And … action?

Gender, knowledge and inequalities in the UK screen industries

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Abstract

This article explores how a knowledge ecology framework can help us better understand the production of gender knowledge, especially in relation to improving gender equality. Drawing on Law et al. (2011), it analyses what knowledge of gender inequality is made visible and actionable in the case of the UK screen sector. We, firstly, show (1) that the gender knowledge production for the UK screen sector operated with reductionist understandings of gender and gender inequality, and presented gender inequality as something that needed evidencing rather than changing, and (2) that gender knowledge was circulated in two relatively distinct circuits, a policy- and practice-facing one focused on workforce statistics and a more heterogeneous and critical academic one. We then discuss which aspects of gender inequality in the UK screen industry remained invisible and thus less actionable. The article concludes with a critical appreciation of how the knowledge ecology framework might help better understand gender knowledge production, in relation to social change in the UK screen sector and beyond.

Keywords

screen industries, gender, knowledge production, creative industries, double social life of method

Introduction

Research on gender has an established concern with knowledge (e.g. Haraway, 1988, Butler, 2010). It examines how knowledge brings gender into reality and makes it actionable – for better (for instance when gender identity becomes a source of individual empowerment) or worse (for instance in the case of gender discrimination in pay (Eveline & Todd, 2009)). This article focuses on gender knowledge and work: it asks how we can better understand the relationship between knowledge about gender and gender inequality in work on the one hand, and attempts to advance gender equality on the other. Gender knowledge, for the purpose of this article broadly defined as the knowledge about gendered perceptions, experiences, practices and outcomes in work, is contingent. What gender equality initiatives are possible and probable depends on what gender knowledge is produced and circulated, and which aspects of gender inequality that knowledge makes visible. For instance, as Walby (2011) shows, depending on the definition of knowledge work used, certain gender gaps become visible in workforce statistics and others do not. Similarly, Cullen and Murphy (2018) show how different understandings of the business case for gender equality led to the prioritisation of certain gender equality initiatives (increasing the share of women on boards, for

instance) over others (e.g. better childcare provision). If we seek to understand existing and possible gender equality interventions, we thus need to understand what gender inequalities the gender knowledge for a specific setting makes visible and actionable.

This article explores how a knowledge ecology framework can help us better understand the production of gender knowledge, especially in relation to improving gender equality. The knowledge ecology framework is based on Law et al.'s (2011) work on the social life of method (see also Law & Urry, 2004; Law, 2009; Savage, 2013). The social life of method approach analyses how research methods help manifest the very social realities they claim to measure or represent, and how the way methods create knowledge is linked to social change. Law et al. (2011, p. 11) posit that the methods used to create knowledge 'have relations, circulate and (re-)produce realities and have genealogies – of problems, interests, purposes – that are mutually implicated.' These complexities, they argue, need to be appreciated in their entirety, especially if we want to understand the potential of knowledge to facilitate social change.

We apply the knowledge ecology framework (Law et al., 2011) to a purposefully chosen empirical context, the UK screen sector. Comprising film, TV, video games, animation and special effects production, the UK screen sector has been the subject of substantive gender knowledge production, much of which sought to facilitate social change, in the form of better gender equality as well as increased workforce diversity more broadly. It thus constitutes a fruitful case for exploring what understanding of the link between gender knowledge production and social change might be gained from applying a knowledge ecology lens.

The following two sections explain the conceptual and empirical background of our analysis. Using Law et al.'s framework, we then explore different aspects of the gender knowledge ecology for the UK screen sector (section 4) and discuss what is made visible and actionable (section 5). To conclude we offer a critical appreciation of how the knowledge ecology framework might help better understand gender knowledge production, in relation to social change in the UK screen sector and beyond, and identify future avenues for research.

An ecology perspective on knowledge

Our analysis of gender knowledge in the UK screen sector uses the ecology framework proposed by Law, Ruppert and Savage as a conceptual lens for 'rethinking knowledges, realities and methods' (Law et al., 2011, p. 14; see also Law & Urry, 2004; Law, 2009; Savage, 2013). Examining what they term 'the double social life of method', Law et al.'s starting point is a discussion of research methods as tools for generating knowledge. They emphasise that, firstly, methods are 'constituted by the social world of which they are a part' (2011, p. 4). Methods are shaped by the purposes towards which they are developed and applied, by the researchers who apply and by the stakeholders who advocate them. Secondly, methods also powerfully produce and reproduce the social by providing the languages and frameworks through which we perceive, articulate and negotiate what is perceived as reality. Law et al. go on to argue that the knowledge produced by methods 'inhabit[s] and reproduce[s] ecological forms that fit more or less comfortably together' (2011, p. 13), that is, a wider ecology involved and implicated in the production, circulation and application of that knowledge. These ecologies comprise 'knowledges, realities and methods' that need to be considered 'in the same breath […] to understand the work being done by our methods' (2011, p. 14). Law et al. emphasise that only if we take into account the ecology in which knowledge is produced and circulated, as well as the knowledge itself, can we work towards social change.

Affecting social change requires thinking and knowing differently, they conclude, which in turn requires not just a mere change of narratives, but intervention in, and reconfiguration of, complex ecologies.

Law et al.'s agenda of questioning knowledge in its multi-faceted ecology has been taken up across the social sciences, for instance in debates on digital methodology and the role of Big Data in social research (e.g. Ruppert, 2013; Ruppert et al., 2015; Halford & Savage, 2017); in cultural policy studies, particularly research into the production of regimes of cultural value in public policy (e.g. Gilmore, 2014; D. O'Brien, 2014; Campbell et al., 2016; Miles & Gibson 2016); and in critical international relations research (e.g. Aradau & Huysmuns, 2014). The unifying concern across these disciplines is with the 'performative practices' of producing and circulating knowledge 'through which "truthful" worlds are enacted, both in the sense of being acted upon and coming into being' (Aradau & Huysmuns, 2014, p. 598). This concern has become particularly salient with the rise of 'evidence based' policy in the UK and elsewhere. Evidence based policy explicitly ties the shaping of social reality through political acts to a body of knowledge that is purposefully produced to aid the design of these political acts. In this context, governments' ontological politics, for instance their preferences for and their investments in certain methods, have become a renewed point of interest for research (Savage, 2013).

For our analysis of gender knowledge and social change in the screen sector, Law et al.'s framework was an attractive tool for two related reasons. Firstly, it is designed to explore what we know and how we know it as well as the potential for knowing differently and thus doing differently. It explicitly interrogates how methods and knowledge production (re-)produce social realities and thus impact what social change is possible. Secondly, the framework aims to enable critical enquiry into the production and circulation of knowledge, which is in itself a political undertaking – one that, in Law et al.'s parlance, implicitly establishes knowledge production requiring deconstruction.[i] However, Law et al.'s concepts do not have any particular direction of workforce diversity or gender critique inscribed and should thus enable a critical analysis of gender knowledge and its production without requiring an a priori commitment to specific aims of gender-related social change. These key properties motivated our choice to use a knowledge ecology perspective in our analysis.

Building on Law et al.'s work, we focus our analysis of the gender knowledge production for the UK screen industry on three constituent parts of knowledge ecologies:

- The *representations* of knowledge, i.e. the content and the way that content is presented: Representations provide articulations of the social that can be referred to and acted upon, they transform data into information and 'known reality'. Our analysis of the gender knowledge for screen work therefore included a content analysis of what knowledge is presented and how.
- The *realities* produced and reproduced in knowledge production: Depending on their designs and focus, methods are based on and reinforce *putative realities*, underlying or inferred understandings of their research object – a specific concept of gender, for instance. We also consider the *implicit realities* embedded in methods, the assumptions about the characteristics of the subjects and objects involved in knowledge creation – for instance the assumptions about what or who constitutes an appropriate source of data on gender equality.
- The *institutional context* in which knowledge is generated and the *circuits* in which it is communicated, disseminated and applied: The institutional context of knowledge production directly impacts what realities are being made visible and knowable. Political agendas, for instance, influence the research questions asked or the methods chosen. The

circuits through which knowledge then flows – academic journals, government briefing papers, school curricula, business consultancy advice, general media etc. – further impact what becomes knowable and actionable. Our analysis therefore looks at the sector and policy context for gender equality in the screen sector, as well as the circuits in which gender knowledge is created and circulated.

Gender, workforce diversity and the UK screen sector

Empirically our analysis of gender knowledge focused on the UK screen sector. This choice of empirical setting was deliberate, both in terms of geography and industry focus. The UK has been a leading proponent of policy that proposes the creative industries (broadly: art, culture and their more applied incarnations such as advertising, design, software or digital R&D) as vehicles for delivering economic growth, prosperity and opportunity more widely (Banks & O'Connor, 2017). However, while such creative industries policy has proved popular internationally (Chapain & Stryjakiewicz, 2017; Keane, 2013; Flew, 2012), there is now growing recognition of entrenched social inequality in creative work, namely that women workers as well as workers from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled workers are demonstrably less likely to establish a successful creative career (D. O'Brien et al., 2016).

Comprising film, television (TV), animation, video games and special effects production (VFX), the screen sector constitutes a major share of the UK's creative industries and has been at the forefront of the creative industries policy agenda (Newsinger, 2012). Broadcasters and sector organisations such as the British Film Institute (BFI), Creative Skillset, Women in Film and Television, Directors UK or the union BECTU have for some time engaged in pro-diversity policy, initiatives and interventions aimed especially at women, ethnic minorities and disabled people. Prominent examples are the commitment in the BFI Diversity Standards to encourage increased diversity in National Lottery-funded films or Channel 4's 360° Diversity Charter which includes guidelines for considering workforce diversity in commissioning decisions (for a critique of diversity schemes such as these see Nwonka & Malik, 2018). Gender inequalities in screen work are part of this established broader diversity agenda, but also distinctly visible within it. Shortly after the conclusion of our study, the Weinstein scandal and responding #MeToo and Time's Up campaigns (Dean, 2017) established film and TV in particular as fundamentally problematic working environments for women.

From the onset, practice and policy initiatives have been complemented as well as challenged by academic and industry research. This research and the gender knowledge produced by it is the object of our analysis, rather than the empirical analysis of, say, practices of knowledge application (e.g. developing a new diversity initiative). Overwhelmingly, this academic and industry research was produced not just to improve knowledge about gender inequality, but also to reduce inequalities. Because of this close link between knowledge production and social change, the UK screen sector constitutes a fruitful empirical case for exploring 'the work being done by our methods' (Law et al., 2011, p. 14) and how the representations, realities, contexts and circuits of knowledge production might impact social change.

We used Law et al.'s conceptual framework to interpret gender-related findings from a meta-analysis undertaken as part of a broader study into the knowledge base for workforce diversity policy and practice in the UK screen sector. This meta-analysis had, firstly, identified all research

- with a primary focus on workforce issues in the UK screen industries, i.e. film, television, video games, animation programming, and special effects; and

- with a primary focus on one or more of the following diversity characteristics: age, disability, gender and gender reassignment, location, pregnancy and maternity, religion, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class; and
- published in English between 2012 to 2016, i.e. from the year of the UK Film Policy Review (DCMS, 2012) to the beginning of our study in 2016.

This definition omitted less recent work as well as research published in other languages or exclusively concerned with screen industries in other geographies.[ii] Our rationale for this omission was that UK screen industry stakeholders (academics and especially practitioners and policy-makers) would base their work on research that was recent and (at least partly) concerned with their own geographical and economic footprint. It should be noted though that knowledge predating 2012 or pertaining to non-UK/non-screen contexts was indirectly included in the knowledge reviewed where publications themselves drew on it. The discussion and conclusion section refer to recent and non-UK research into the screen sector where possible.

Using a list of 77 search terms,[iii] we searched titles, key words, and abstracts/summaries across research databases, websites of key organisations, Google Scholar, relevant academic journals and unpublished research sourced through the research team's professional contacts. The search strategy was tested against existing bibliographic records and across academic databases and initially yielded 4,400 search results. These results were manually screened to identify 173 items that matched the three criteria above.

In a second step, we performed a rapid evidence review (Ganann et al., 2010; Lucas et al., 2004) on these 173 items to identify publications with a genuine research (as opposed to journalistic, entertainment or campaigning) focus on:

- the current state of workforce diversity in the UK screen industries, e.g. workforce composition, causes of discrimination and unequal participation, barriers to increasing diversity, multiple and intersectionality effects, and differences between industries or diversity characteristics;
- evidence on interventions to increase workforce diversity in the UK screen industries;
- evidence on the cultural, social or business justifications for increasing workforce diversity in the UK screen industries.

The rapid evidence assessments were discussed between the research team to ensure inter-rater reliability (Armstrong et al., 1997; Morse et al., 2002) and resulted in a body of 80 studies. In a third step, these 80 studies were read in-depth by the research team and thematically coded using Nvivo 11 software. This article reports mainly on those 56 studies from our meta-analysis that related to gender in the UK screen sector, either solely or in combination with other workforce diversity characteristics, supplemented with general knowledge about the UK screen sector (its key organisations and relevant policies) acquired over the course of our studies. Our choice to analyse gender knowledge production using this particular set of data is, of course, in itself an act of construction and establishing knowledge – we will return to this point when reflecting on the limitations of our approach in the conclusion.

Before presenting the findings from our meta-analysis it is important to note that our search was set up to identify publications that featured one or more of the UK screen industries. Consequently, research on gender equality more broadly would not necessarily have been picked up by the search. The items reviewed predominantly comprised research into cultural work, which, in terms of topics

and methodologies, overlaps with sociology, work and employment studies, organization studies, management research or labour market economics. However, as a collective body of work, research on cultural work by no means mirrors the extent of those disciplines' combined œvre on gender equality in work, partly because of its relative infancy as a research field. Our analysis of the content of gender knowledge in the screen sector was largely inductive. We first sought to establish what existed (and how it was produced and presented) and then contrasted the existing knowledge with key themes of research on gender equality in work more broadly, including workforce participation, pay, promotion, gender discrimination and intersectionalities.

The gender knowledge for the UK screen sector: an ecology perspective

The multi-faceted complexities of knowledge production make it difficult, if not impossible, to exactly identify what was produced first and then (re-)produced something else. As D. O'Brien (2014, p. 33) puts it: 'the methods by which methods constitute things like risks, policy problems or populations can often be very difficult to track, and the impact of the double moment of constituting and constituted even more so.' Any sequence of written presentation will inevitably suggest a linearity or hierarchy that slightly misrepresents the complex, mutually constituting relationships of representations, realities, circuits and contexts. The presentation of the findings below has to be read with this caveat in mind. We first explain the context and circuits, to give a sense of the overall setting in which the complexities of gender knowledge production in the UK screen sector play out. We then analyse the representations (the content and presentation) of gender knowledge and, finally, the realities, the hidden assumptions and understandings that knowledge production draws upon and reproduces.

Context and circuits

The production of gender knowledge in the UK screen sector is embedded into a political context that putatively promotes diversity and equal opportunity. At the start of the millennium, the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) made it one of the UK Film Council's goals to 'support and encourage cultural diversity and social inclusiveness' (Film Council, 2000, p. 9). As outlined above, since then key industry players have engaged not only in initiatives to improve workforce diversity, but also in producing knowledge about it, for instance through the Creative Skillset workforce censuses, the BFI's Statistical Yearbooks and, most recently, Project Diamond, an initiative developed to systematically collect information about the diversity characteristics of TV outputs and workers (Creative Diversity Network, 2017). Diversity initiatives such as these have been strongly influenced by the UK's 2010 Equality Act, which enshrined into law equal access rights to employment and services regardless of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, religion, race, sex and sexual orientation (Hepple, 2010). Importantly, the Equality Act also places a duty on public organisations to proactively promote diversity in the workplace. Because a substantive share of the UK screen sector is funded from public sources the Equality Act applies directly or indirectly to a large share of its businesses, organisations and activities. As a consequence, the Equalities Act has become very influential in the creation of workforce diversity knowledge: research typically understands and prioritises diversity through the lens of demographic characteristics mentioned in the Act.

Gender inequalities in screen work are part of this established broader diversity agenda, but also distinctly visible within it: Of the 80 studies into workforce diversity in the UK screen sector, 56

studies covered gender as a diversity characteristic – more than race and ethnicity (41 studies), the next most researched characteristic, and twice as many studies as those covering disability (27 studies) or social class (21 studies). In addition, gender received comparatively more attention from industry research: whereas workforce diversity research overall originated roughly half/half from academic and industry sources, more than two thirds of studies that covered gender in the screen sector and met the selection criteria for our meta-analysis came from industry and less than one third were of academic origin. These figures have to be interpreted cautiously (for instance, they only capture whether gender featured in a particular study, not how extensively), but they do indicate substantial production of gender knowledge both within the screen industry and academic research.

Industry research is produced, published and disseminated by sector organisations such as Creative Skillset, the Creative Diversity Network or the BFI. Some of these bodies are member organisations for screen sector businesses with an explicit brief to produce and provide gender knowledge for their members (e.g. Project Diamond provides diversity data analysis for the five biggest broadcasters). Some sector organisations also have explicit policy briefs and implicit obligations to advance workforce diversity (e.g. the British Film Institute's funding activities have to deliver on the government's diversity goals) and many sector organisations engage in initiatives to promote gender equality themselves (e.g. the mentoring programmes run by campaigning organisation Women in Film & TV). Sector organisations are thus extremely influential both in the production of gender knowledge in the UK screen sector and in the application of that knowledge in the delivery of gender equality initiatives. Industry research overwhelmingly produced gender knowledge using quantitative methodologies (Creative Skillset, 2012; Directors UK, 2014; DCMS, 2014). This choice of methods is likely to be at least partly driven by resource considerations: Quantitative workforce surveys can collect sector-wide data for reporting on Equality Act indicators at relatively low cost. The use of workforce surveys as tools for creating gender knowledge in the screen sector is limited by a range of factors, some distinct to screen sector work, and considerable debate is devoted to such methodological issues (CAMEo, 2018; D. O'Brien et al., 2016; Wreyford & Cobb, 2017). However, in this article we are more concerned with the putative realities assumed and perpetuated by the surveys, which we will discuss below.

The academic production of knowledge about screen work takes place in the emerging, interdisciplinary as well as international research area of cultural work. Knowledge contributions come predominantly from cultural studies; cultural sociology and cultural policy; work and employment studies; and management, human resource management and organisation studies. Contributions are published in the journals and conference sub-themes of these disciplines rather than in outlets solely dedicated to cultural work. Key research foci in that knowledge ecology are the lived experience of cultural work and inequality, representations of cultural producers, creative careers and motivation, as well as, increasingly, the structures and systems that withhold or afford opportunity in cultural work. Within that academic knowledge ecology, research into screen work produced gender knowledge predominantly through qualitative research methods (Gill, 2014a; Mills & Ralph, 2015; Wreyford, 2015) and often used quantitative industry research as a foundation from which to embark on more in-depth, critical enquiry. Academic research also produced specific realities of gender equality, and we will discuss these below too. For our understanding of contexts and circuits, another finding is worth noting first. While academic research cited and built on industry research, industry research by and large did not cite academic work and was overwhelmingly self-referential. There was thus little evidence of industry research being cross-pollinated with academic research: if industry research was cognisant of, or even used, academic research, that cognisance or use were not visible. From our analysis of the research itself (rather

than empirical data gathered specifically on practices of knowledge application) it thus appears that, in the terms of Law et al.'s framework, gender knowledge in the UK screen industry was produced and disseminated in two distinct circuits: an industry circuit operating independently of academic gender knowledge production, and an academic circuit in which academic and industry knowledge were produced and circulated in combination.

Representations

Our analysis of representations asked what knowledge about gender inequality was established through industry and academic research: what articulations of gender inequality were produced, what aspects of gender inequality were made visible? Condensing findings from an in-depth content analysis, this sub-section provides an overview of research into gender in the UK screen sector to illustrate the representations dominating the gender knowledge ecology.

A major share of both industry and academic knowledge production was dedicated to *evidencing the existence of gender inequalities*. Around 60% of the 56 studies relating to gender in the UK screen sector used workforce statistics to establish knowledge on women's workforce participation

- by industry, e.g. showing that women were better represented in film and TV than in the creative media industries generally (47% and 45% versus 36%, respectively) and much less well represented in video games, animation and VFX (Creative Skillset, 2012);
- by roles, e.g. showing that women were under-represented in key creative, decision making and technical roles (screenwriting, directing, sound and camera) but over-represented in costume and make up (BFI, 2013; Follows et al., 2016; Creative Skillset, 2012);
- by seniority, e.g. establishing women as relatively under-represented in senior roles and better represented at junior levels (Gill, 2014a);
- in relation to the presence of other women in the workforce (e.g. women-directed film projects tended to have a (much) higher proportion of women in key creative roles than male-directed projects (Follows et al., 2016));
- in relation to specific genres (e.g. women were seen as more suited to working on children's films and romance (Follows et al., 2016) and less suited to directing drama, entertainment and sci-fi shows, or to presenting 'hard' news stories or commenting as experts (Directors UK, 2014; House of Lords, 2015; World Association for Christian Communication, 2015)).

Just under half of the gender-related research in our meta-analysis focused on *barriers to women's participation and advancement* in the UK screen sector and established knowledge in four areas. Firstly, knowledge on work and employment conditions centred on how long and unsocial hours, flexible contracts and freelancing, income insecurities, low paid entry positions, lack of childcare/work-life balance policies and presenteeism pose obstacles to women with caring commitments (e.g. Follows et al., 2016; A. O'Brien, 2014; House of Lords Select Committee, 2015; Raising Films 2016; Wing-Fai et al., 2015). This knowledge also established women as taking on this struggle of combining career and caring sustained by a noticeable dedication to, or even love for, working in the screen sector (Eikhof & York, 2015) as well as an 'ethic of 'getting on with it', not 'moaning' or 'whinging'' (Wing-Fai et al., 2015, p. 61).

A second area of knowledge on barriers to women's participation and advancement centred on gendered perceptions. This gender knowledge, firstly, described typical perceptions of women and how, regardless of their truth value (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015) these perceptions impacted employment prospects. Studies evidenced perceptions of women as more suited to caring,

nurturing, communicating and operational management, and to working on less serious topics such children's programmes and quiz shows (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Mills & Ralph, 2015; World Association for Christian Communication, 2015). Women were also seen as '"risky" in a way men are not' (European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016a, p. 191), and, in the case of mothers, as not having enough 'hunger' to succeed (Wing-Fai et al., 2015, p. 15). Notably, these perceptions were invoked in gender-specific ways: while men were judged on individual achievement, perceptions of women fed through into the collective stereotyping of women workers (Wing-Fai et al., 2015). Lastly, studies relating to gendered perceptions also established knowledge about women's difficulties in dealing with these perceptions, being reluctant to raise gender issues for fear of being labelled a 'killjoy' (Mills & Ralph, 2015) or 'gaining a reputation within industry networks for being 'difficult' and thereby risking future work' (A. O'Brien, 2014, p. 8; House of Lords Select Committee, 2015).

The third area of knowledge production relating to barriers was concerned with sexism, ageism and lookism. Studies into TV work produced evidence that women's employment opportunities were influenced by youthful ideals of women's beauty and corporeal aesthetics (Eikhof & York, 2015) and that such preferences were justified with alleged audience demands (Spedale & Coupland, 2014). Women engaging in 'beauty work' to avoid discrimination was both documented as a fact and critically discussed as reproducing disempowering gender stereotypes (Spedale & Coupland, 2014).

A fourth area of studies into barriers to women's workforce participation established knowledge about a 'new sexism' (Gill, 2014a, p. 514), showing how individuals would hold gender-equal or feminist world-views and then openly subordinate these to business imperatives, for instance framing business risks as legitimate reasons for gender-based recruitment decisions. These studies also raised how such legitimising of discrimination was accepted by its victims (Gill, 2014a; House of Lords, 2015; Wreyford 2015), who accepted that it was 'more 'rational' to hire a man, because he would be less likely to leave or to take time off' (Wing-Fai et al., 2015, p. 14).

A much smaller proportion of academic and industry research was dedicated to producing knowledge of *how and why to increase gender equality* (16 and four studies, respectively). Again, three thematic foci emerged from our analysis. Firstly, most knowledge production focused on empowering initiatives, i.e. initiatives designed to enhance individual women's capacity to enter and to progress in screen work. Industry research on this topic mainly established knowledge about the training or mentoring/coaching activities themselves, or reproduced their recommendations, for instance regarding networking or the role of TV in challenging stereotypes (e.g. BBC, 2013; Channel 4, 2016a; Directors UK, 2014). Academic studies of empowering interventions produced more critical knowledge, for instance, analysing attempts to disrupt the 'technical and geeky' image of digital worker (Proctor-Thomson 2013). A second thematic focus of knowledge production was the need to transform sector practice and to remove barriers to women's participation and advancement. A small share of knowledge evidenced that social change in the screen sector required structural change, for instance through recommendations of voluntary targets for increasing women's participation on and off-screen (House of Lords, 2015), changes in hiring practices and the provision of childcare (Creative Industries Federation, 2016) as well as specialised data gathering and policy development, production funding targets for women, and gender parity on all commissioning panels (European Women's Audiovisual Network, 2016b). Thirdly, knowledge production focused on the opportunities lost as a consequence of women's unequal workforce participation. Knowledge production on this topic portrayed the lack of gender equality as limiting the screen industries' outputs, for instance because it excluded talent and reduced the diversity of experiences and perspectives in cultural production. This lost opportunity was presented as negatively affecting companies, audiences and the UK's screen sector more generally (e.g. Channel 4, 2016b Creative

Industries Federation, 2016; Creative Scotland, 2015; Directors UK, 2014, 2015; Raising Films, 2016). Only one study presented empirical evidence for these lost opportunity claims (Dodd, 2012), whereas others highlighted the difficulties of identifying the benefits of increased gender equality (e.g. Mills & Ralph, 2015).

Overall, knowledge on interventions to improve gender equality accounted for a much smaller share of the overall gender knowledge produced for the UK screen sector. Overwhelmingly, the gender inequality was articulated as something that needed to be evidenced and explained, rather than challenged and changed.

Realities

Within the representations of gender knowledge operated putative and implicit realities of gender and gender inequality. At a basic level, both industry and academic research produced a putative reality of a gendered screen sector workforce. Sector statistics and surveys, but to a less visible extent also qualitative research (Law & Urry, 2004; Savage, 2013), produce populations, and, in the case of the UK screen sector workforce, they produced them as gendered. In so doing the problem of gender inequality was made visible.

Building on this general reality of gender inequality as an issue, gender knowledge for the UK screen sector featured a pronounced putative reality of gender itself. Across the studies in our meta-analysis, and independent of methodology or provenance, gender was understood as binary (woman vs. man) and, implicitly, as cisgender heterosexual woman. Although we had explicitly designed the meta-analysis to search for publications covering sexual orientation and gender reassignment, we found no research specifically dedicated to, for instance, the workplace experiences of LGBT+ workers in the screen industries. Gender knowledge in the UK screen sector centred firmly on comparisons of women with men, for instance regarding workforce participation, ability to cope with precarious employment conditions or the perception of workers' abilities. Importantly, based on this binary understanding, gender was also overwhelmingly understood as 'relating to women'. Men's experiences or male-specific issues were hardly discussed; analysis and discussions focused squarely on women.

On the one hand, the gender knowledge was thus dominated by a doubly reductionist understanding of gender: as cisgender heterosexual and as equating to women. On the other hand, gender featured as closely linked to, if not synonymous with, motherhood and age. This understanding was most pronounced in knowledge on perceptions of women and on employment conditions as barriers for workers with caring responsibilities. Similarly, research into age as an influence on workforce participation and advancement focused squarely on the experience of the 'ageing woman' and did not discuss male or gender-neutral aspects. Notably, other diversity characteristics – disability, race and ethnicity, class or geographic location – were not presented in gendered ways. The production of gender knowledge thus also featured reductionist understandings of caring responsibilities and age as 'women's issues.' Overall, gender knowledge in the UK screen sector thus purported – explicitly and implicitly – a putative reality of gender as cisgender heterosexual woman, with age and motherhood as constituent components.

The two different methods used in gender knowledge production, qualitative and quantitative research, share this implicit reality of gender. However, they (re-)produced different realities of gender inequality. Quantitative research (34 studies) produced gender knowledge mainly through workforce surveys (e.g. Creative Skillset, 2012; Directors UK, 2014; DCMS, 2014). These surveys

collected nominal or ordinal data on diversity characteristics, typically those mentioned in the Equalities Act, i.e. gender, age, and, infrequently, gender reassignment, marriage, pregnancy and maternity, which was then transformed into workforce statistics, largely centred on women's unequal participation in screen sector employment. The putative reality established here was thus one of gender inequality as meaning 'unequal presence of women in the workforce'.

Two further implicit realities also operate through these quantitative studies. On the one hand, workforce surveys carry with them the assumption that employers and individual workers can be surveyed in ways that collect relevant, valid and reliable information. In the screen sector, this is a methodologically problematic assumption. For example, the annual Creative Skillset census is based on employer responses from invitations sent to every registered company in the creative media sectors (including, but not limited to the screen industries), around 20,000 companies in 2014. The survey achieved a 57 per cent response rate in 2014 but freelancers who were not working on the day of the census were excluded, which especially affects industries like film and TV with particularly high shares of freelance employment. On the other hand, the focus on workforce statistics prioritises an understanding of gender equality as something about which knowledge can be produced and articulated at the macro-level of the collective (the sector workforce) – also a problematic assumption, to which we will return in our joint discussion below.

Qualitative research, which was at the centre of 15 studies into gender and screen sector work, predominantly produced gender knowledge based on interviews with women workers. These studies established, often very passionately and emphatically, a reality of gender inequality as an individual experience of struggle in and against the screen sector as an employment context. This articulation of gender inequality centred on women as in various ways disadvantaged (e.g. not possessing the right networks, for instance, or being perceived in negatively connoted ways) who are fighting to make good that disadvantage and to overcome systemic barriers to workforce participation (e.g. Gill, 2014a; Mills & Ralph, 2015; Wreyford, 2015). Implicitly, this qualitative approach is based on, and perpetuates the assumption of, individual workers as able to recognise and articulate experiences of gender inequality. Such assumptions have of course been questioned in general discussions of research methods – first person accounts are shaped by an interviewee's position in social space and need to be contextualised and carefully interpreted rather than being taken at face value (Herbert, 2014; Taylor et al., 2009). More interesting for the case at hand though is the fact that qualitative research so overwhelmingly established women themselves and the individual experience of inequality as the linchpin of gender knowledge production. Again, we will return to this point in our joint discussion below.

Discussion

Our analysis of the representations, realities, contexts and circuits was largely inductive: it focused on that knowledge which was produced and established through academic and industry research into gender and the UK screen sector, published 2012-2016. For a critical appreciation of what that knowledge production made visible and knowable – and therefore actionable – about gender inequality in UK screen work, this section relates the previous findings to research into gender more widely.

The representations of gender knowledge we identified for the screen sector echoed some key concerns of gender research generally, about gendered perceptions, sexism and ageism, and the resulting discrimination against women (e.g. Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009; Thomas

et al., 2014), or about the impact of work and employment conditions on women's workforce participation (e.g. Warren & Lyonette, 2015). However, there were also obvious omissions. Four issues in particular, on which gender research has produced substantive bodies of knowledge, hardly featured in the gender knowledge ecology for the UK screen sector.

Firstly, studies into gender in screen work hardly mentioned employment outcomes such as pay or promotion. Even in critical qualitative studies (e.g. A. O'Brien, 2014; Wreyford, 2015) there was no substantial and nuanced discussion of, say, the glass ceiling (e.g. Cotter et al., 2001; Arulampalam et al., 2007) in screen work or gender pay gaps (e.g. Eveline & Todd, 2009). Since the completion of our study, a new duty for companies to report on gender pay gaps has been introduced in the UK, which also covers large screen sector organisations (e.g. BFI, 2017). Knowledge production on gendered pay and progression in the screen sector may thus follow soon. However, in our study period of 2012-2016, such knowledge was notably absent.

Similarly and secondly, intersectionality – the interplay of equality-relevant characteristics such as gender, class, race or disability and its impact on social inequality in work (e.g. Acker, 2006; Davis, 2008; Walby et al., 2012) – hardly featured in the representations dominating the gender knowledge ecology for the UK screen sector. Although, as explained above, the influential 2010 Equality Act covers a total of nine diversity characteristics, most research into screen work produced knowledge on gender inequality without reference to, for instance, the additional impact of ethnicity, disability or social class. Gender research more broadly, and also the small number of screen sector studies that did evidence intersectionality as relevant in screen work (Wing-Fai et al., 2015; Mills & Ralph, 2015; Eikhof & York, 2015), strongly suggest that omitting intersectionality from the analysis of screen work produces gender knowledge of only limited insightfulness and, thus, usefulness.

Thirdly, the knowledge produced about interventions to improve gender equality in screen work was comparatively much less developed. For other empirical contexts there exists substantive and more critical knowledge on the potentially problematic aspects of empowering initiatives (e.g. Rainbird, 2007) or the various evidence cases for gender diversity (Prügl & True, 2014, Elomäki, 2015; Cullen & Murphy, 2018). But the gender knowledge ecology for the UK screen sector hardly featured representations of these aspects of gender inequality.

Finally, there were no studies into sexual harassment. Research on this topic started to emerge after our review period, with Hennekam and Bennet's (2017) documentation of women's sexual harassment in cultural work more broadly, and then more recent academic reactions to the Weinstein scandal (e.g. Corcione, 2018; Kim, 2018; Sorensen, 2018). Given this recent evidence of how widespread and deeply ingrained practices of sexual discrimination and sexual harassment are in particular in screen work, the previous omission of this research topic is notable, and looks set to be somewhat remedied in the future.

Reductionist representations are one source of limitations to what is visible and thus actionable about gender inequality. Law et al.'s (2011) ecology perspective allows us to see that important limitations also arise from the realities (re-)produced in gender knowledge production and the ways in which knowledge is circulated. Most obviously and fundamentally, the putative reality of gender as cisgender, heterosexual and concerning women, motherhood and age inhibits the production of knowledge about a substantive share of other workers: working fathers, workers who identify as men, workers with non-binary gender identities, or workers who identify as women but not as heterosexual. These workers' experiences are, we would argue, worthy of investigation in their own right. But the lack of an appropriately nuanced reality of gender is also likely to limit the understanding and change of gender inequality that is possible in the screen sector. Shared parental

leave, for instance, which has been identified an effective lever to better gender equality (e.g. Baird & O'Brien, 2015), requires a nuanced understanding of gender at work rather than a conflating of cisgender woman with motherhood. A reductionist articulation of gender such as the one dominating the gender knowledge production for the UK screen sector means that the potential of interventions such as shared parental leave is much less likely to be visible and, therefore, actionable.

In addition, industry and academic research operated, as evidenced above, with distinct realities of gender inequality. Industry research, because of its mainly quantitative methods, was dominated by an understanding of gender inequality as equating to women's unequal participation in the workforce. Gender inequality was thus established through a macro-level lens. Importantly though, this macro-level lens was limited in two ways. Firstly, in terms of focus it prioritised statistical workforce analysis over other gender-related issues that could have been interrogated at macro-level – for instance, the underlying sector definitions, which Walby (2011) has shown to impact our understanding of gender issues in knowledge work, or the effectiveness of labour market regulation for addressing gender inequality (see Coles & MacNeill (2017) for an application to the Canadian screen sector). Secondly, the focus on workforce statistics was executed with limited breadth and depth. Quantitative knowledge production could have, potentially, generated gender knowledge based on quantitative data regarding pay, promotion or diversity characteristics other than gender. But instead of operating with such broader macro-level realities, industry research centred firmly on a narrow understanding of gender inequality as statistically evidenced unequal workforce participation. Importantly, it is this understanding of gender inequality that is most visible to, and actionable for, screen sector practitioners, organisations and policy-makers.

Most academic research, by contrast, operated with a putative reality of gender inequality as women fighting disadvantage and overcoming barriers to workforce participation. Importantly, this qualitative approach established individual experiences and practices as key to gender knowledge production. Sector-level statistics, such as those fuelling the understanding of gender inequality that dominates industry research, can evidence symptoms of gender inequalities, but they can offer only very limited understanding of the practices and mechanisms that cause the inequalities in the first place. Research that explores women's experiences of networking, for instance, can highlight those practices and mechanisms: the gendered perceptions of women in recruitment situations or the 'new sexism' that prioritises business rationales over equal opportunity (Mósesdóttir, 2011). The implicit assumption that individual experience and practice is key to gender knowledge production is thus an important one. It is also important to note that this implicit reality was mainly confined to the academic research circuit, which means that the idea of understanding the causes of gender inequality through the lens of individual experience is less likely to be available to policy-makers and practitioners.

Notably, neither in qualitative or quantitative research did we find putative or implicit realities that foregrounded gender inequality as caused by (individually enacted but socially situated and shaped) practices – the recruitment decisions made by producers, commissioners or directors, for instance, or the organisational, national or societal contexts in which such agency is exercised and influenced. While some studies reported women's experience with decision makers (e.g. Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Eikhof & York, 2015), very little knowledge production focused on the decision makers themselves (though see Wreyford; 2015). More recent research on screen sector work also suggests that the transformative interventions needed to improve gender equality require consideration of how recruitment and promotion decisions might be made more equitably (Eikhof, 2017) – knowledge that was not visible and thus not actionable in the gender knowledge ecology for the UK

screen sector 2012-2016. The omission of realities of knowledge production centred on the systems causing individual experiences of inequality is significant: it renders crucial aspects of gender inequality invisible and thus makes them less likely to be addressed through action.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore how a knowledge ecology perspective might help us understand the production of gender knowledge, especially in relation to initiatives aimed at improving gender inequality. We asked what aspects of gender inequality were made visible and actionable through the gender knowledge production for the UK screen sector in the period 2012-2016. Applying Law et al.'s (2011) framework showed, firstly, that this gender knowledge production established a particular reality of gender inequality: gender was articulated as cisgender heterosexual woman, gender inequality was predominantly understood as the presence of women in the workforce and as women's struggle in a hostile employment system, and presented as something that needed evidencing rather than changing.

Secondly, our analysis also showed that gender knowledge was circulated in two circuits, a policy- and practice-facing one aimed at improving the diversity indicators of the screen sector workforce as a collective, and a more heterogeneous academic one that placed higher emphasis on qualitative, in-depth understanding and was more likely to advocate structural change. While knowledge circulated in the academic circuit did reference policy research, such cross-referencing was not visible in the policy literature. Although it is possible – and potentially probable – that policy research was influenced by academic research, that influence was not visible in our data analysis. Discussing the representations and realities of gender knowledge for the UK screen sector in a wider context, several omissions emerged: pay, promotion and intersectionalities were under-researched, and understandings of gender inequalities as caused by practices and structures that needed changing were at best nascent. Overall, gender inequality was thus mainly made visible and actionable as the unequal workforce participation of cisgender, heterosexual women, understood either through workforce statistics or through individual experience of disadvantage.

In drawing conclusions from this analysis, we first need to reflect on the social life of our own method. In choosing to analyse the gender-relevant studies from a meta-analysis of research into workforce diversity in the UK screen sector we, firstly, established gender knowledge as that which was contained in research of a certain standard (e.g. we excluded campaign publications) and related to certain questions. Secondly, we chose to base our exploration of a knowledge ecology analysis on this particular set of knowledge, supplemented with our general knowledge of the UK screen sector. We thus made visible certain aspects of a knowledge ecology (knowledge expressed as research) and not others. Future research might usefully focus on other aspects of that same knowledge ecology, for instance the application of gender knowledge in the design or delivery of interventions such as mentoring programmes, or the knowledge mobilised by individuals in their decision making or the delivery of gender initiatives.

However, in focusing on industry and academic research we have analysed an influential component of the gender knowledge ecology for the UK screen sector. Law et al. (2011) propose the ecology framework to emphasise that knowledge 'inhabit[s] and reproduce[s] ecological forms that fit more or less comfortably together' (Law et al. 2011, p. 13) and that are difficult to disrupt. The task, as they put it, is to 'excavate the versions of the social embedded in our methods, to bring them into the light, and to debate them. Do we actually want the kind of collectivities implied by

ethnographies, by surveys, by focus groups, or by collations of transactional data? Do we even know what they are? And what kind of subjectivities and collectivities are they propagating?' (Law et al., 2011, p. 12; see also Law, 2009).

Our analysis has shown that the versions of gender inequality embedded in the methods used to produce knowledge on the UK screen sector over our study period rendered several crucial aspects invisible and thus unactionable. Importantly though, using a knowledge ecology perspective rather than a traditional content analysis of existing research shows that better gender equality in the screen industries does not only require remedying omissions in representations with current methods. A more in-depth analysis of existing workforce surveys for intersections of gender, race and class, for instance, would certainly be useful – but only to an extent. What is also required is a discussion of the putative and implicit realities, for instance a more widespread recognition that gender needs to be understood through more than just statistics, that practices and structures that cause gender inequality are objects worthy of knowledge production and that gender itself needs to be understood differently. Although not focused on practices of knowledge application, our analysis also suggests that gender knowledge is circulated in academic and industry circuits with little overlap, and that integrating these circuits might lead to fruitful cross-pollination in knowledge production.

Through facilitating such debates, an ecology perspective on knowledge production can powerfully broaden our focus from the content of knowledge to the conditions and circumstances under which certain understanding, articulations or assumptions take effect and others do not. This knowledge can then be constructively used to imagine and shape change: 'if social investigation makes worlds, then it can, in some measure, think about the worlds it wants to help to make' (Law & Urry 2004, pp. 390-391). Considering knowledge production in its context can make visible the potential for change. It can help identify the change of methods, context or circuits needed for different representations and realities to become, or be made to become, visible or even dominant. In Walby's (2011) earlier example of the knowledge economy, for instance, the dominance of a technology-centred definition of knowledge production over a human capital-centred one is shown to be associated with a particular paradigm of economic policy – a knowledge ecology approach might identify what upholds that paradigm and how it might be changed.

Considering the ecology for a particular type of gender knowledge can also broaden the perspective of which social actors might be involved in the production and circulation of knowledge. What different realities might be imagined, for instance, if cultural producers, trade unions or members of marginalised social groups became more central to the production of knowledge? What might be conducive research designs and methods for affecting that integration? More specific to higher education and cultural industries, Gill (2014b) suggests that gendered injustices in work remain unchallenged because traditional concepts (read: realities) of exploitation cannot adequately capture the conditions and experiences of academic and cultural labour. Her call for a new 'politicised vocabulary' (Gill, 2014b, p. 25) might usefully be answered using a gender knowledge ecology approach that asks what realities (e.g. understandings of work) would need to be established or foregrounded to describe gendered experiences of exploitation in these contexts. A knowledge ecology could also help identify the circuits in which representations of gendered exploitation might need to be circulated if gendered exploitation in academic or cultural work is to be challenged and changed.

A final and screen-sector-specific example concerns the fledgling production of knowledge about sexual harassment. Cobb and Horeck (2018) draw attention to the circulation and context of such knowledge in their warning that while the Weinstein scandal may have triggered a 'dramatic and

unprecedented cultural acknowledgement and conversation about sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood and beyond' (Cobb & Horeck, 2018, p. 489), it would be premature to assume that this new visibility of feminist arguments about gendered inequality will inevitably lead to long-term structural change. A knowledge ecology perspective could help discuss what would be needed to not only maintain visibility – and thus actionability – but to prompt actual change. Also, and more conceptually, a knowledge ecology perspective could query how the realities (re)produced by knowledge on sexual harassment relate to realities in gender knowledge more broadly. General media coverage of the Weinstein scandal, for instance, looks set to reinforce exactly that putative reality of gender as cisgender heterosexual woman which our study has identified as limiting the gender knowledge production for the screen sector. How, then, could knowledge about sexual harassment be produced respecting the cisgender heterosexual woman articulations that will likely have been the target of sexual harassment, but without reinforcing reductionist notions of gender and perpetuating limitations to the production of knowledge about the broader context of gender inequality in which sexual harassment is embedded?

Law (2009, p. 250) emphasises that 'if we do not like the realities being done by [the methods] then it becomes important to elaborate other methods, practices with other network-hinterlands, other realities, other sets of connectivities, and other circuits.' Research, and, with it, researchers, is not solely or even mainly responsible for bringing about change in gender practice and policy. But it can take up the challenge posited in Law's quote above and push itself to reimagine knowledge ecologies that align the aspired social with the actionable social, i.e. the putative and implicit realities of gender knowledge that need to be established to feed institutional contexts and knowledge circuits in ways that might genuinely advance gender equality – in the screen industries and elsewhere.

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NB the below list contains, marked with *, all gender-related publications included in our meta-analysis of workforce diversity research in the UK screen industries which were analysed for this paper, regardless of whether these publications are also explicitly cited in the paper.

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[i] Law et al.'s proposal of a conceptual framework for critically questioning and reimaging knowledge production implicitly assumes that current processes and outcomes of knowledge production fall short of something more desirable. The criteria on which this assessment of insufficiency is based, however, are not explicated. So while we can interpret the knowledge ecology approach as comparatively neutral in relation to workforce diversity or gender, it is in itself a social product, imbued with the ontological and epistemological choices and political aims of the researchers who proposed it.

[ii] The only exception to this approach is A. O'Brien (2014), for which we decided to prioritise relevance to research questions over geography. As A. O'Brien (2014: p. 1209) herself notes, her study of broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland is insightful because "the industry shares the typical structures of the European broadcast industry, albeit on a smaller scale." Given the relative scarcity of high quality research into screen work, we therefore decided to include this item.

[iii] Search terms were divided into three categories: (1) Diversity characteristics: older, younger, youth, young people, old people, disability, disabled, impairment, accessibility, ableism, gender, gender reassignment, parent, pregnant, pregnancy, maternity, sexism, sexist, marriage, married, civil partnership, race, ethnicity, ethnic, racism, BAME, BME, minority, gay, lesbian, bisexual, LGBT, sexual orientation, religious expression, religious belief, precarious, precariat, social class, socio economic background, discrimination, diversity, discrimination, discriminate; (2) Screen sector: film, cinema, television, TV, video game, video gaming, computer game, game development, animation, visual effects, VFX, screen industry, screen industries, digital media, interactive media, content creation, audio visual, creative; (3) Work and employment: job, worker, workforce, 'work force', training, education, employment, employer, employed, labour, labor, self-employed, freelance, recruitment, professional, apprenticeship.
Any item that contained any combination of terms from each of the three categories in the title, key words or abstract/summary was considered for inclusion in the review.