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Creative industries' new entrants as equality, diversity and inclusion change agents?

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how new entrants to the Creative Industries view the challenge of achieving equality, diversity and inclusion in the sector. The research adopts a case study approach based on a snowball sample and interviews with 21 new entrants to media work. All were graduates of the same media degree programme and all were based in Ireland and worked in the audio-visual sector, PR, communications, marketing, content creation or advertising, as well as in media-related roles in non-media organisations and companies. The key findings are that new entrants do see the need for EDI initiatives in creative industries. However, they frame EDI interventions in terms of the needs of individuals. Because of their new entrant status they do not see themselves as being in a strong position to advocate for equality, diversity and inclusion in creative industries and so do not view themselves as change agents.

KEYWORDS

Equality; diversity; inclusion; new entrants; creative industries

Introduction

The Creative Industries (CIs) are often discussed in media debate and public discourse and are increasingly positioned as positive contributors to economic and cultural growth and success. CIs insist on the need for an available and skilled workforce ready to contribute to and sustain the creative economy but a key problem is the exclusion of some workers on the basis of their social identity. This is problematic because the CIs reflect back to us our culture, social values and beliefs. It matters who gets to participate in cultural production because all members of society need to be able to see themselves reflected in those productions. That there is inequality and exclusion in CIs is clear. In Ireland women are under-represented in film work between 2011 and 2017 women comprised only 21% of screenwriters and 17% of directors (Screen Ireland, 2019). A recent study of 1300 arts workers in Ireland found gendered patterns of bullying and harassment across many creative and cultural sectors (*Speak Up: A Call for Change*, 2021).

Fortunately there is agreement in Irish society that these inequalities should be addressed (O'Brien, 2019). Much activism in the last number of years has focused on the question of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in CIs. In defining EDI Ozbilgin (2009, p. 2) notes Equality provides a base for a comparative reading of relations of power; diversity draws attention to multiplicity and a variety of lived experiences and

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categories of stratification in society; and inclusion encompasses the strategic dimension of investigating interventions that address power imbalances in workplaces' quoted in Ozimek (2020, p. 12). Oswick and Noon (2014) offer further nuance by noting that EDI are temporal-based political constructions that are subject to neoliberal and business influences, which can generate backlash against social groups (2020, p. 13) as well as generating a "diversity industry" (Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020).

Notwithstanding the need to interrogate how EDI is framed and researched, a further limitation of the field is that verry little research has considered how new entrants to the sector view the challenge of achieving EDI in CIs and it is to that question that this paper is addressed. This question matters because studies often focus on industry leaders as sources of change (Kerrigan et al., 2021) but rarely is a grass roots or bottom-up approach to EDI considered. New generations of workers are commonly presumed to be less conservative than long-term incumbents but this paper probes whether this is really the case. It examines media workers as a subset of creative workers and explores whether they think EDI matters in media work. It explores how they view the promotion of EDI in their workplaces and asks if they see themselves as a new generation of workers with an agenda for change. Our findings suggest that, while new entrants show an awareness of inequality, lack of diversity and discrimination in creative workplaces, their responses to this exhibit neoliberalised worker subjectivities. Individual and informal responses to discrimination are favoured above collective or formal ones. This we read as a response to new entrants' vulnerability and precariousness in media work. They feel the weight of reputational damage or career impediment as a consequence of action taken against discrimination.

Review of literature

Research on CIs has largely revealed that the sector is characterised by "bad work". Scholarship has established that the CIs are informalised, unequal and exploitative (Banks et al., 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Wreyford et al., 2021). The worker is subject to the needs of the industries in which market fluctuations and uncertainty are passed directly to the individual self-employed worker (Taylor & Littleton, 2013, p. 157). Neoliberal individualisation has resulted in workers internalising all risk and responsibility for their working lives (McRobbie, 2016, Gill & Scharff, 2011). Insecure casualised and intermittent employment has left workers with few social protections (Gill, 2010) and has left many suffering "anxiety, chronic stress and poor physical health" (Allen, 2020, p. 84).

The problematic character of creative work as "bad" is further underscored by the sector revealing numerous inequalities based on social identity (Banks, 2017; Nwonka, 2015; Oakley, 2013; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). A variety of scholars have documented the inequalities derived from class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, family status and abilities which "further complicate and extend privilege and inequality" (Finkel et al., 2017, p. 282; Crenshaw, 1989). Other scholars have established that CI work is characterised by gender (Conor et al., 2015), class (Dent, 2017) and racial (Nwonka, 2020) inequalities and by discriminations on the bases of sexuality (Kerrigan, 2020) disability (Smith et al., 2021, p. 29) and family status (O'Brien & Liddy, 2021). These discriminations are often subtle and insidious and are connected to broader structural and systemic issues in the CIs (O' Brien & Kerrigan, 2020). As Brook, O' Brien & Taylor note "Who produces culture reflects social

inequality. The workforce in cultural occupations and cultural industries is highly unequal"(2020, p. 2).

Despite this reality, CIs do not suffer from a lack of willing entrants to the sector. In the Irish and other national contexts numerous third level educational programmes offer means through which aspiring workers can position themselves for entry to creative work. Over 1100 people have graduated such programmes in Ireland in recent years (HEA, 2018). Moreover, many of these programmes directly address the difficulties graduates will face working in sectors where precarity and vulnerability are the norm and so students are aware of the challenging and precarious nature of work in the area (O'Brien & Kerrigan, 2020, p. 55). As O'Brien & Kerrigan have detailed, accommodating flexibility and living with uncertainty in a sector that is both competitive and already over-subscribed with qualified workers were taken for granted aspects of working lives amongst graduates. Many graduates accepted over-work, unpaid internships and under-employment as the price of entry on route to becoming creative workers in the Irish context (O'Brien & Kerrigan, 2020, p. 64; Moody, 2020).

Noonan (2013) similarly confirms that graduates in Wales also understood that creative work was inherently unequal, but this did not dissuade them from aspiring to careers in the sector. Pollard (2013a, 2013b) notes that the progression of graduates from college to work is not a linear process and is neither smooth nor predictable. Haukka (2010) and Ashton (2014) both similarly observe that graduate entry into creative work is challenging, characterised by prolonged transition phases, multiple entry attempts, project-based work, dual employment to subsidise earnings and serial unpaid internships. Graduates are required to be highly intrinsically motivated and to use career management competencies to become established professionally (Bridgstock, 2005). Along with the potential for exclusion on the basis of a protected characteristic, new entrants can find CI work exclusionary in a multitude of ways.

Because CIs are understood to be inherently precarious and intrinsically unequal, the last number of years has witnessed an increase in calls from workers and organisations within the Irish media sector to improve access to work in creative production. Consequently, greater efforts have been made to promote equality amongst workers through national and organisational policy and various EDI initiatives. In Ireland since late 2015 there is evidence of numerous such initiatives. In December 2015, the Irish Film Board launched a "Gender Equality Six Point Plan" aimed at increasing women's participation in film production (IFB, 2015). This was followed by the creation of a Gender Equality and Diversity subcommittee in 2017 and additional funding for women's film through the Point of View scheme in 2018.

EDI activism in film was followed by changes in the television sector. The BAI launched its "Strategy Statement 2017–2019" in February 2017, with a focus on diversity and a mission to "promote a plurality of voices, viewpoints, outlets and sources in Irish media" (BAI, 2017, p. 1). In April 2018, the BAI launched its Gender Action Plan, committed to producing accurate data on numbers of women involved in the sector and in decision-making positions in the industry (2018, p. 3). Subsequently, the national broadcaster, RTÉ published their 2018–2022 Strategy with a Diversity and Inclusion Charter, which proposed that Diversity and Inclusion was to be fully integrated into workplace policies and practices. The sector demonstrated commitment to promoting EDI throughout the period albeit mainly focusing on a binary approach to gender, with less attention paid

to age, religion, disability, sexuality and family status as noted by Ozimek in the UK (2020, p. 3). Moreover, Irish policy has followed UK tendencies, as noted by Malik (2013) towards a neoliberalising agenda and depoliticisation. While in the Irish context the business case for diversity (Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020) is sometimes operationalised, policy also articulates a social justice orientation arguing that CIs need to fairly represent all cohorts in society (Kerrigan et al., 2021).

This paper brings together the threads of the three issues described above, creative and media industries characterised by precarious work, ambitious but potentially vulnerable new entrants and a focus on sectoral initiatives towards EDI. At the intersection of these three trends the paper seeks to examine three further inter-related questions, firstly to ask whether new entrants to creative work see exclusion and inequality as a problem in their working worlds; secondly to ask how exactly they think questions of equality and inclusion should be addressed, and thirdly to question whether they see themselves as social actors in generating change within CIs in the Irish context. Responses to these questions are outlined below but first the methodology of the study is outlined.

Materials and methods

The research adopts a qualitative interview-based approach to explore how new entrants to media work perceive social inequality in the industries in which they aspire to have careers. This study explores the experiences of 21 new entrants to media work all based in Ireland. Ethics clearance was received from the authors' University Ethics Committee. Candidates for interview were selected through a snowball sample that started with a small number of graduates of one media degree programme who referred other candidates who had graduated from the same programme in the previous four years. The media workers that formed the study included those that worked in audio-visual sectors; PR, communications, marketing, content creation and advertising; as well as in media-related roles in non-media organisations and companies. The sample included 13 female-identifying and 8 male-identifying interviewees, with a small but representative number of people of colour.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews highlight the nature of lived experience through dialogue between the interviewer and participant. This mode of data collection allows for fine grained understandings of complicated phenomena that are sometimes accepted as unproblematic. The specific questions asked of interviewees are referred to in the findings section. All interviews were transcribed and anonymised with any identifying details removed or changed. Short codes were generated and grouped into larger thematic clusters. The clusters were analysed to generate key themes, which on further analysis with reference to current literature constituted the key findings from the data. The key findings are that new entrants do see the need for EDI initiatives in CIs, however, they frame EDI interventions in terms of the needs of individuals, they do not see new entrants as advocates for EDI. Each of these findings is outlined in detail below.

Results: the need for diversity

The respondents largely saw exclusion, inequality and a lack of diversity as an issue. They felt that CIs were gendered and they reported observing and experiencing

gender bias, particularly in terms of a resistance to female leadership. Respondents also observed the lack of class, racial and ethnic diversity and were cognisant of the issues experienced by mothers working in their organisations. However, responses varied on whether to address the problem as an individual issue or as a structural one.

Opinions on diversity

Respondents were asked whether they thought some people were excluded from media work because of gender, race, class, disability or anything else. In response, new entrants recognised the need for diversity in the industry, as exemplified in one response "any media jobs that I've had there's been little to no diversity" (A) and another that "there's always a need for more diversity and equality in the sector" (U). There was a sense that media industries misrepresented the composition of the broader population: "it's not like Ireland isn't diverse at the moment" (K). The impact of a lack of diversity was seen to negatively affect people who were excluded "I think that we kind of all under-estimate how badly people are discriminated against" (N) as well as to impact negatively on the industry itself. As one respondent put it "I think the industry itself benefits from more diversity, especially in terms of the more artistic end of the industry" (F).

As well as seeing the need for change and greater inclusion, respondents were also clear that diversity was lacking in ways that related to a number of different identities. The vast majority of respondents saw gender equality as a clear issue, and most of them commented specifically on gender as a basis of exclusion. The next most remarked upon form of exclusion was that based on race, followed by class and family status, while a small number of respondents referenced sexuality and age as grounds for bias in media industries. Only one mentioned disability and none referred to ethnicity or Traveller identity as a ground for exclusion, despite a dearth of Travellers in media work. This may reflect the general attention paid to gender more than other characteristics in CIs policies and activism.

Respondents had observed gender inequality in their sectors. Most were able to articulate how this inequality manifested. They were equally clear that this gender inequality was a problem for media industries specifically. "I know for women especially in media there is this discrimination and stuff" (C) and "Particularly in the media sector I think that it's the last industry to actually look at this an issue and realise that a lot more needs to be done … " (T). Respondents observed gender bias working in a number of ways, such as bias in hiring practices, through male-dominated networking, and in the allocation of leadership roles. As one woman commented on hiring bias "I've noticed people are more likely to hire men … there are only a handful of women editors and a handful of women in VFX … I knew all the women by name because there are so few of them" (L). Another woman pointed to the challenges of networking in a male-dominated sector "It's a very old boy's industry and it's pretty much the lads all looking out for the lads and that can be very difficult for women with trying to network and secure jobs" (O). Gender was understood to impact on who had power and who held leadership positions in the sector. As one respondent put it "males are … in all the high paying jobs and like the top jobs … ." (A).

Experiences of discrimination

Reflecting studies elsewhere of women in media work (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017; Jones & Pringle, 2015) Many of the respondents who identified as female spoke to their own direct experience of sexism, gender bias and discrimination. Respondents were asked very generally whether they felt respected in their work. Many respondents were clear that media industries were gender discriminatory and this was evidenced in comments such as "I would have experienced sexism in the workplace to a certain degree … " (N) and "Personally as a woman I think we've all experienced little bits about that" (B**)**. Young women entering industry found it particularly difficult to break the stereotypes about female-appropriate work. One runner in a post-production house recounted:

> A lot of the girls that were runners, we tended to be quite good at our jobs, managing the kitchen and all the lunches and a lot of the lads were rubbish at that, but they would sit around talking to the editors and they would be the ones to get more experience and to get the assistant jobs … I found a lot of the lads were very like: "Oh, she doesn't even know how to do that" put her back in the kitchen type of vibe. (U)

Even when some respondents did work their way into leadership roles, they reported instances of push-back or rejection from other men. One woman recounted that, when leading a work project, a male journalist who was interviewing her about the project said "I don't want to speak to you, where's your boss?" (O). She believed this was both because she was young and female. This was echoed by another respondent who reported that her leadership was undermined by a male colleague and by peers:

> I was sort of taking a leadership position, but then I kind of got the vibe that I was coming across as bossy and then another guy started taking the lead … when he was doing it everyone was sort of listening to him where I felt like I was nagging people you know? (L)

Another woman reported a similar experience of men's adverse reactions to women leading "One person in particular was very kind of alpha male, when it came to potentially a woman leading the team it was not okay with him, he expected to be the person in power" (T). Other exclusionary practices included use of sexist remarks and comments. One female respondent described the lasting effect of this "someone kind of higher up had made a comment about like the way I looked … I remember that always stuck with me … there was certain people who kind of say things and get away with them" (D). Another respondent spoke of the normalisation of workplace sexism "there is a very prevalent version of discrimination, throw-away sexist comments and people just let it slide under the carpet" (H).

When asked how they responded to this bias and discrimination, interviewees described uncertainty and fatigue, despite only having worked in CIs for a few years. Some saw having more women in power as the solution: "I'd say pushing women to have leadership positions … I would say there needs to be a push for that" (B). Other women were more fatalistic about the status quo, seeing it as just something that happens "I'm a young woman and if it's like an older man trying to push me around, I'm just like it happens" (A). Some, however, had internalised a sense of responsibility for the bias and sexism (Gill, 2014). They blamed sexism on women's lack of confidence, and devalued their professionalism (Dent, 2020). As one respondent recounted "The whole lab was full of men and you just feel a bit like out of place … but it's just a

confidence thing … If you feel out of place, I think it affects your confidence" (E). At times the women struggled to "know" if what they were experiencing was really gender-based or not, they calibrated their experience as personal opinion rather than "fact". "I think that could have been a gender thing … but like again that's my own personal opinion, I don't know if that was fact or not" (L). Such a range of responses suggest that respondents were unsure of how to discuss their experiences of gender inequalities. Nonetheless, they were very clear that gender inequality was a problem for Irish media industries.

When asked if they thought it was harder for some people to get work because of gender, race, class or disability or anything else, very many of the respondents pointed to the racialised nature of the sector. "I did notice that there's only one person on the panel who is black" (H) and "The majority of people are white" (A) and "There aren't any people of colour that I work with and there's no mixed-race people either" (G). As with gender inequality respondents were clear that the absence of people of colour was a problem in the media industry.

> The workplace doesn't represent the actual racial diversity of Ireland these days. I mean Ireland is a pretty diverse country than what it was say ten years ago that's for sure and I don't feel like in any of the jobs I've worked in that's shown really. (O)

Only one respondent spoke directly to their own experience of racial bias, observing that "if you have a non-Anglicised name people are going to immediately make certain assumptions" (P). However, most respondents were unable to "explain" the absence of people of colour from the industry. While they occasionally offered solutions to gender inequality or while they could unpack some of the ways in which class identity translates into a lack of resources to do unpaid work and so excludes people, none of the respondents connected the lack of people of colour in the industry to racism in the sector or in society more broadly. Instead, there was an admission of not knowing why the industry lacked racial diversity. As one respondent put it "I don't work with anybody of colour and I don't really know why, I don't know why" (G). Another concurred "Everybody who works here is white, and everybody I worked with in the previous radio station was also white, so I don't know why" (H).

Perceptions of structural bias

Respondents were more confident in identifying structural issues that resulted in marginalisation and exclusion of other groups such as mothers and working-class new entrants. When asked about discrimination on the basis of family status, respondents pointed to various structures and practices of media work that made it difficult for those with caring responsibilities or those with little financial support to enter the sector and sustain careers. Even though none of the respondents stated that they had caring responsibilities, a number of them noticed how the work culture of long hours mitigated against mothers.

> I was talking to a woman, who works in production … she was pretty high up and she used to work on films … when she had kids she just had to stop … because she was like: "The hours are just too much, it's too much". (A)

Respondents also commented on how the work culture and expectation of complete availability unencumbered by care duties also mitigated against mothers participating

equally in the industry. This was particularly the case with regard to the pandemic and the additional exigencies it placed on mothers who were juggling additional care burdens during COVID but who were not met with accommodations by media industries.

> During the pandemic when people couldn't child-mind or creches weren't open we were all asked to come back to the office and this girl is a single mam and she was minding her child at home and basically (she was forced to return). (D)

Interestingly none of the respondents saw this bias against mothers as a reasonable position for the industry to adopt. Rather they seemed to expect that the industry should accommodate mothers who were working in media. Respondents were very clear that the mistreatment was because of family status, there was very little ambivalence in that regard and nothing but support for the mothers. As one respondent said

> She's a mom and she wanted to request to work from home pre-COVID two days a week, which was a policy that was allowed in our organisation but the manager had to sign off on it and that manager just made her life hell … she always, I felt, mistreated this girl who was a mom, just because she was a mom. (I)

Class inequalities were observed, with unpaid/low-paid internships highlighted as particularly problematic. Respondents saw capacity to undertake internships as a sign of class privilege, yet some still saw them as a necessary career step (Oakley & O'Brien, 2016; Randle et al., 2015; Shade & Jacobson, 2015). As one person said

> I definitely believe that there is a lot of class issues or class pressures that can heavily influence whether or not people can get into the industry and obviously I believe that lines up with unpaid internships as well. If you're not going to get paid to go on an internship and you can't afford to live, you just can't. (F)

Similarly, another respondent agreed "people of lower class can't afford unpaid internships obviously, I think unpaid internships are really unfair" (L). One respondent spoke to her own sense of privilege in being able to undertake an internship because of her class position

> I think class has a huge part to play in it because I did an unpaid internship. The reason that I was able to do that is because my parents had enough money that they were able to let me live with them and support me … in media, you just won't get work without experience … there are so many people who are willing to do unpaid work … you're not going to be able to do that unless you have a certain background. (N)

Respondents had the impression that unpaid internships and the class position that facilitates them were key to getting access to entry roles. In addition, there was also a sense that this was a very widescale and normative practice within the sector. As a respondent put it "it just kind of shocked me that (the industry) ran on interns" (A).

New entrants also saw age, sexuality and disability as grounds on which people were marginalised in media industries. As one respondent commented "I definitely faced some trouble because of my age" (J). Similarly new entrants could observe how sexuality was weaponised against colleagues. One respondent recounted how a manager "approached a person one night on a night out and asked them if they were gay in front of a group of people and embarrassed them" (I). Another respondent was blunter about how sexuality

was a basis for discrimination "If you're openly gay there's definitely places that just won't hire you because they're just not comfortable with homosexuality and trans" (P). Only one respondent mentioned disability as a basis of exclusion and inequality, despite this being specifically mentioned in an interview question. "There isn't anybody with a disability that I work with or that I'm aware of … there isn't any wheelchair users in my workplace, if people have other kinds of disabilities, then I haven't been aware of that" (G). In sum, new entrants to media work did recognise that gender, race, class, family status, sexuality, age and disability were grounds on which some people were excluded from media work. They were very clear that Irish media industries did not represent the diversity that they understood existed in Irish society more generally. The overwhelming majority of respondents were clear that EDI should be addressed in media work. The following section outlines how the new entrants believed EDI could be tackled.

Addressing EDI for new entrants

Despite interview questions inviting respondents to comment on addressing EDI at a policy, HR or sectoral level they consistently framed it as something to be addressed by individuals. Moreover, they did not tend to look to groups, unions or to activism to address inequality. Only a small minority of new entrants when asked if they would report an EDI issue to HR answered in the affirmative.

Many respondents framed discrimination as something that **happens to individuals** and so unless they had direct experience of it they didn't feel it was something that they were qualified to comment on or responsible to prevent. There was no discussion of inequality as a structural phenomenon in society, with the majority of responses pointing to the personal or individual nature of bias and discrimination. "I think there definitely is biases there, but I just haven't really felt them personally" (D) and "I am grateful to say I've never really experienced any kind of equality issues" (T). Even when respondents could identify as part of a marginalised group they still framed EDI as a personal experience. "I'm a gay man myself and that has never been an issue anywhere for me … it hasn't been something I've had to think much about or experience, thankfully" (M). They saw individual experience as a "qualifier" for engagement on the issue.

Respondents also framed i**nterventions** on equality as something that could be operationalised at an individual level, with only some reference to collective action or organised activism, despite being asked if the Irish industry should respond to social movements like MeToo or Black Lives Matter. "It has to start on an individual level" (N) and "I think as an individual it's important to stand up and educate yourself and act … I think everyone should act" (C). Interestingly the way in which new entrants to media work saw their individual interventions happening was through discourse, literally voicing opinion, saying something or "calling out" inequality, as one respondent put it "Everyone should have some sort of a say, whatever your thoughts are, people should be voicing their opinions" (T) and "I think you have to look at yourself and hold yourself accountable, hold your friends, your family members accountable for things they're saying" (J). The dominance of "calling out" in new entrants' strategies for addressing inequality on the one hand suggests empowerment through naming inequality or discrimination, but on the other hand, negates further action through formal complaint or worker organisation. Respondents also proposed that the act of doing the calling

would automatically or "naturally" solve the problem. "We have to all make a decision and say okay I'm not going to accept this anymore and I think then the rest will come naturally" (N).

Very few of the respondents proposed that complainants should go to HR. Only a couple of respondents spoke about going to HR to complain. "Definitely I wouldn't have a problem going, especially our HR girl (sic), she's really nice and approachable so I don't think I'd have an issue going" (B) and "But of course, if you actually repeatedly feel it's serious, you go to the HR, you go to your manager" (S). The latter respondent saw a complaint to HR as a last resort and was conscious of how asserting that protection might make for an "awkward" situation.

> I kind of tend to go to my manager first, like I think, because at the end of the day you don't want to create an awkward situation, an awkward environment for the other people in your workplace so you bring it up to your line manager first and I think as well, as a line manager, they should be able to deal with it in private … if you can deal with it in a quiet manner well then deal with it in a quiet manner. (S)

Part of the desire to deal with EDI issues at the individual level and preferably quietly was connected to new entrants' sense of complaint as problematic.

New entrants felt that there was some risk associated with being seen to complain. They spoke about this idea in the abstract: "If you're kind of just fresh out of college you feel like you need to impress so you work hard and not to be seen complaining" (B) and "I think a lot of people just maybe don't want to be a hassle or come across like they're moaning or complaining" (D). They saw complaint as something that could compromise their future careers:

> as an intern or as a young worker, you're maybe not really equal to everyone on the team … especially when you're trying to make a good impression and maybe you want to stay at a company – it's really hard to address issues like that. (N)

One woman articulated her response to the idea of complaining about any EDI issue as follows

> If it happened to me, I probably wouldn't address it, I'd probably just be like: "Right, head down, keep trucking along" if I'm being completely honest, I'd have a little cry about it after work, get over it and go in the next day which, yeah, that's probably the truth … (J)

When asked how EDI should be addressed in the sector some respondents suggested that individuals should carefully research potential employers and **work only for "good" companies.** Respondents "advice" to those seeking media work was for them to choose EDI-focused media companies "try to work for a company that you support as well, one that does have diversity and inclusion" (B). They assumed that it would be clear which employers had issues with bias and discrimination and that new entrants could avoid problems by working for a "nice" company. "Look at reviews, make sure it's a nice culture to be in, even if you're there short term it is nice to feel like they're accepting of everyone and that it's a nice environment to work in" (D). They also correlated age with bias and assumed younger companies were automatically more diverse and equal.

> It was a pretty woke company to work for. All the people there were not of the older stuffier generation, I'd say the oldest person there was forty. Everyone was pretty chill and pretty aware of kind of social issues, so I didn't see any of it anyway. (P)

Exposure to inequality, discrimination and bias were, therefore, perceived to be something new entrants could avoid and, according to the latter respondent, the industry would eventually age out of inequality.

Respondents did see some scope for groups and organisations to lobby on EDI issues but none of the respondents named this "group" response as activism or framed it in terms of work that unions might undertake. The latter were not mentioned at all in the data. Instead, new entrants saw EDI as something that some vague unnamed organisation should take on. Some new entrants did recognise the limits to individuals' capacities to bring about change "I think there's strength in numbers and I think that having a unified voice about whatever issue is affecting you is more beneficial than just you by yourself" (F). They saw the need to amplify individual voices through collaboration with "multiple people preaching the same thing" (E). They saw groups as a way to garner protection for the individual in making a complaint in a precarious line of work … (F). One respondent saw "a place for groups of people to get together to sort of, not cause a ruckus, but look for people's rights, to make sure that people are being treated fairly and equally in the workplace" (H). However, new entrants were generally quite vague about the identity or source or formation of these groups that should lobby for change. "I definitely think that formal organisations and sort of groups within the media industry would be beneficial, in saying that I don't know that there are groups … I'm sure there probably are, I probably should look into that … " (G). Respondents proposed that changing power dynamics in the media workplace was really just a matter of rational debate and engagement and having those in power simply listen and accommodate change "if you've enough voices people are really going to listen" (N).

New entrants as change agents

That new entrants to media and creative work feel vulnerable is well-documented (Moody, 2020; Taylor & Luckman, 2020) but how identity factors converge to undermine their sense of agency in addressing EDI has received less attention. Because workers saw themselves as precarious and felt economically vulnerable, they were more likely to feel the need to tolerate, internalise and self-manage discrimination and broader structural inequality. This illustrates a "labouring subjectivity" where workers are "responsibilised", fearful of reprisals and avoid conflict in order to seek job security (Gill, 2014). While respondents saw bias, discrimination and inequality as things that happened to individuals, they frequently did not see themselves as individuals who could address those issues. As has been found in other studies (Jones & Pringle, 2015), they were concerned about reputational damage and the impact any "speaking out" might have on career advancement. Ultimately, new entrants did not see themselves as agents of change because of their relatively precarious position in the industry as interns, as juniors, as having fixed or flexible contracts, as freelancers.

The reasons they offered for refraining from complaint and intervention were myriad. They proposed that they could not intervene if their position was not permanent, "I feel like I can't, because my position is not necessarily permanent" (C), or if they were on a temporary contract: "I was on a temporary contract … I'd probably be less inclined to bring it forward … " (D). They could not intervene if they were interns, "I think because I'm an intern I feel like I have less say and less sway" (E) and they saw any vocalisation

of concern as potentially disruptive, "I think if you're an intern you kind of just don't say anything anyway, you're kind of like: 'Well I don't want to annoy them'" (G). They did not feel they could intervene if they were freelance, "I feel like being freelance I have less security I suppose to make comments" (F); if they were on probabation "I want to pass probation, I don't want to cause I scene, I'm on probation" (I) or if they were a junior employee "I still feel quite junior as an employee, and I don't know how I would feel about speaking out … " (H). Other respondents framed this reluctance to intervene in terms of their own low status

> If it was coming from the top down, I probably would hold off commenting for fear that something – which sounds terribly selfish I know but I just feel like it wouldn't be my place as someone on the bottom of the pyramid. (J)

They considered their future job prospects in the light of any potential intervention "you don't know if it's going to impact the chance of your career staying with this company … but it is something that I think you do consider … you don't want your actions to affect your options … " (B). Of the few respondents who mentioned going to HR they were not optimistic that this was a radical intervention that would result in change. As one respondent put it "I would probably feel comfortable going to HR, but I'd go knowing nothing would probably be done about it, it wouldn't be resolved" (I). The respondents were very clear that addressing EDI was something to tackle at a later point in time, as one said

> young people think "Well I have to put in the few years of being the bottom of the pile, sort of a thing, before I get to a stage where I can stand up for myself a little bit more". (M)

So, we are left with a paradox whereby a generation that claims to be more socially aware of inequality and diversity is so economically circumscribed by the neoliberal structures of their working lives that they are genuinely in a vulnerable situation if they do attempt to directly or individually address EDI issues. Only one respondent reflected on the problem of depending on individuals to address inequality

> The reality is if the onus is on individuals to do it then it won't get done … That's where groups are great because a group can have a mission and then you feel like … it's not you personally on the line when you're taking certain actions. (P)

Unfortunately, looking beyond the individual to address inequality was rare and so it seems that there may be stagnation with regard to improving EDI for entry level or new workers in media industries because of the structural and cultural issues outlined above.

Discussion

The findings outlined above conclude that new entrants to media industries do indeed see the need for EDI initiatives in their workplace. However, they frame individuals as central to those necessary interventions and do not see the structural aspects of inequality and exclusion. This raises a challenge for higher education to more directly address these issues with students. Moreover respondents do not see themselves as being in a strong position to advocate for EDI in CIs because they are new entrants to industry. What this means is that there is very little impetus coming from a new generation of

workers to address social inequalities at work. While new entrants are expected to innovate in terms of their technical skills in creative work (Faggian et al., 2013), and are understood to be in a position to offer reverse mentoring around the socialisation of new technologies (Dittes et al., 2019;), when it comes to social change in the workplace, this group of respondents did not explicitly advocate for structural change. They see the need for greater inclusion but did not ultimately see themselves as key actors in generating change. They saw change as something that individuals could operationalise mainly by "calling out" issues. They did not clearly name activist organisations or unions as potential sites for change. This is in contradiction of studies by De Peuter and Cohen (2020) and Campbell (2022) which point to the rise of union organisation, care ethics and collectives. The precarious nature of media work and the vulnerability experienced by new entrants mean that broader EDI policies and initiatives may be at risk. This study is based on one small cohort of new entrants in Ireland, with limited generalisability and would benefit from further and more extensive engagement with additional participants and in other national contexts. Moreover, the analysis examines only media workers and could be further expanded to include other areas of the CIs such as theatre, art, music, writing and design to understand how change for EDI will be adopted or not by the next generation of creative workers.

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