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"Better Workplaces Are Good for Everyone": An Interview with Natalie Grant of SMTJ about Motherhood, Working in Television and the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: *Natalie Grant is a freelance series producer primarily working in entertainment and reality television and codirector of Share My Telly Job (SMTJ), an organisation that exists to promote job-sharing and the normalisation of other forms of flexible working in the UK television and film industry, such as condensed hours and part-time work, in order to encourage better equality, diversity and inclusion. In this interview by Helen Kennedy and Jack Newsinger, held via email in December 2021, Grant talks about her experiences as a mother working in television, what led to her becoming a campaigner, and how more flexible kinds of work can promote greater equality and diversity in the television industry workforce.*

Natalie Grant is a freelance series producer, primarily working in entertainment and reality television and codirector of Share My Telly Job (SMTJ), an organisation that exists to promote job-sharing and the normalisation of other forms of flexible working in the UK television and film industry, such as condensed hours and part-time work, in order to encourage better equality, diversity and inclusion.

In 2021, as the third national Covid-19 lockdown ended in the UK, Natalie asked Professor Helen Kennedy, Dr Jack Newsinger, Dr Natalie Wreyford and Dr Rowan Aust at the Institute for Screen Industries Research at the University of Nottingham to conduct a survey of mothers working in UK television to find out how the pandemic had affected them. The findings, which were published in the report *Locked Down and Locked Out: The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Mothers Working in the UK Television Industry* in September 2021, were shocking. They showed that the "COVID-19 Pandemic and associated government lockdowns have been nothing short of a disaster for mothers working in the UK television sector" and revealed "the multiple impacts across childcare, ability to work, finances, mental health and wellbeing, and hope for the future" (Wreyford et al. 10). However, as is known all too well by those campaigning for better workplaces for mothers and families, Covid-19 did not create these conditions; rather, it exacerbated and revealed them.

We interviewed Grant via email in December 2021 about her experiences as a mother working in television, what led to her becoming a campaigner and how more flexible kinds of work can promote greater equality and diversity in the television industry workforce.[i]

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: What does SMTJ do? How successful has it been and what are the key challenges?

GRANT: SMTJ exists to promote job-sharing and the normalisation of other forms of flexible working in the TV and film industry, such as condensed hours and part-time work. We advocate for a less masculinised working culture, which is itself characterised by excessive working hours and promotes the exclusionary practices endemic in production work. Whilst the benefits of this to mothers managing work alongside childcare responsibilities are clear, SMTJ believe that job-sharing and other flexible working measures are good for *all* workers and the industry as a whole. Benefits include talent retention, better mental health, increased output and improved diversity. Our work includes running training for production companies and broadcasters, offering free advice and mentoring for freelancers and hosting networking events and webinars. We have an active social media presence and a functionality on our website which enables freelancers to find suitable job-share partners or chat to each other about flexible working and offer peer-to-peer support. We have been involved in a number of academic research projects—including *Locked Down and Locked Out*—and have plans to engage in further research work in the future.

Figure 1: SMTJ partnered with The Institute for Screen Industries Research, University of Nottingham, to find out how mothers working in TV were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
Image from the cover of the project report, *Locked Down and Locked Out: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mothers Working in the UK Television Industry*.

In 2020 we began work on The Time Project, the first endeavour of its kind, gathering data which seeks to understand how excessive working hours impact underrepresented groups. The purpose of the project is to work towards improving parity in the industry, to advocate for longer lead-up times to production to allow for diverse hiring and management training. The first report for The Time Project will be published at the end of January 2022, but our hope is that the tool we've created will continue to be developed and can be used by workers, production companies and broadcasters to monitor and regulate working hours, pay and conditions. Our ethos at SMTJ has always been about finding practical solutions to problems in the industry and our hope is that The Time Project will improve transparency and make the industry fairer for everyone working within it.

We currently have a scheme for job-sharers working in craft and tech roles in HETV running in partnership with Screenskills. The first pairs will start their job-shares in the spring. We also have a new scheme for job-sharers in unscripted genres—Share The Next Step—about to begin. STNS is funded by SIGN (Screen Industries Growth Network) and supported by ScreenSkills and will help women to progress in their career as part of a job-share pair. These schemes are the first of their kind to focus on job-sharing as a way to retain and, crucially, progress women in the industry. When SMTJ started around seven years ago, no one was really talking about job-sharing and flexible working in TV; indeed, many people we spoke to said it would never happen. Now, it is much more commonplace, and we know of job-sharers working successfully in a broad variety of roles and genres. However, we still feel there is a lot of work to be done. We are regularly contacted by people working in the industry who have had their flexible working requests denied. Increasingly too, we're being contacted by men, people without children and new entrants, who for all sorts of different reasons want or need more workplace flexibility.

The key challenges we face are, firstly, a lack of funding. Until very recently, SMTJ was entirely self-funded and, really, a labour of love. The irony is not lost on Lou Patel, Michelle Reynolds, Rowan Aust and I that we campaign for an end to people working for free in the industry, but have dedicated hundreds if not thousands of hours of our own time for free (and some of our own money) to the work we do with SMTJ. Funding would enable us to invest in developing our website and plan in the longer term to make the work we do sustainable.

The other key challenge we have faced is a reluctance from broadcasters and production companies to fundamentally change working culture. There's a lot of talk but not much action when it comes to enacting real and substantive change!

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: Tell us about how your career and experiences led you to becoming a campaigner for flexible work in television.

GRANT: I certainly never really envisaged myself as a "campaigner". Until only quite recently, I'd always been very keen to just keep my head down and get on with things. Like most freelancers, I had "the fear" that if you complain or kick up a fuss, you won't get hired again, so even when we experience bullying, harassment and discrimination—which is rife in the industry—most of us do our best to ignore it and we're conditioned that it's best to just keep quiet and carry on.

When I had my first child in 2017, I was anecdotally aware of the industry's treatment of mothers. I recall being told very early on in my career that "women in telly either have kids or a career, you can't have both" and, as I looked around me, that certainly seemed to be the case. I had seen the difficulties some of my peers had experienced trying to return to work after having children and most of the women I knew who'd had children before me had since left the industry. Of course, I felt a great deal of empathy for those women, but until you've actually experienced it yourself, I guess, like any kind of discrimination, it's impossible to fully understand the reality.

I went back to work full-time when my daughter was just three-months old. I'd accepted the job before I'd even given birth, in part because I was so anxious about being replaced and afraid I'd be "forgotten about" if I took any longer off work. I was unsure how my partner and I would cope financially, as we are both freelancers in the industry and so had no access to paid maternity or paternity leave. There was also a degree to which working in television was/is such a big part of my identity, that I wasn't quite sure I was ready to give that up—so when the work was offered, it felt hard to turn down.

Thanks to my mum agreeing to temporarily live with us and provide round-the-clock childcare, I managed to still do the same (excessive!) hours that everyone else on the team were doing. I was very anxious that my colleagues might think I was less committed or less capable since having a baby and felt a real need to "prove" that I was still able to work in the way I had before becoming a mum. I avoided talking about my daughter at work and felt almost like I had to "hide" this huge, life-changing thing that had just happened to me. I was leaving the house every day at 8.30 a.m. to start work at 9.30 a.m., working for sixteen hours or more, often without any proper break, breast pumping in my edit suite whilst I carried on working, then getting a cab home in the early hours of the morning. I'd then be breastfeeding my new-born when she woke in the night, wracked with guilt that I hadn't seen her all day, and then getting back up and doing it all again the next day. By the end of the six-week contract, I was mentally and physically broken.

As I looked ahead, I also knew that I couldn't keep relying on my mum for childcare (she lives three-hundred miles away!). But as we explored the alternative childcare options, none seemed conducive to working as a freelancer in TV. The waiting lists for full-time nursery places and good childminders in our area were over a year long. The cost is extortionate, and they didn't offer the flexibility we would need. We couldn't afford a full-time nanny and we don't have space for an au pair. Logistically, it all felt like an absolute nightmare, especially when I couldn't always guarantee my next contract.

So, it was at that point I realised I would need to consider a job-share. Louise (Patel) and I had been friends for a number of years, and we'd talked a lot about SMTJ when she'd first started her blog and the website a couple of years earlier, following the birth of her first child. We'd had countless conversations about the lack of flexible working in the industry and the need for change and now I had a child of my own and was experiencing many of the issues we'd talked about for myself, I began to get more involved with developing SMTJ.

Around the same time, I also did my first job-share. Despite the fact it was a brand-new format, a very tight turn around and my job-share partner and I had never actually met, it all worked brilliantly and gave me assurance that job-sharing could work and would enable me to keep

working and allow me time to spend with my daughter (and reduce the extortionate childcare fees we'd have to commit to). I thought I'd found the Holy Grail! But subsequently, when that job ended, there came a couple of experiences of very blatant maternity discrimination which made me think it might not be quite that simple.

The first experience was thanks to somebody who I'd worked with a number of times before, who contacted me about a role on a show he was series producing. It was a job that I was more than qualified for. He seemed very keen for me to do it, and I was keen to say yes too, but knowing the kind of hours that would be involved, I asked if he might consider me job-sharing. I explained how it would work and talked him through the positive experience I'd recently had and how seamlessly it had worked. I offered up options on people I could share with (all hugely experienced) and gave assurances that I would make sure it was a success—no one ever wants a job-share to work more than the job-sharers themselves. His response was that he "just didn't see how job-sharing could work" and that if I would agree to do full-time then the job was mine, but if I couldn't commit to doing full-time, then I couldn't do the job. In a subsequent call he also advised that I should "just do what everyone else does and get a full-time nanny". I declined the job, and his suggestion to hire a full-time nanny. I later found out that he gave the job to someone who was far, far less experienced but childless.

Not long after that, I was called about another role, again, by a man I'd worked with before. He was very complimentary about me, and he essentially offered me the job there and then on the phone. But, as he was explaining the finer details of the TX schedule and the format, my daughter started crying in the background and his tone changed entirely. He said, "Oh I didn't realise you'd had a baby since I last saw you", and then came the backtracking. He actually said, "I know I shouldn't really say this, but this probably won't be the right job for you if you've got a baby. To be totally honest, I just think this will be too much for someone with a young child. You know how it is, first series, mad hours and all that." I assured him that he didn't need to be worried about my childcare arrangements and that I would always ensure I was able to stay in the edit just as late as anyone else. He sounded very awkward and then said he would call me back when he'd chatted to the exec. Which, obviously, he never did. Once again, I then found out that the job had gone to someone far less experienced, younger, and with no children.

So, at that point, not quite a year into motherhood, I'd had a series of experiences which had led me to realise that, first, I couldn't (and didn't want to) work full-time—certainly not all the time—whilst our daughter was very young; second, job-sharing definitely *could* work (even on new formats/fast turnaround shows or when you don't know your job-share partner) and it would provide me with a bit more work-life balance; third, some employers are prejudiced towards mothers and resistant to facilitating job-sharing or flexible working. This had been true even when being considered for jobs I was overqualified for and in instances where I knew the series producers. If former colleagues and even "friends" were reluctant to allow me to job-share, what hope was there I could make it a sustainable career choice?

I began to feel a real sense of injustice—particularly as time went on and it became very clear to me that people who had been at the same level as me, or even junior, were leapfrogging me to become execs and even commissioners—and the difference was, they didn't have children.

I think I also felt a sense that, if my career was going to be over anyway, if people weren't going to hire me anymore because I have a child, then I may as well channel my frustration into something positive. I didn't feel like I had as much to lose anymore.

That said, despite deciding I wanted to take a more active role in SMTJ alongside Lou, initially I found it very difficult to speak out publicly about job-sharing. It felt almost shameful to say "actually, I want to spend a bit more time with my family." I was afraid people would perceive me as being less committed to my career and that my phone would stop ringing. I even had a female exec (a mother herself) tell me as much. She advised me that, "rather than trying to change an industry that will never change", I should just get my "head down, work really hard for the next few years" and that "by the time you've had another kid and they're at school, you'll be an exec and can take your foot off the gas a bit from series producing". Perhaps that would be true—but I'd never get back that time with my children and I suspect my mental health, marriage and homelife would have suffered considerably.

The more I got involved with SMTJ and began feeling confident enough to speak at events and on webinars, I began to realise that, actually, it's quite liberating when you speak out and when you realise that there are so many other women having the same experiences and not feeling able to speak about it. I've read academic papers which refer to motherhood being "unspeakable" in television and creative industries and that absolutely resonates, but, hopefully, with things like SMTJ and, more recently, Telly Mums Network (a support group founded by Cheryl Woodcock in 2019) that's all starting to change and mums are feeling more able to speak out about their experiences and challenge the structural barriers and discrimination we face.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: What are the key ways in which working practices in the TV industry negatively impact mothers and parenting more generally?

GRANT: Where to start? There are really so many ways in which the industry works against mothers, parents and care-givers!

- Long working hours and a culture of presenteeism disadvantage anyone with parenting or caring commitments—particularly single mothers, those without family support networks, those living outside the main production hubs, those unable to afford additional childcare costs and mothers with children who have additional needs. As our work on The Time Project has proven, TV workers are regularly working well in excess of fifty hours a week. Jobs regularly involve unsociable hours, late nights, early starts, working weekends, six- or seven-day working weeks, and with many roles requiring people to go away on location. Often, there simply aren't enough hours in the day to work in TV *and* see your children (let alone all the other responsibilities that come with running a home and general adult life!).

- Late commissions, squeezed schedules, a "start tomorrow" and "fast turnaround" commissioning culture gives mothers no time to put childcare plans into place (or change the childcare plans they have in place without notice).

- The industry remains very London-centric, yet very often people with growing families are forced to move out of London for more space/access to schools etc., thus increasing commute

times/reducing access to work; and many companies are unfortunately still reluctant to allow working from home, even post-Ccovid.

- For some jobs, there can be long periods away on location required, which often leads to certain jobs being seen as "male", like directing or sound and camera crew, and more office-based roles, like production co-ordinating and casting being seen as "female". It's not a coincidence that they are often also roles which pay less. As the data from The Time Project has shown, there is a huge gender pay gap in the industry and in terms of going on location, post Covid, we've also seen the rise of being required to "bubble up"—which is exclusionary to many mums, who often can't go away from their families for weeks or months on end.

- There are a lack of mothers in senior positions, so then if women can't see it, they can't be it and the cycle continues. Of the mothers we do see in senior positions, often many have outsourced the traditional home-based labour (have nannies, cleaners etc) and, again, this favours those with money, partners and access to family support. Evidence suggests that if you're from a higher socioeconomic background to begin with, you're more likely to have a nanny/cleaner/space for an au pair etc.—all of which makes staying in the industry easier.

- Informal hiring practices: jobs are often won through networking and teams are decided on the basis of who's most fun on a night out! This perpetuates a "jobs for the boys" culture. When you have children, it's much harder to have time available for networking.

- The largely freelance workforce gives rise to a "feast or famine" way of working. Having no regularity or job security is incompatible with having responsibilities to care for children both economically and practically.

- Freelance women are ineligible for paid maternity leave. They often feel forced to return to work sooner than they would like and then, in the UK, face amongst the most expensive childcare costs in the world. Most childcare options don't offer the level of flexibility (or length of day) that's required to fit around TV work.

- The busiest time of the year for the industry is over the school summer holidays.

- Very few companies have pregnancy and maternity policies in place—so, for example, few provide things like a designated space and fridge for breastfeeding mothers or paid time off for freelancers to attend prenatal appointments and scans.

- A lack of formalised HR or any sort of reporting mechanisms give rise to a prevalence of sexism, ageism, prejudice, bias, gendered discrimination and harassment—there remains a widely held belief that mothers bring problems rather than value to a team. When mothers—particularly freelance mothers—experience these issues, there is often no way of reporting or challenging it and there remains a fear of being "blacklisted" if they do.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: How does flexible working help to encourage more diversity in television work?

GRANT: One of the key benefits of flexible working is improving diversity, which has long been a problem for the TV industry, especially at senior levels where it often seems like pretty much everyone is a white, middle-class, non-disabled man from London or the Home Counties!

Flexible working might mean job-sharing, reduced, condensed or flexible hours, working from home, hybrid working—it can be all sorts of things—but the most important thing is that it is about finding a way of working which supports the workforce to do their job in a more sustainable way.

There is a misconception that flexible work is just "something that's nice for the mums". Flexible working facilitates access for a whole range of under-represented groups, whether that is people with caring commitments, older people, disabled or neurodivergent people or those with physical or mental health issues. It can be helpful to people from low-income backgrounds who need a more stable secondary income, which the freelance nature of TV can't often provide. It's about opening up career progression opportunities and providing a kinder way of working. Flexible working allows us to create a more protected culture to nurture and develop crucial talents within marginalized groups.

Often, people talk about flexible working in TV solely in terms of talent retention, but I think there's a strong case to argue that we should also be offering it at entry level too. For many young people trying to start out in television, if they are without the financial safety net of wealthy parents, the first few years of precarious, low-paid work prove exclusionary. The freelance, short-term nature of the work makes it almost impossible to maintain a stable income stream, particularly for those with limited existing contacts or those who are constrained by location, disability or other acknowledged barriers such as class, gender or race.

With limited entry level positions available, competition is high. Short lead times on many productions mean that people often feel under pressure to "drop it all" in order to accept jobs when they are offered. These jobs can often be just for a week or two at a time. This is an enormous barrier for anyone who has rent to pay, bills or debts to manage. It proves prohibitive for those with caring commitments or other responsibilities, and it can be a significant barrier for anyone who is neurodivergent, disabled or who struggles with aspects of their physical or mental health.

Job-sharing would enable those people to maintain a steady income in another part-time job and thus lessen the financial blow of the precarious nature of freelance television work. It can also mean that disabled people or those with physical or mental health conditions hoping to start out in the industry are able to do so in a way which doesn't force burnout and helps achieve a healthier work–life balance.

There is a "survival of the fittest" mentality in television and I have heard more than one employer express the opinion that TV is "simply not for 'fragile people'". But we need "fragile people"—we need *all* kinds of people, from a whole spectrum of different backgrounds who bring a broad range of lived experience to the industry. It's also worth remembering that extra commitments or health issues can affect any of us at any point in our career, so it is in *everybody*'s interest to encourage a kinder working culture and that includes flexible working.

Huge numbers of highly skilled people leave the TV workforce at a mid-career point, with research suggesting women tend to leave on average in their mid- to late thirties and men around a decade later. Often, they leave to care for children or relatives, or to look after their own mental or physical health, for more work–life balance or greater job security. Yet, by enabling people to remain or return on a flexible basis, companies can, amongst other benefits, increase the diversity of their talent. Allowing people to work from home or offering hybrid working helps to address the London-centric nature of the industry and allows people to live and work where they chose (or, crucially, where they can afford to!). Without a diverse workforce, the people, the product, and our ability to tell meaningful stories all suffer. The industry as a whole loses.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: How does motherhood sit within wider industry debates on diversity and inequality?

GRANT: Very often it doesn't! I've sat through webinars on diversity and been in meetings with people whose job titles explicitly reference diversity, and they never mention motherhood; people seem to forget pregnancy and maternity are a protected characteristic.

The exodus of women over thirty-five and its link to motherhood and a lack of workplace flexibility is a problem the industry has known about for decades but has been very slow to act upon. Whilst many employers will include a "diversity statement" on their job ads or websites, few reference mothers or parents within this or are open to changing the ways in which they work to accommodate parents. They want to be seen to be saying "we're a diverse employer" but do very little to adapt the jobs, reduce working hours or make any other adjustments to ensure jobs are accessible for mums and people with caring commitments.

There's a sense that motherhood is viewed as a personal, individual choice. Unlike most other protected characteristics, we chose to be mothers, and so there's a sense that we "made our bed"—that we always knew that working in TV and being a mum would be hard to combine, so we should either get on with it and stop complaining so much or admit defeat and leave quietly!

One thing shown in the report is that the "motherhood penalty" appears to affect mothers regardless of their social class background and ethnic origin. Often, it feels like the industry is only able to focus on "fixing" one area of diversity at once, when in fact many of the practical solutions they could seek to implement would help lots of different under-represented groups. We need a holistic approach to creating more equal, caring and supportive workplaces that are accessible for everyone, including mothers.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: What has been the single most difficult and impactful aspect of the pandemic on your own professional practices and those within the community that you support?

GRANT: As the report for *Locked Down and Locked Out* clearly showed, mothers in television were impacted exponentially by the pandemic. The closures of schools and loss of access to childcare provisions made it impossible for many women to continue working; and for those who did, the impact on their mental health and relationships was often enormous.

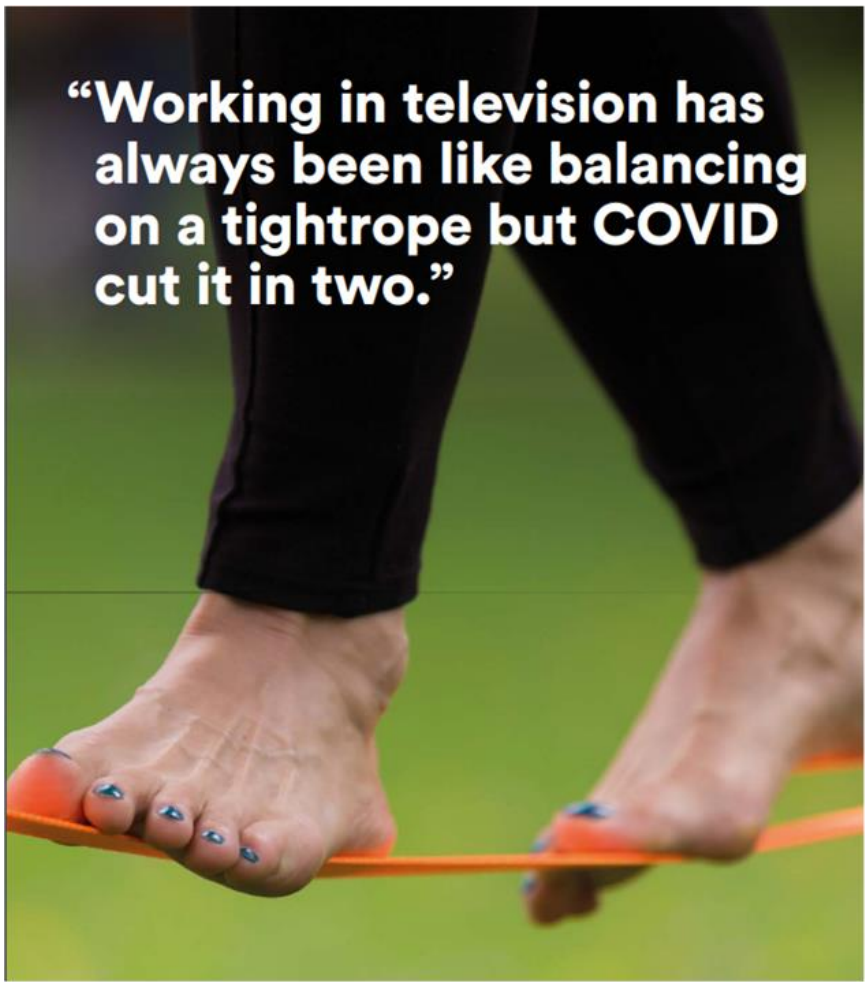

Figure 2: Covid made deep seated inequalities in creative work more visible. Image from the project report, *Locked Down and Locked Out: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Mothers Working in the UK Television Industry*.

For me personally, at the start of the pandemic I lost a six-month contract with no notice period when production was halted. As my husband is also a freelancer in television, there was a huge amount of anxiety about how we would survive financially and a lot of uncertainty about if and when things might return to “normal”. When production did start up again, I was unable to work due to a lack of access to childcare, which was extremely frustrating. All the jobs I was getting calls about went to men without primary caring responsibilities. When I finally did go back to work, the stress of intermittent home schooling and the constant threat of more school closures felt overwhelming at times, but I feel very aware that, compared to many women in the industry, my story is a relatively positive one. Some of the stories which came out of the *Locked Down and Locked Out* research, and the stories of women I have met through Telly Mums Network since, have been truly heart breaking and many of those women will be impacted financially and emotionally by the last couple of years for a very long time to come.

It can feel quite hard, therefore, to see positives from what we have all lived through over the past two years, but, hopefully there might be some.

For everyone, the pandemic meant that our home lives and our work lives collided in a way they hadn't before. Suddenly, many of us went from trying to avoid mentioning our children at work and often hiding our motherhood identity, to having our kids pop up on zoom meetings with commissioners! Pre-pandemic, I would've rarely talked to my boss about my child; yet, in the midst of the pandemic, she was often running around naked in the back of a zoom call! (My daughter, that is, not my boss!) It opened up conversations we hadn't had before, and perhaps that is a first step in people feeling like they can bring their "true selves" to work?

Conversations around flexible working, job-sharing, working from home, caring for relatives, childcare, parenting and work—they've all come to the fore much more. Flexible working has been discussed on the news and in the papers, it's in the public consciousness in a way it wasn't before, so it's much more difficult for the TV industry to view it as a niche way of working.

Working from home is also becoming much more accepted in the industry—though, it has to be said, not by all companies. The pandemic proved that we can all make shows without being in the office or edit suite every day and, whilst working from home is not always the perfect solution for everyone (data from The Time Project shows people working from home tend to work longer hours), the fact that it is at least an option now opens up opportunities for some people to work in a way that is more suited to them.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: Where does responsibility for making change lie? And why has progress been so slow?

GRANT: The responsibility for making real change ultimately lies with the broadcasters and subscription video on demand platforms—they're the ones at the top of the food chain, holding the purse strings.

Unfortunately, at the moment there's a lot of performative action and not a lot of practical, substantive change. It's great that the broadcasters have so many equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives and that they pay into things like the Film and TV Charity to fund mental-health support phone lines and counselling services for freelancers, but, arguably, not so many people would need mental health support if they turned their attention to changing the ways in which we work, improving conditions and actually enabling the people who make their shows to have things like a healthy work–life balance and job security.

To really address the causes of many of the issues the industry faces would mean broadcasters accepting more responsibility for the people who make their shows. It will mean extending schedules and lead up times, putting an end to "buy out" contracts and to stop expecting people to work an uncapped number of hours, often unpaid. It would mean them committing to improving staffing budgets, investing in training and development, creating more staff positions, perhaps even funding an independent reporting body. Ultimately, a lot of these solutions mean spending more money, which is the main reason progress has been so slow—although, arguably, the benefits of attracting a more diverse workforce and retaining them (and having a healthier and happier industry) would pay dividends.

Progress has also been slow because there has always been an abundant supply of people desperate to work in television: there is a "revolving door" of talent which means there are always new entrants keen to step up and accept working conditions perhaps others cannot. Although I do increasingly wonder whether that might start to change too in the post-pandemic employment landscape.

KENNEDY & NEWSINGER: Is television a good place to work for women?

GRANT: Working in television can be hugely rewarding and it can be amazing fun. Some of my happiest memories have been whilst I've been at work—which I imagine can't be said for people in a lot of jobs! Many of my closest friends and even my husband are people I've met at work. I've felt privileged to meet some incredible contributors and share their stories on screen. My job has given me the opportunity to travel very extensively and have some really magical experiences—things I would've never been able to do in any other career.

However, the industry remains one that is rife with sexism and misogyny. Almost every woman I know working in TV has a story of being on the receiving end of a sexist comment, of being discriminated against because of their gender or has experienced sexual harassment and even sexual assault. We have seen from the data on The Time Project that women in TV are being consistently underpaid compared to men. Women are working longer hours, for less money. Other research has shown that women leave the industry much earlier than their male counterparts—it is not a long-term career for most women who start out.

I have a disproportionately high number of friends working in TV who've undergone IVF treatment on their own and often talk about how working so hard and such long hours throughout their twenties and thirties meant they "never had time to meet anyone". Many women in TV I know feel like they've missed out on things like a long-term relationship, having children or spending time with their friends and family because of the demands of their jobs. It's not an industry that lends itself to a life outside of work—how can you have time for anything else, if you're working sixty or even eighty hours a week?

We live in a society where women still tend to be the ones who take on unpaid caring responsibilities, be that motherhood or caring for an elderly parent or relative, and working in TV, particularly as a freelancer, is not really conducive to that. It is an ageist industry and, mothers or not, women over fifty are especially scarce. Informal hiring practices and a lack of HR protection disadvantage older women. Recent data from Ofcom, the UK broadcast regulator, showed that only 17% of women in the TV workforce are aged over fifty, and as their data was based on workers with staff jobs at the channels, I would suspect the figure is even lower amongst freelancers. Across society, as well as a gender pay gap, women also face a pension pay gap—and again, the freelance nature of TV only exacerbates that. Most freelance women in TV I know don't have a pension and many, even those in senior level roles which pay relatively well, often talk about feeling financially unstable.

Women working in television are also impacted by a lack of support around menopause, which, it is worth remembering, starts for some in their thirties. Again, this is especially problematic for freelancers. Whereas broadcasters like Chanel Four and more recently, ITV have

brought in menopause policies for their staff, no such support exists for freelance workers. Women in menopause often need additional support to remain in work, which the industry simply doesn't provide.

Whilst I don't regret pursuing a career in TV, I'm not sure it is a career I would encourage my own daughter into; certainly, not unless the workplace culture was to change quite considerably.

Note

[i] For enquiries related to the ongoing research around motherhood in UK TV, please contact: jack.newsinger@nottingham.ac.uk.

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