted, “Working with the lads was never any hassle, I never felt uncomfortable, I never got abuse or stick or anything, I worked with them for twelve years; they were like family” (Respondent C). Many of the women saw their working lives as embedded in a close-knit community of like-minded people:

The team that I worked with were very strong, very independent women, so they were a great education, a great team for me to be around, in terms of everything, in terms of how to deal with people, how to brush people aside; they were a great bar for me to aspire to. . . (Respondent F).

In light of how much they enjoyed their work, many of the women had devised pragmatic responses to the practical challenges that arose from the gendered and inflexible nature of their industry, while adopting a postfeminist position of denying the relevance of gender to their careers.

Adaptations to the inflexibility of the sector involved neoliberal self-disciplining, with women taking control of their own schedules and routines. One producer reorganized her working week around a four-day week:

I am given good flexibility and control my own time. That is the way I run my team as well . . . I work a four-day week—I have a fantastic producer working with me, who also works four days—but the other four, and this is what makes the arrangement work. (Respondent D)

In another instance, a presenter chose to work intensely, but in seasonal bursts rather than all year round. “I could keep the long days going because my work was contract driven and short term . . . there would be a break after a season” (Respondent M). However, she acknowledged that the downside of compromising on working full-time was that her career progress was bound to be slower.

These positive articulations of women’s media work were challenged, however, by direct experiences of gender bias. In situations of gender bias, interviewees oftentimes adapted their own behaviors rather than directly challenge bias in a confrontational manner. A series producer commented,

I did run into problems with camera or sound operators giving me a bit of lip, and they probably wouldn’t have said those things to men. I do think men get away with a bit more, but you learn very quickly to be hardened to that, and the only way to answer that is to do a really good job, and then you don’t get lip from anyone. (Respondent A)

Rather than demand compromises in the intensity of work-life commitments, some of the women simply “got on” with the job at hand and juggled work and home as best they could. A series producer noted,

I felt under huge pressure to be in studio early, which was quite tricky because there were two children to get out the door . . . I always worked right through lunch, and then I'd try to get away about 4:30 or 4:45 to be ahead of traffic to collect children . . . I was loving my job but it was getting tougher and tougher. (Respondent A)

Again there was a postfeminist approach to denying gender and consequently no push-back on the industry to accommodate the women's needs for flexibility. Ultimately, when the intensity of juggling home and work got too much, this series producer responded by taking a leave of absence from work. She later extended the leave, then left her job, and eventually reentered the industry four years later as a freelance studio director. The change in direction within the industry was yet another adaptation made on her part to better generate a sustainable work-life balance, but one that again made no demand on the industry for improved equality. She notes, "There are certain jobs that are all or nothing, and series producer or exec producer are all or nothing jobs. There are other jobs that are more flexible and family friendly; [studio] directing is one of them" (Respondent A). Women constituted the perfect neoliberal worker by adapting to the demands of television production, by reorganizing their workdays and weeks, by making their work seasonal, by taking leaves of absence, or even by changing direction within the sector, but crucially their postfeminist subjectivities disallowed any public claim that the challenges were gender specific, and in truly neoliberal fashion, they did not demand that the industry change to accommodate women's competing life and work realities.

When not making claims about gender neutrality, or coping with or adapting to the neoliberal exigencies of television production, women seemed fatalistic about the direction the industry was taking and that there might not ultimately be a place for women in it. As a presenter commented,

Journalism is gone very "yellow-pack" . . . young people are working almost full-time and not being paid a penny for their work, and everyone is constantly under threat that their job will be taken . . . Media, it's a terrible career . . . and I'm really beginning to wonder, can women really do it? (Respondent M)

Women were not optimistic about their future in industry:

I think it's very important that there's a women's voice, a women's thinking, and a woman's mindset across all media . . . but it's not an easy thing to juggle . . . and as things get tighter, and personnel gets cut back even further, it's going to make that even more difficult. (Respondent A)

Conclusion

Traditional gender subjectivities continue to be operationalized in Irish television production; for instance, in the manner in which roles were allocated in the production process. Women typically assume low status administrative roles whereas men assumed technical operation and higher status roles purely on the basis of tradition.

Similarly, women experienced the routines of production, in the forms of assignment allocation, angles, or perspective applied to stories and the dynamics of teamwork, differently from men. In the conduct of “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983), in the sense of inducing the right feeling in others, which is a necessary component of program making, traditional ideas of “natural” gender divisions were very evident with this work largely consigned to female workers. But as Guy and Newman (2004) note, these feminized work tasks are not a part of formal job descriptions or performance evaluations and so went unrewarded as part of the production process while their gendered nature was denied in postfeminist fashion. The media work culture observed traditionally masculine practices of long working hours, retained a rigid separation of career and life, and endured a lack of workplace flexibility but in so doing, gender was obscured as a category relevant to the labor process, and women did not connect their agency as workers to their gender subjectivity. Crucially, while labor and identity were mutually constitutive, as Mayer (2011) describes, there was little articulation of a gendered connection between these two concepts on the part of the Irish women interviewed.

This is hardly a surprising finding because to actively challenge the gendered aspects of the production process was impossible for these women, for a number of reasons. First, because a postfeminist sensibility predominated whereby the gendering of labor practices was denied, or rendered invisible by the industry and even by the women who suffered their impacts directly. Second, for those women who were cognizant of the existence of gender bias, they were also clear on the normative neoliberal expectation of how that bias was to be addressed—by women adapting to and coping with the normative-masculine routines of production, role allocations, and work cultures, rather than by risking exclusion from their vital networks by asking for change within the industry. Third, the atomizing effect of neoliberal individualization in the workplace left the women with little resource to group solidarity as a mechanism to begin to articulate and address gender bias.

Despite evidence of clear patterns of gendering in Irish television production, there was little critical engagement with gender as a feature of creative labor. Instead, a neoliberal and postfeminist form of self-regulation and self-blame, with the transference of risk and responsibility onto the individual worker to change, adapt, cope, or leave, predominated. The sense of risk and precarity that attaches to the neoliberal media worker and the postfeminist denial of the relevance of gender were articulated in the women’s fear of suffering reputational damage as a consequence of challenging the status quo. As one of the respondents put it, in short, “You can’t say anything about gender or bias because you need to work with these people again, so you’re really caught” (Respondent P). This fatalism is unsurprising considering the status of women in Irish media production, where they constitute a minority of only 30 percent of the workforce (Eurostat 2013) and are present in only 12 percent of decision-making roles (EIGE 2013). The impact of economic recession on Irish labor markets from peak to trough led to the destruction of 15.2 percent of jobs (O’Farrell 2013, 2) and created a national sense of the precariousness of work. These trends ensure that women’s marginalization in television production heightens to a sense of “being disposable” (Gill

2014, 5). In the context of the current socioeconomy of Irish television production, the fatalism of the women workers interviewed and their reluctance to articulate gender as a central dimension of their experience of work is understandable and is a key explanatory factor both in perpetuating gender inequality and in the silencing of any possible resistance.

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