

Combining motherhood and work in the creative industries: Mothers have the problem

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Abstract

This article examines film and television workers' experience of mothering in Ireland and argues that not only are mothers constructed as a 'problem' in these Creative Industries workplaces because of their care work duties, but the 'problem' of work's incompatibility with motherhood is presented as one to be 'solved' by mothers themselves. Drawing from the scholarship on motherhood in film and television work and 12 interviews with workers in the film and television Creative Industries sectors who are mothers, we undertake a thematic analysis to uncover common experiences and insights that are reflective of but depart in some ways from the literature. We identify four themes that suggest that motherhood remains Othered in film and television work and that balancing care work and motherhood remains a form of additional labour that mothers (almost exclusively) must undertake: managing pregnancy at work; maternity leave and the return to work; care for children while working; and mothers' finding solutions.

Keywords

Care, creative industries, labour, mothers, work

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Introduction

This article examines a subset of Irish Creative Industries workers, specifically those who are mothers and who work in the film and television sectors. It examines their experiences of mothering and argues that not only are mothers constructed as a 'problem' in these Creative Industries (CIs) workplace because of their care work duties, but the 'problem' of work's incompatibility with motherhood is presented as one to be 'solved' by mothers themselves. Scholars have already identified a variety of challenges and impediments that mothers face in work, which generate and perpetuate inequalities in CIs. Authors note the career penalty that accompanies motherhood in film and television work. Those mothers who do sustain such work may find their status diminished and devalued (Dent, 2019). Mothers can additionally find themselves locked out of film and television work, which is heavily networked and exclusionary (Wreyford, 2015) and mothers may ultimately exit work given the insurmountable challenges they face in accessing and sustaining work while caring (Authors). This paper adds to this body of knowledge by pointing out that not only is motherhood a problem for CIs, but it is one that the mother herself must attend to and resolve. Further, despite recent attention to gender equality within Irish CI policies, pregnancy and motherhood remain issues to be resolved by mothers rather than something to be attended to institutionally or structurally. In generating this insight our article draws on interviews with 12 film and television workers in Ireland who are mothers and who speak of their experiences of being pregnant, undertaking maternity leave, negotiating with employers and colleagues about their pregnancy and motherhood and who consider the problem of motherhood in the CI workplace. While they speculate about 'solutions' to the issue of caring and mothering while in work, ultimately, they also point to how they individually internalise the responsibility for the problem of resolving motherhood with work and for squaring the circle of the incompatibilities between these roles. Effectively they conclude that motherhood generates additional care work for them, which is incompatible in various ways with creative work, but this problem of incompatibility is one that they as mothers expect to have to solve.

We undertake a thematic analysis to uncover common experiences and insights that are reflective of but depart in some ways from the literature. We identify four themes that suggest that motherhood remains Othered in film and television work and that balancing care work and motherhood remains a form of additional labour that mothers (almost exclusively) must undertake. The 'problem' of motherhood at work is for mothers to fix. This begins during pregnancy which is seen as something to be managed and 'resolved' by mothers rather than by their employers or by society more generally. Pregnant women often self-responsibilised their pregnancies while in film and television work. Similarly, periods of maternity leave and return from leave were challenging, but specifically challenging for mothers rather than for their employers. Many mothers reported feeling 'lucky' if their employers were accommodating of maternity leave. But they also experienced an overall loss of agency as employers frequently made decisions for them rather than with them about their capacity to work. Again, when it came to organising the juggle of care with work mothers were left to figure out the juggle and individualised the care-work nexus. They described how they used personal and informal strategies to 'manage' care responsibilities rather than seeing any structural or cultural aspects to the

inequalities that affected them. Finally, there was little inclination to identify top-down actions and changes that could create better conditions for mother-workers. This meant that the problem of motherhood in film and television work remained firmly located with the mother. The solution to the challenges of mothering while working remained the problem of the mother. In this way not only did mothers suffer the bias, discrimination and inequality that went hand in hand with their maternal status but all the problems that arose from that status and the bias attached to it were also seen to be the mother's problem to solve. On top of the initial wound of bias against working mothers was another burden, to fix the problem the mother has created at work.

Creative industries and work

In Ireland, the film and television industries are economically and politically defined as core sectors of the Creative Industries. CIs are typically understood as inclusive of various sectors engaged in commercial cultural production, which capitalise on creativity and intellectual property creation (Banks & O'Connor, 2009; Flew, 2011; Galloway & Dunlop, 2007). CIs have, since the 1990s, become more prominent in economic and cultural policies in the anglophone and Western European contexts (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Garnham, 2005; Lee, 2017; O'Brien, 2019). The extent to which such policies are coherent, perpetuate or reduce economic and social inequalities and encourage employment and work practices that are highly neoliberalised continues to be the subject of much critical literature on CIs (Banks, 2017; Brook et al., 2018, 2020; Gill, 2002; McRobbie, 2018; Oakley, 2004, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2016; Randle, 2015; Taylor, 2012). In particular, scholars have paid close attention to labour, work and employment in CIs and there has been much criticism of the structural organisation of work in CIs, the conditions and arrangements of work, the (lack of) quality of much CI work, particularly in film and television. Analysis of the barriers many workers face in entering or sustaining work in CIs is another key strand in the literature. Studies of creative work, which include film and television as well as other sectors such as advertising, games, publishing and music, demonstrate how Creative Industries are found to have structures and cultures of work that are exploitative, unfair and exclusive. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013: 17), for example, develop a framework for understanding how creative work more generally is delineated as 'good' or 'bad' work. Bad work is defined by 'poor pay, hours and safety; powerlessness; boredom; isolation; self-doubt and shame; overwork; insecurity and risk'. Banks (2017) also cites income inequality and low pay as significant barriers to CI participation noting that, for artists in particular, 'prevailing patterns of pay and remuneration permit only a privileged minority to sustain artistic careers' (p. 122). In accounting for why creative work remains desirable given these conditions, Brook et al., (2020: 16–17) describe a paradoxical situation in which such work is both undervalued in terms of conditions and remuneration and highly valued in terms of the social status it implies. Such work is perceived to be professional and associated with the middle-classes, thus making it desirable and aspirational. However, as documented by many scholars, because creative work is highly desirable it is concomitantly highly exclusive of many social groups, and this is especially the case in film and television. The creative workforce is classist in composition and dominated by a narrow elite, with almost

complete underrepresentation of working-class participants (Allen & Hollingworth, 2013; Eikhof, 2013; Oakley, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2016; Shaw, 2020). CIs also show low participation from other minoritised social identities, with a lack of diversity in terms of gender identities (O'Brien, 2019; Aust, 2021; Proctor-Thomson, 2013), racial and ethnic identities (Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2013; Idriss, 2016; Nava, 2022; Nwonka, 2015, 2021) and disabled people (Finkel et al., 2017; Randle & Hardy, 2017). Mothers join the ranks of those who experience underrepresentation and challenges in managing careers in creative sectors, but in addition the mothers themselves as individuals are often expected to solve the problems that arise from their status as mothers and creative workers.

Motherhood and film and television work

There are numerous challenges faced by mothers in film and television work that extend from the structural to the personal. Key issues identified in the literature relate to the devaluing of motherhood and care work more generally and in film and television work; the lack of tolerance of mothers in such work; the perception that women choose motherhood over work, particularly those who exit the industry; and the self-responsibilising and individualising of the care responsibility that mothers face.

Dent (2019) argues that 'women's caregiving responsibilities operate to devalue their economic position within the field but also provide wider benefits to both their partners and the industry through the support they continue to provide' (p. 549). Mothers perceived as making a personal choice and therefore are left to deal with the consequences of that choice. In her study of female screenwriters in UK CIs, for example, Wreyford (2018) notes how women are considered as natural and inevitable carers who choose to take on the role, which in turn alleviates the industry of any responsibility or blame for current poor conditions for screenwriters who are mothers. Wreyford (2013), elsewhere, says that since motherhood is perceived to be an individual choice made by women, that they are expected to personally take responsibility for managing career and care and 'to make personal and professional sacrifices that men are not required to make' (Wreyford, 2013: 16). Equally mothers are thought to leave film and television work by choice. Authors and Percival (2020) have both challenged these assumptions that women exit film and television work by choice and, instead, identify the specific difficulties that mothers have in sustaining work, especially in the audiovisual sector. The myth of choice only serves to reinforce gender inequalities by supporting the status quo where working conditions remain hostile to mothers.

Motherhood is, therefore, stigmatised and poorly tolerated which results in women masking their maternal status in work. Berridge (2022) note that motherhood and not fatherhood is persistently represented as the 'issue' regarding parenting and film and television work. They further suggest that because motherhood is associated with challenging work-life balance, and all women are perceived to potentially become mothers, that all women face a motherhood penalty. Those who are mothers are forced to be discreet about it. Gregory and Verhoeven (2021), writing about the screen industries, cited mothers making their care invisible as a strategy for sustaining their work, suggesting how devalued is the work of mothers. Dent (2019) notes how those in creative, including film and television, work submerge their maternal identities in order to be successful,

this in turn invisibilises mothers in creative work, and leads to a devalued or demoted status or complete withdrawal, which further stigmatises them. Berridge (2019) identifies the ways in which mothers challenge and resist the general invisibilisation of care work in CIs. Looking at testimonials from the Raising Film website, she argues that these collectively work to negate the notion that care work is an individual mother's responsibility and issue.

Nonetheless, although mothers may have identified some of these issues on such fora as the Raising Films website, mothers are still required to find solutions to care and work balance individually and, often, informally. Willis and Dex (2005), in their examination of mothers' return to television work, find that a combination of changing industry employment conditions, insufficient support from partners along with challenges in securing childcare and the 'vulnerability to the bosses' discretion and favor' constrained their decisions to remain in work and their capacity to sustain work. Others have pointed to how mothers in film and television work negotiate with employers and strategise informally to manage care arrangements, often internalising this responsibility (Gregory & Brigden, 2017; O'Brien & Liddy, 2021; Liddy & O'Brien, 2020) In fact, as Beedles (2021) has noted, there are specific structural barriers that are currently permitted and encouraged within CIs. Through her examination of the television industries practice of opting out of the government working hours directive, Beedles argues that family-unfriendly working hours are effectively sanctioned and normalised, with motherhood then structured as incompatible with TV work. Likewise, Milner and Gregory (2022) have demonstrated that organisational structures and 'cultures of boundaryless work, constant availability, and unstinting commitment' along with weak formalised supports made balancing work and family very challenging. Collectively, then, mothers experience a complex array of structural, interpersonal and personal challenges and barriers in carrying out film and television work. This paper takes that analysis a step further by noting that mothers are not just responsible for both work and care but they are also responsible for fixing the problems that their caring raises in their workplace. This is effectively a triple burden of doing the work, doing the care work and finding the solutions to the problems that arise because mothers are both caring and working. Not only do they experience the problem, they also have to fix it.

Methods

This article reports on findings from 12 interviews with mothers who are film and television workers in Ireland and who spoke of their experiences of pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work, care work and perceived challenges in mothering. Irish CIs, and the film and television sectors within, are similar to those of other Anglo-European nations in that CIs are positioned sectors of potential economic growth and cultural development. Irish CIs are, however, small and often dependent upon State funding and support and are globally integrated and dependent upon global and transnational finance (Flynn, 2018). The creative, specifically film and television, labour force is, thus, precarious on several fronts: the Irish economy has been in various financial crises and has experienced recessions and inflation periodically, leading to fluctuations in both production and CI funding (Barton, 2020; Flynn, 2018). This has impacted on the availability of

Table 1. Table of participants and the sector, role, no. of children and ages, marital status and employment status.

ID	Sector	Role	No. of children	Ages (years)	Marital status	Employment status
1	Television	Producer	2	5+	Married	Employed
2	Television	Producer/production manager	2	5+	Married	Employed
3	Documentary	Producer	1	-5	Partner	Self employed
4	Documentary	Editor	2	-5	Married	Self employed
5	Television/film	Editor	2	10+	Divorced	Self employed
6	Television	Producer	1	10+	Divorced	Self employed
7	Film	Director	2	20+	Married	Self employed
8	Television	Editor	2	10+	Married	Self employed
9	Television	Producer	2	10+	Married	IPC
10	Television	Producer	2	-5	Partner	IPC
11	Film	Art department	1	10+	Married	Self employed
12	Film	Director	4	18+	Married	Self employed

work and the quality of work and working conditions. There is, therefore, high competition for film and television work and the existing workforce has been defined by inequality, with poor gender representation and very poor representation of those from diverse race or ethnicities, with diverse and different abilities and from wide socio-economic backgrounds (Authors). Studies of accessibility to, and sustainability of, film and television work have found that workers themselves report challenges in entering work, discrimination while in work and are faced with challenges if they are mothers in such work (O'Brien, 2019; Liddy, 2020; O'Brien & Liddy, 2021; Liddy & O'Brien, 2020).

We use a qualitative approach to motherhood and film and television work in order to better understand the experiences of mothers as they narrate their stories of motherhood and work to the researchers. Qualitative research allows us to 'describe routine and problematic moments and meanings' in our respondents' lives and experiences of motherhood and creative work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 2) We found the qualitative method of in-depth, semi-structured interviews to be the most appropriate way to create opportunities for mothers to speak to pre-established themes and also to bring to the researchers' attention other matters that might have been missed. Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling and were asked to take part in 45 minutes long online or phone interviews. The sample consisted of 12 mothers at various career stages and who were at various stages of motherhood as per Table 1. They worked predominantly in the film and television industries, although the nature of creative work in Ireland means that many had diverse portfolio careers.

Interviews were transcribed using a combination of transcription software and manual transcription. Keeping the themes and issues raised in the literature in mind, the researchers identified initial codes that reflected or deviated from these themes. Individual codes were then analysed and grouped into themes and thematic analysis was undertaken. This allowed for the identification of issues and ideas that recurred across interviews and

which demonstrated trends and commonalities as well as unforeseen topics (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researchers collated the data, summarised and illustrated the themes through individual participant quotes and comments and have represented these themes in the findings section that follows. Limitations of the research include the narrowness of the sample and the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the respondents. Equally, the study is geographically and temporally bound and, therefore, other studies may find different trends beyond the contemporary Irish context. Nonetheless, our study has revealed important commonalities with the existing literature and some important concerns regarding how mothers experience and negotiate film and television work and care work and how resolving the tensions between these becomes an additional problem that mothers must address. These findings are outlined in detail below.

Whose responsibility is it to find the work/motherhood balance?

The work/life or more accurately work/care-work balance problem is seen by mothers who work in film and television as primarily the mother's responsibility. This starts as early as pregnancy, is articulated again in how mothers frame their maternity leave and their return to work post-leave. There is a discourse evident in how these workers describe their maternity that frames them as (solely) responsible for this 'situation', that is, being a mother and having a child while working in film and television. Crucially it is the mothers who are framed as holding the responsibility to solve the problem that is created by the tensions that arise from them combining care work and film and television work.

Managing pregnancy at work

Mothers saw themselves as primarily responsible for managing their pregnancy at work. This manifested in how they approached the physical challenges of pregnancy and in how they went about managing deadlines. In both cases the respondents saw mothers as responsible for 'sorting out' both of these challenges. In addition, some mothers expressed how 'blessed' or 'lucky' they were when their pregnancy was accommodated at work, seeing this as a favour rendered to them rather than as an entitlement as a worker. They saw that they were blessed if the problem was acknowledged rather than left to them, but being grateful implies some gift has been bestowed, some burden has been lifted that should by rights have been the mothers.

Mothers were clear that they were responsible for addressing the 'problem' of pregnancy at work. Pregnancy caused some workers to lose jobs. As one mother described 'There were jobs that I wasn't even approached for that I was first in line for, like, I bust my ass making a pilot, when they got the commission, they literally didn't even call me. And when I queried, I was told, we thought you were off having kids?' (Aoife). In a similar vein another respondent described not being heard when pregnancy motivated her to say no to work and potential employers persisted in pursuing her to take the job. As she put it 'The series got commissioned and I was pregnant, just very early days. . . and I hadn't said anything. . . So I said no, and I was going to walk away from it. . . I want this time with my child, my first time having a baby. But there was back and forth and they

were saying well, maybe you could get someone else in to do the leg work at the start. And then you come in. . . late on in the pregnancy, I didn't need this stress. And it was turning into a bit of a stress, you know. . . I was too emotional and I was worried' (Emer). Pregnancy was, therefore, something that either cost opportunities or something employers ignored.

Scheduling pregnancy around work deadlines proved a problem. Respondents almost invariably proposed that it was the pregnant person who figured this out. This is perhaps a feature of the freelance work pattern so common in film and television industries, and yet none of the mothers used that as a contextual explanation for why they took on the stress of managing deadlines around their pregnancy. As one mother put it when schedule changes occurred 'If it had all gone to original schedule, I would have been like shooting (a feature) but pregnant, but that would have been fine. But they just kept shifting the dates. And I had to get one of my assistants to take over because I was going into hospital' (Áine). A similar situation arose for another respondent working in documentary who explained 'I got the funding and then I found out I was pregnant. So I knew I would be shooting when I was pregnant and I knew there would be delay on the editing. . . it was pressurized, you know, because I knew I had to get it done before (baby) was born. And then I knew I had to come back quite soon after. . . So I edited that when she was five months old' (Emer). Similarly, mothers acknowledged the physical challenges of pregnancy but nonetheless felt a pressure to keep going. Whether they wanted to keep working or not, they saw it their responsibility to 'keep going'. As one mother explained 'It was difficult going up six flights of stairs towards the end. . . And I was due in May and I was doing that in April. Like, yeah, I just kept going' (Emer). One risked her health for work, refusing to see there was any problem, as it was one that was perhaps unfixable 'I had to have a caesarean, (the baby) was the wrong way around. . . and I was working on a film and the doctor was about to kill me that I was working on a film. So I was just admitted, there was too much movement' (Áine). The mother saw the scheduling of her birth as interfering with the film schedule and perceived it as her individual problem.

If the mothers were accommodated or their pregnancy was actively supported in any way at work, they framed this not as a reasonable right but rather as a form of extraordinary blessing, for which they were immensely grateful or they saw it as good fortune or luck, rather than a reasonable entitlement. One mother described how she managed her working life so that she could rely on individuals to be flexible 'While I was very heavily pregnant, and then afterwards getting back to work, I found people to be quite flexible. But then I could work with the people that I wanted to work with, that I knew I got on with and that I knew would be like that' (Áine). She expressed gratitude, which she associated with that support. 'No doubt that there are people that aren't so flexible and that aren't willing to support, which is ridiculous . . . Thankfully, I have got to say, I think I've been kind of blessed' (Áine). And yet, despite the gratitude she still noted the cost of pregnancy, which would have been too much for her to support in film and television work had she not had support 'I wouldn't put myself through it' (Áine). Another mother spoke enthusiastically about how lucky she was to get maternity payments. 'I got statutory maternity leave. . . I got the full whack, which was amazing. I couldn't believe they were paying me. . . While I was off it was incredible' (Sarah).

Pregnancy impacted on respondents' physical capacities to work, on timelines of availability for work and on employees' agency at work. For most respondents these challenges were not viewed as 'work' problems however but rather as a tension between maternity and work, a problem that the individual mother had to resolve, while simultaneously continuing with both mothering and working. This individualisation of the problem of motherhood and work was reflected also in how respondents talked about their periods of maternity leave and their return to work after childbirth.

Maternity leave and returning to work

Many respondents saw maternity leave not as an entitlement but as something they earned before it was taken. Or they perceived that 'leave' did not mean that they were entirely unavailable for work; if work had a problem, that became the problem of the mother. One of the mothers saw herself as 'lucky' to get (a statutory entitlement to) leave. The question of returning from maternity leave was, like with pregnancy, often an occasion on which the mother's agency was erased with nobody listening and crucially nobody but the mother addressing the problems that arise when an individual has to juggle care work with film and television work. The problem of returning was left to the mother to figure out whether they wanted to solve it or not. The very real problems of breastfeeding and working were the mothers problems to address.

One mother presented maternity leave as something that she had almost 'earned' through overwork before she took the leave 'I took the six months maternity thing, I mean, I worked extremely hard up to up to the point of burn out. Literally, I think, I stopped working on like, 13th and baby was born on the 22nd' (Claire). Another concurred 'You try and clear the decks as much as you can before you go and then you know it's going to fall on everyone else to some extent and then I know when I was on maternity leave. . . you're still on the end of the phone. . .' (Niamh). These mothers took on the problem of work distribution as their problem despite being entitled to maternity leave. Several mothers spoke of being available or working while on maternity leave in case there was a problem 'I was still kind of working but just being on maternity leave' (Gráinne). Others saw flexibility during leave as a matter of luck so they too framed entitlement to maternity leave as a stroke of 'luck'. As one respondent put it 'I was lucky because I was on a long term contract with RTÉ. I took, at the time you were entitled to three months statutory maternity leave' (Siobhan).

When it came to (officially) returning to work from maternity leave a couple of respondents noted how they had their agency erased in the 'decision' to come back from maternity leave. As one director recounted 'A producer rang me up and said, now you have to get back to work. . . In this industry, if you're good at your job, you're valuable, and so they want to get you back. . . But actually, it wasn't like they'd help me figure it all out. It was just like, yeah, you're coming back. . .' (Sarah). She describes the challenges of returning to a feature film while breastfeeding a 5 month old. 'I was trying to wean him before I went off on (a film shoot) and he wouldn't wean. So, I'd finish work at 10 o'clock. And I'd feed him at night, between 10 and 5am in the morning, then go back to work. And I think he did take a few bottles during the day, so there's all that kind of stuff. And you just do it like. I think if I thought about it more, I would have thought

'Don't be ridiculous' but I just I didn't know and I didn't think' (Sarah). Another mother described the prospects of returning to work in film, where again she was being courted to return but with more specific supports promised. As she described 'This producer she was like 'we really want to work with you, we'll try and make it easy for you, you don't need to be there all the time, we have assistants and a supervisor so you can step in and out, we will make it work around your schedule' (Áine). However, this was very much an individual and local arrangement with this one women, these accommodations were not seen as something that mothers could ever simply be entitled to, or regular arrangements that could be built into film production. Instead, the respondent saw this as a producer being 'nice' (Áine) and the return to work from maternity leave as an individual bargain to be struck.

Care for children while working

The individualisation of responsibility for maternity was not restricted to periods of pregnancy and maternity leave but rather extended throughout the period of children needing care, that need for care and the mothers need to work were the mothers' problem to solve. In the Irish film and television industry it was taken for granted that long working hours are the norm and that this is something mothers are largely responsible to self-manage. As one respondent put it 'This business isn't for the faint hearted and it's not normal working hours. There's no 9-5 in television or drama. It's mental' (Alison). Another respondent agreed regarding the exigent working hours 'You would have one night on every project where you're going to be in the edit suite until three in the morning or sometimes five in the morning and that was just expected. . . that's just part of the culture. . . .' (Olivia). In that context flexibility around childcare needs was very far from normative 'I've experienced times where you've have to leave early or you have to go and suddenly it's kind of frowned on because the project's not done. And they don't give a hoot about whether you need to bring the kids to soccer or whatever' (Joanne).

This tension between the need to care and its disavowal at work and the placement of the mother herself at the nexus of that problem was captured by a respondent who felt like she, and she alone, was always trying to address both needs at once, but neither successfully. As she put it 'you have to produce pretty much a transmittable programming in really short amount of time, on top of buying purple hairspray and deciding about soccer matches and carpooling decisions and all of that. So yeah, it can sometimes get on you all right, you just think, Oh, God, I need to concentrate on one thing' (Joanne). However, the way in which she addressed the challenge was as an individual, by 'adapting' to the challenges rather than seeking that the industry, co-parents or society accommodate them in any way. She addressed childcare questions by 'Sending the sneaky text under the desk if need be, or taking the call, or suddenly you need to go to the loo and you're actually on the phone, you know, that kind of way' (Joanne). Another framing on how mothers are always the solution to the problem of juggling work and care was offered by another respondent who recommended mothers do the (yet again additional) relational work needed to make sure they have family and partner support for their work. Mothers were to do the film and television work, the care work and the relational work needed to solve the problem of combining care and work. As she put it in the context of having her

partner and mother on set ‘You do need to really, really sort out your relationships and your network and really work on them. . . because if you don’t, you can’t just hope it’ll work out, you sort of have to put the effort into your network. You know, if you’re going to be a fly by night in the way you work, you need to get some security in your family and your friends’ (Sarah). The security she recommended was the work of the mother. A couple of respondents did explicitly note the absence of structural supports around working hours and the pressure on individuals to perform. But despite some gentle questioning of the possibility of structural supports, the respondents still concluded that it is mothers who ‘make it work’.

Motherhood and work solutions

When asked where respondents proposed that solutions should come from in to trying to resolve the challenges of pregnancy, maternity leave, returning to work and combining childcare with film and television work, respondents saw the ‘answer’ lying in a disparate number of areas, but overall leaned heavily on female networks and women-centred solutions, thus perpetuating the gendering of care work. There were many references to individual people intervening and on the ground approaches to help find a balance across work and care. For instance, ‘I was going to move down to the country and do three days from home, two days from the office. . . just to try and get a bit of balance back’ (Niamh). Some respondents did note that they looked to peers, particularly other women, to support them or to be flexible in their interests. As one put it ‘I’ve found a real comfort in that kind of collegial thing, which feels a bit ‘sisterhoody’. . . that we’ve kind of got each other’s backs’ (Olivia). Respondents reported having offered this sort of flexibility in an informal or implicit way to colleagues in need on occasion. As one respondent noted ‘I remember being, you know, working with people who were pregnant and kind of, taking on extra work because obviously they were feeling tired or nauseous or had scans or whatever. So, I always kind of, helping out pregnant women in our industry. . . there was a sort of solidarity cycle. . . and it came back to me karmically. . .’ (Claire). Respondents spoke also about an explicit expectation that they would cover each other’s work while peers were on leave. ‘One of my colleagues is out on maternity leave at the moment but it’s not like someone has come in to replace her so between myself and another girl that works there, we’ve kind of, split her tasks, like it just kind of gets spread around’ (Niamh). The respondent saw replacing a worker as something that ‘The smaller independent companies can’t really afford to do’ (Niamh) and so the responsibility was seen more as the peer workers’ than the companies. Even in this solidarity-based solutions to the problem of doing care and film and television work, it is still mothers and women who are at the centre of the solution rather than co-parents, men, industry or society.

Occasionally respondents explicitly recognised that the burden fell disproportionately on mother-workers and never on industry, as one noted ‘We need childcare. It needs to be paid for, like somebody has to mind the kids and the women are just automatically assumed to take care of the children’ (Sarah). There was very little sense that advocacy or activist groups were having any impact on the status quo. As one respondent put it ‘Sometimes it gets tiresome having all of these symposiums on women in creative industries, and the challenges we face. Like we know what the challenges are,

the challenges are childcare actually, that's the number one main thing' (Aoife). However, there was not widespread acceptance that the provision of childcare was an 'easy' or even feasible possibility with one respondent commenting 'Solutions? That child care can be provided, which is a bloody unicorn world' (Emer). Similarly, there were only a few references to industry-led changes that could be implemented. The departure point for change was seen to be an 'Open discussion around this' (Emer) and increased 'flexibility. . . sharing the work. . . there are other ways you can do it' (Emer). Another respondent proposed job sharing 'The people I'm working for they set up job sharing, which I thought was wonderful. . . I just think that's brilliant that they did that' (Sarah). Another proposal was a 'mobile creche that would go around and collect all the mothers' kids so that they could go to work. Like it's a nightmare for women without proper paid childcare' (Sarah). Only one respondent proposed that 'There needs to be direction from government and policymakers and the different bodies that represent the people in the creative industry to provide a platform for discussions around this and to move towards more flexibility' (Emer). This solution was proposed while the respondent simultaneously accepted the proviso that with childcare 'There's a certain amount of that is your own responsibility' (Emer) even the more radical solutions were softened by a self-responsibilising note for mothers.

Conclusion

'Women stop themselves from moving on in their career, because they're presuming, well, I might want children someday' (Sarah).

'Children still have to be born, women still have to figure out how to, you know, fit them into their working life' (Sarah).

Sarah's uncertainty about how to conceptualise motherhood and film and television work, represent many of the views of motherhood and work that emerged across all interviews. The overarching sentiment was of self-responsibilisation, the problem of both working and mothering was the mother's problem to solve, giving her a triple burden of film and television work, care work and problem solving. This was experienced and enacted at all key stages of motherhood including pregnancy, during maternity leave and on the return to work as well as in the care arrangements made for, in particular, young children. Mothers positioned themselves, or felt positioned, as wholly responsible for making the problem of motherhood work around work. While the mothers interviewed sometimes alluded to the 'issue' as a structural one, they very rarely identified or thought possible structural solutions. In the case of Sarah, not only are mothers responsible for 'figuring out' how to sustain a career while mothering, but they are also agents of their own lack of career progression and select motherhood over their careers. What is especially revealing about the extent of self-responsibilising is that it exists parallel to various industry-led initiatives aimed at improving gender diversity in wider CI sectors in Ireland. In recent years, various policies have been developed which are aimed at improving the representation of women in CIs (Author) following an increase in reporting activity on gender in CI work, especially film and television work (Author). Organisations and bodies such as Screen Ireland and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland have developed action plans and strategies that focus on data collection,

incentivising gender equality through funding and promoting accountability. Screen Ireland, for example, produced a gender action plan which ringfenced funding for female-led productions (Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, 2018; Irish Film Board, 2015, 2018; Screen Ireland, 2020). National broadcaster RTÉ also produced a Diversity and Inclusion programme that committed to equal representation of women and men in its workforce and particularly in leadership roles (RTÉ, 2018).

The results of our research suggest that such gender and diversity initiatives are not felt at the maternal coalface and there is an opportunity to more specifically address the barriers and challenges that mothers, as a distinct yet highly representative cohort of women, face. It is also important to emphasise localised experiences since much of the CI literature around film and television is concerned with specific national contexts that may collectively be taken to represent international experiences. Particularly regarding national structures of CIs and national socio-economic policies around caregiving, one overall solution will not fit all national situations. Differences in experiences are, therefore, crucial to map. Nonetheless, our research is in some ways reflective of other international studies that have found that women self-responsibilise childcare in creative work (Dent, 2019; O'Brien & Liddy, 2021; Wreyford, 2018). Our findings add to this literature by identifying key stages and 'pinch-points' where women and mothers are profoundly responsabilised for pregnancy and childcare and which function as potential exit points from film and television work. More significantly however it points to how mothers are placed as the people to solve the problem of combining work with motherhood. There is little or no discussion of the triple burden that is placed on mothers, not only to do the film and television work, but to also combine that with responsibility for care work, but in addition to also see all of this as a problem for mothers and mothers only to solve. This is significant since structural arrangements regarding pregnancy, maternity leave, return to work and childcare, that is motherhood in general, remain largely absent from gender policy in CIs. This must be addressed if true equality is to be achieved for mothers in film and television work.

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