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What difference does it make? Women's pop cultural production and consumption in Manchester.

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of women in small cultural businesses and is based upon interviews with women working in a range of contexts in Manchester's popular music scene. The research seeks to promote wider consideration of women's power in cultural production and consumption. We argue that it is necessary that ideas of creativity, and experiences of production and consumption, be understood as inter-related *processes*. Each part of this process is imbued with particular gender characteristics that can serve to reinforce existing patterns and hierarchies. We explore the ways in which female leisure and consumption patterns have been marginalised and how this in turn shapes cultural production. This process influences career choices but it is also reinforced through the integration of consumption into the cultural workplace. Practices often associated with the sector, such as the blurring of work and leisure and 'networking', appear to be understood and operated in significantly different ways by women. As cultural industries such as popular music are predicated upon the colonisation of urban space we explore the use of the city and the particular character of Manchester's music scene. We conclude that, despite the existence of highly contingent and individualised identities, patriarchal relations remain evident. These are

particularly clear in discussion of the performative and sexualised aspects

of the job. **(word count: 215)**

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What difference does it make? Women's pop cultural production and consumption in Manchester[1]

This paper explores women's employment in the popular music sector. In particular, we focus upon women's perceptions of their role in the Manchester example - a city with relatively well-established pop cultural industries.[2] Over the past two decades Manchester has seen a growing number of small and medium sized enterprises emerge which are closely connected with pop music and club culture (Champion 1990, Milestone 1996, Purvis 1996) and a general expansion of the night-time economy (Lovatt, 1996). These enterprises, many of which are clustered in an area now branded the 'Northern Quarter', have a significant visible presence and are becoming central to the city's self-image. They are currently the focus for a number of economic development initiatives including the recent launch of the Manchester Cultural Industries Development Service (CIDS). This joint initiative by Manchester, Tameside and Salford councils sits alongside the Manchester Music Network which is charged with supporting and promoting the local music sector. Initiatives such as these demonstrate the increasingly important role that the 'cultural industries' are assuming in local economic development. Cities such as Manchester have long traded upon their pop musical heritage but this is beginning to go beyond city publicity materials (images of Manchester bands, pop cultural sites and youth cultural hedonism have been incorporated into

publicity materials since the early 1990s) to become the focus of post-industrial employment and social cohesion strategies.

Manchester's pop cultural industries emerged out of the city's experience with music-based youth cultures such as northern soul and punk. These subcultures typically incorporated a substantial commitment to 'DIY' cultural production: fashion design, fanzine production, 'pop' graphic design and the buying and selling records (Chambers 1985, Milestone 1997, Savage 1991). With the introduction of the Thatcher government's Enterprise Allowance Scheme (EAS) in 1983 some opportunities were opened up for young unemployed people to formalise their subcultural entrepreneurship by setting up micro businesses and supplementing their benefits.[3] Even after EAS had been abolished[4] precedence had been set and new pop cultural businesses continued to emerge. The personnel for these type of enterprises have tended to be a mixture of ex-university graduates (Banks 1999) and local youth. The flourishing of these pop cultural industries is helped in part by the huge client base provided by Manchester's massive student population.[5] Although the large scale UK music industry continues to be London-based recent years have seen some regional British cities[6] establish low-level commercial music infrastructures. Whilst these regional pop cultural micro-businesses pose no economic threat to the 'majors' (BMG, Sony Music, Universal Music International and the recently merged Warner EMI Music) their symbolic

value can have significance: they provide new employment opportunities premised on innovation and street credibility and provide an alternative to London's cultural capital supremacy.[7] Crucially they allow hedonistic youth culture lifestyles to be played out in the provinces and have extended the geographical dispersal of new cultural intermediaries (O'Connor 1998, Featherstone 1991). A cultural industry, such as music, is distinguished by the intersection of art, creativity and commerce and the reliance upon the production or dissemination of symbolic rather than use value. Arguments about the convergence of the economic and the cultural need to be analysed in this context where notions of 'lifestyle' and work are so closely intertwined (see, for example, Du Gay, 1997:340).

Women have been significantly under-represented in the mainstream music industry in occupations such as band management, production, artist and repertoire, sound engineering and disc jockeying (Cohen 1997, Negus, 1992). Even as performers women have often been defined primarily by their sexuality with little control over the creative process[8] (Bayton 1992, Garrett 1990, Frith and McRobbie 1990). In our research we have been concerned with assessing the extent to which these newer, apparently less hierarchical, grassroots micro-businesses offer different and more accessible opportunities for women. How do the gender differences inherent in the mainstream translate to these flexible, informal, non-London urban pop cultural scenes and infrastructures?

The research data is drawn from in-depth interviews conducted with women working in a range of contexts in the city's music scene.[9] We have interviewed 27 women to date using an aide memoire to form the basis of one to one in-depth interviews which last between one and half to three hours. The interviews are generally conducted at the interviewees place of work or a suitable space nearby (such as local café bars and pubs). The interviews are taped and transcribed. The women we have interviewed work in a variety of occupations all connected with music and club culture, they include music journalists, promoters, discjockeys, musicians, venue managers and music retail . Through a variety of previous projects we have close contact with Manchester cultural industries and have access to databases of all the cultural businesses in Manchester. Using our established local knowledge and contacts we selected interview subjects that worked in music-related micro to small enterprises (MSEs). We then used snowballing techniques to contact other suitable participants, including the organisation of, and attendance at, industry networking events.

Our project research has also been supplemented by access to the findings of other local projects concerned with employment in Manchester's cultural industries. These interviews (with both men and women) have allowed us the opportunity to directly compare the responses of men and

women to comparable employment-related questions. The women we have interviewed specifically for our research are between the ages of 16 and 45+ but with the majority (18) falling into the 25-34 age range. Six have children or other dependants, 22 describe themselves as white whilst the rest are comprised of Black Caribbean (1), Black other (2), Indian (1) and Filipino (1). 17 of the women are self employed or freelance and 10 are salaried employees. 20 of our interviewees earn less that £15,000 per year with only three earning over £25,000 per year.

The interviews concentrate upon issues such as career histories, aspirations and use of the city's spaces and networks. We focus primarily on women in small cultural businesses - the micro level of cultural production – although many of these businesses interact daily with the global multinationals that dominate the industry. In contrast to many studies of women in music (see for example Clawson (1999), Bayton (1990), Wald (1998)), we are not predominantly concerned with women as musicians or performers but with the employment of women across a range of jobs within a pop music infrastructure/scene. This is crucial, not least because it is an area that has been overlooked, but also because we need to understand the barriers as well as the opportunities for women in these new cultural businesses. Here qualitative research is essential as a vehicle for understanding the nuances and complexities of contemporary identities. We see the processes that occur at every stage of the production,

distribution and consumption chain of popular music as instrumental to the production and maintenance of gender differences. In addition, within an industry such as music, issues of *performance* - as discussed by Butler (1993) - have relevance beyond the 'front-line' of singers, bands and DJs. Performance and presentation are central to most forms of employment in the music industry due to service-centred working practices and emphasis upon the integration of lifestyle and work.

We argue that an analysis of the cultural industries demands a consideration of 'who' – in terms of gender, ethnicity, class – is producing products and spaces because of the centrality of symbolic value, knowledge and self-replication to this field. A male[10] musician and DJ remarked:

> The dominant force is twenty something, thirty something, males who went to Manchester Poly.[11] They control the [Manchester] scene basically.

We need to explore the significance that depictions and understandings such as these have for cultural production and for the nature of the 'scene' in Manchester. Our research has revealed that although Manchester's new cultural industries can transform working practices (through flexible hours, workplace informality) these are not necessarily, or automatically more women friendly. There remain a number of distinct gender divisions premised on unequal power and rights. In this paper we focus on the key themes that emerge from our data and in particular we focus on current

cultural industries 'buzz words' and examine their impact and implications for women in the light of our findings.

Understanding consumption-production

Working is linked to playing in the cultural industries and this connection shapes working life and helps to determine career aspirations. To understand the gendered nature of pop cultural production it is necessary to grasp the gendered nature of pop cultural consumption. However, as Cara Aitchinson has recently argued, we still do not know enough about women's leisure.[12] For decades researchers have ignored or marginalised girls' and women's leisure and this has led to a series of assumptions about female tastes and interests. As McRobbie and Garber (1975) argued, the sub-cultural theory developed at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was almost exclusively premised on men researching men. Information about girls and subcultures is so limited that we cannot be sure that girls were as passive as has been claimed by sub-cultural theory, perhaps they were simply 'active' in different ways to boys.

This area needs to be revisited to determine whether girls were as marginalised and invisible in youth sub-cultures as the theorists imply or whether researchers simply failed to ask questions of, and about, girls. In

the sphere of popular cultural consumption and production – as in many other fields - women have formed a 'muted group' in that they do not form part of the dominant communication system (Wall and Gannon-Leary, 1999). This occurs in spaces of consumption and work but also through the way in which women are studied by academia. Within anthropology, for example, the Ardeners found ethnographers (of both sexes) were much more inclined to understand society in the same terms as male interviewees. Correspondingly, women's views tended to be interpreted as being inarticulate and irrelevant (Ardener, 1975). To understand the involvement of women and girls in cultural production and consumption academic discourse must engage with the ways in which everyday experiences are conceptualised and the ways in which gender is 'performed' daily.

McRobbie has made significant contributions to our understandings of girls' and women's leisure but, in the 1970s, as she later criticises herself for, much of her research focused on the analysis of girls leisure as defined through comics and magazines. McRobbie initially argued that girls' leisure was constructed within an overarching ideology of patriarchal romance that instantly set limitations on career and leisure aspirations. Girls' magazines in the 1970s did not encourage them to be interested in the production of music or to become knowledgeable about musical genres. Whereas girls' magazines were superficial and generalised, those

catering for boys were based around special interests that allowed boys to become 'experts'. However, McRobbie came to realise that 'in my own early work so much effort was put into attempting to problematise the marginalised experience of girls in youth culture that it never occurred to me to explore this further and find out exactly what they were doing on a day to day basis' (1994:160). Importantly McRobbie, in criticising her own work for focusing too closely on the 'text of oppressive meanings', now argues for a greater emphasis on research into cultural production and ethnography which can 'reveal a much greater level of involvement on the part of young women in sub-cultures' (1994:163). McRobbie has described subcultures as 'job creation schemes' for the cultural industries. Involvement in subcultures (DJing, producing fanzines, buying and selling clothes) 'provide the opportunity for learning and sharing skills, practising them, for making a small amount of money; more importantly they provide pathways for future 'life skills' in the form of work and self employment' (McRobbie, 1994:161). The multi-media sector provides an example of a new cultural industry where women are likely to encounter barriers because of the male domination of the adolescent training grounds for multimedia, namely, computer games and arcades. Research by Leslie Haddon has examined the very different ways in which boys and girls encounter computer games and arcades;

'By appropriating space the boys, albeit perhaps relatively few boys, were very visible to the producers of hardware, software and magazines. It is little wonder that those in the industry could easily assume that micros and games-playing were a totally male domain, and show surprise that girls demonstrated any interest at all.' (1994:90)

In the sphere of music, girls are much more obviously involved and yet their activities in this sphere tend to be interpreted quite differently to those of boys. The 'teeny-bopper' audience of pre-pubescent girls for boy- and girl-bands is a standard source of amusement and ridicule (see Garrett, 1990). Whereas boys' fandom is frequently characterised as a serious activity – marked by avid collecting, accumulation of information, and emulation – girls activities in these fields are dismissed as childish obsessions and 'singing into hairbrushes'. Will Straw has identified the ways in which the 'nerdish homosociality' of record collecting reinforces the masculinism of popular music (Straw, 1997). As Julie Burchill recently remarked 'why screaming is a less valid reaction to pop than filing CDs alphabetically, or reciting Dylan, has yet to be explained to me'.[13]

These processes have significant repercussions in shaping career choices and individual identities. Many of the women interviewed indicated that they had never considered the possibility of working in a field associated with a 'hobby' or leisure activity. This has tended not to be the case for men, where they describe their transition from adolescent obsession to career as seamless.

> We were friends from college, I had the musical background […] I knew he was into music so […] one day I said to [him] why don't we start a club? It was as simple as that. [male DJ and promoter]

> Obviously when you're doing your A Levels you don't think 'oh I'm going to be a DJ' do you? You just think go to university.. [female DJ and promoter]

Many women break into the music industry through administrative roles but men very rarely take this route. An A&R manager remarked 'virtually every woman I know has started off by being a secretary and worked their way up… and I don't know of any men who have got in as secretaries'. 'Working your way up' is often difficult because, across sectors, secretarial positions are segregated from overall organisational career structures.[14] A female musician we interviewed discussed the different path taken by her male musical partner:

> I've just drifted around really. I've done all sorts of things. You know I have worked in offices and done bits and pieces like that.. It's been a very indirect route to what I do now. […] And in some ways I wish I had come more directly to what I wanted to do. I mean [B], the other person in [the band], is a lot younger than me and came pretty directly from leaving school, he went to sound engineering-college. So it's been a very direct route for him. He's younger and he's doing exactly what he wanted to do. [musician]

A Finnish sub-cultural study of boys and girls by Airi Maki-Kulmala found:

> The excessive relation to music was obvious in the future plans of the boys. They wanted music to be the basic element of their future life. They wanted to have bands of their own and make a lot of money. ..For girls, music was more like a hobby than an essential element of a lifestyle.

> They had no ambition toward making their own music.
> (1993)

The roots to later musical activity are clearly based in these early experiences. However, we would argue that it is not that girls and young women lack dreams and ambitions related to music but that they operate within webs of social, political and aesthetic meaning that do not routinely expect or enable them to realise them.

> I was always obsessively into music, culture, and the musical scene. I followed every kind of musical scene when I was younger, from very young. Taped the charts religiously and all the rest of it! So I have always been obsessed by music. But I did not really know that jobs like this existed when I was in school or college. Right up to college, I did not know that you can get a job in a recording studio or work for a record company. [A&R consultant]

Much of women's lack of involvement in the music industry stems from the ways in which cultural consumption is understood, theorised and stratified. Thornton has pointed to the ways in which notions of sub-cultural 'authenticity' are linked to masculinity (1995). In order to have their cultural consumption legitimised and recognised women have to attempt to fit into masculine patterns. This ensures that women always have to struggle to find a positive model for their own experiences and creativity:

> I think men seem to have a natural tendency towards trainspotter-behaviour. […] they are very good at tunnelling themselves in one direction [..] I find it really hard to channel myself into one single direction and not get distracted by other things. [musician]

A lot of men are more precious about music than a lot of women. I have a lot more male customers than female customers. Lads seem to be much more: 'I have to get this and I have to get that!' And there don't seem to be as many girls like that. I think that people sometimes tend to think that because I am a girl, I don't really know what I am talking about. Like "how come you got into music, love!" [laughs]. [record shop manager]

You've got to be completely obsessed in a Nick Hornby kind of a way. I've always been obsessed and totally focused on what I want to do. [A&R manager]

The trainspotter, the obsessive collector, the Nick Hornby character in *High Fidelity*, these male patterns dominate our perceptions of what it means to consume and to be consumed by music. In a variety of ways these models are being conformed to, but at the same time challenged and transformed, by women involved in cultural production.

Maria Pini's work on women in the rave scene has highlighted the ways in which we need to contest the 'familiar association of 'youth' with masculinity' and draws attention to the continuing dearth of research into girls' and young women's experiences of youth cultural practices. Pini (1997) suggests that the emphasis upon cultural production has meant that women are particularly ignored. This gap between production and consumption needs to be closed through analysis of the ways in which gendered understandings of popular culture reinforce particular patterns throughout the process of consumption and production. These spheres are inextricably bound together; how cultural products are produced and who

sets standards of taste and distinction has a profound impact on processes of consumption. In this field in particular consumption patterns go on to influence future production.

New working practices: blurring work and leisure?

> I don' t like office politics in normal kind of 9 to 5 jobs. So, there is a life style choice. And even though I work really hard, it's work I enjoy, with people that I enjoy working with. It's like bringing your whole lifestyle into work. [music journalist]

> Work and leisure are linked. Because of all this bar and pub culture and everything else related to that in Manchester, the people that we know are all connected in lots of ways. [record promoter]

It is in the cultural industries, so the story goes, that work and leisure blur or intermingle. Recent debates about cultural production often celebrate the creativity, innovation and empowerment accorded to people who are able to make a living from hobbies and leisure interests.[15] In this way, consumption does not simply shape future career choices but continues to inform and interact with the work place through specific working practices. The buzzwords - flexible, innovative, information-rich and non-hierarchical - frequently claimed to be the future of all successful businesses are associated most specifically with the cultural industries. The rhetoric of creativity and flexibility, however has different implications for women than for men in many ways.

In her research into employment in the high technology sector in the South East (of which the workforce was 90% male) Doreen Massey found that a recurring comment by the men interviewed was that 'the boundary between work and play disappears' (1994). In response to this, Massey asks, 'who does the domestic labour… who goes to the launderette?' Massey argues that 'flexibility' is very often someone else's constraint; she asks who services these workers so they are able to blur work and leisure as if there were nothing else more mundane in between. The 'new version of masculinity and a new and still highly problematical set of gender roles and gender relations' identified by Massey echo similar patterns we have found in the cultural industries. Our interviews demonstrate that women do not understand the linkages and inter-dependencies between work and leisure as a simplistic celebration of a 'boundary-less' world.

Amongst the women we have interviewed there is a pervasive recognition that there is not just 'work' and 'leisure' and nothing in between. Almost all the interviewees factor in questions of child rearing, family responsibilities and domestic work. There is a sense of the different time frames and spaces within which women tend to operate. The 'linear' clock time experienced by women includes the patchwork of paid work and consumption but alongside this is the round of cyclical duties which revolve each day and are never 'finished' such as housework and care of dependants. This more complex relationship to time - and to leisure -

means that the apparent dissolution of the lines between work and 'play' is often experienced differently by women. The interviews demonstrate that men tend to perceive the inter-relations between work and social life as fairly seamless.

> If I go out on a night out with friends I'll […] end up talking to someone, and it's quite often some work can be done […] it means you get this constant sort of circle and forum for feedback because you meet these people socially and […] you don't have to organise a meeting. [male music journalist]

Many of the women remained ironically distanced from 'networking' and maintained a sense of separation between social and work environments.

> When I see my friends, I tend not to go to a club with them or out in town […] because that's work, if I go to a club I will bump into people from work and have to talk about work. [..] I don't see going out in that way as leisure. [recording studio manager]

> There is one thing I don't like about the job […] that I am never turned off from it really. [venue promoter]

> It's a really slimy and superficial scene. That's what I don't like about it. [DJ and promoter]

Women frequently opt out of the sector because consumption is seen as such an integral part of working life in the cultural industries. As one of our interviewees – and a parent - remarked 'I wouldn't be able to go and do a job that depended on me taking an active part in the corporate social life. I'd need to be there at nine and finish at six. So I am sort of steering away from the music industry for the time being'.

> You know the music industry is not something that you can grow old in. It's not a good industry for you to be

working in when you're in your 40s. I've got to think ahead to what I'm going to be doing when I'm 40. - And it is really for young people. Unless you are working in publishing or you are a manager or something like that. But they generally are men. [record label manager]

I would not really want to do this when I was 40. You know, work 90 hour-weeks and not see your family and things. It does become your life, but that's okay for now. [...] J is 45 and he's got three kids and a wife and he still [runs a club] and does shitty hours. I just can't imagine doing that when I am 45 years old, and have three kids and a husband. I haven't yet met a woman that does that. [night-club manager]

Although the 'flexibility' of life in the cultural industries can appear restrictive in practice, it is often interpreted positively by women, as the quotations at the start of this section demonstrate. A night club manager who had just described how the necessity for her to be on the premises whenever the club was open ensured she had almost no life outside work, then went on to say:

I do like having control about dictating my own hours, my own work schedule. I think it would be quite hard to work a nine-to-five and have to be at certain places at certain times. That would be quite difficult. [night-club manager]

The fact that work occurs in a 'leisure' space and the sense of liberation from traditional office life can change perceptions of long hours and poor contractual security. The sense that they have 'escaped' from the office becomes a way of celebrating the particular demands of work done in this sector.

Issues about the industry – such as its lack of professionalism and wide acceptance of informal working patterns - can work both with and against women. Many women are attracted to the pop cultural industries because they believe that the flexibility and informality of work may be more suited to their attempts to combine work and domestic responsibilities. Just as the operation of different time frames in women's lives complicates their ability to be the urban 'flâneuse' so does it shape their participation in cultural industries which are predicated upon the colonisation of city space (Wolff, 1985). Women constantly have to find new ways of organising and shaping space and time in order to construct patterns that are responsive and suited to their experience.

Women and networking in urban spaces

The intimate inter-relations between cultural industries and urban space necessitate an understanding of the gendered use of the city. In a recent study of Manchester (and Sheffield) Taylor, Evans and Fraser found a 'quite astonishing absence of women in any positions of power and influence either in public institutions… or in the private sector (local law firms, banks and financial services, construction industries, or even, as in Manchester, the new cultural industries)' (1996:226). Furthermore they go on to note that the public spaces are 'overwhelmingly male places'. Only 29% of users of Manchester's city centre after 6.30 were women, which

seems to imply limitations in terms of women's participation in the night

time economy of the cultural industries (Taylor *et al*, 1996:227).

There are also questions about the specifically gendered nature of

northern industrial cities such as Manchester. In terms of place the north

of England is gendered masculine, or increasingly, given the loss of heavy

industry as 'de-masculinised'. Tickell and Peck (1996) describe Manchester

as the 'birthplace of industrial machismo' and although the loss of

industry may 'de-masculinise' it does not necessarily feminise. As one of

our interviewees remarked, this lends a particular character to the

northern English urban music scenes:

> What frustrates me about Manchester is that, in particular
> Manchester AND Liverpool are both guilty of it, and
> Leeds, Sheffield: bands have ALWAYS been white straight
> males. Like four or five boys in a band. Which is great, but
> in the last 20 years - you name me one famous female
> artist out of Manchester or from Liverpool or Sheffield!
> There isn't one! And similar with black artists. And I think
> that is because there isn't a nurturing environment in the
> regions for them to come out. The female artists really
> come from America or Australia or London. Apart from
> one exception, it's probably Lisa Stansfield from Rochdale,
> but she had a London-based manager. [A&R consultant]

Women have been notably absent from the defining periods of music

place making in Manchester. In the Northern Soul scene women danced

but were absent from the DJ booth and crucial record trading (Milestone

(1997), Hollows & Milestone (1998)). Similarly, Manchester's version of

Punk produced few female role models[16] despite Raphaels claim that:

> Its DIY ethos and anti-muso attitude allowed women a much-needed space to perform without fear of ridicule. Punk was about starting from scratch and throwing away traditional rock clichés. (1994:xiv)

The late 1980s scene in Manchester did not feature women as band members, DJs, managers or in media images where 'Madchester' became 'Ladchester'. In Champion's[17] description: 'Summer 1989, Saturday afternoon. Oldham Street is swarming with lads wearing flares' [1990]. Perceptions of Manchester music consumption are highly masculinised and the habitus of the cultural industries is closely inter-connected with these worlds. As Sara Cohen argues with regard to another northern English city - Liverpool - rock is not 'naturally male' but is actively *produce*d as male which in turn prohibits women's entry;

> The simple fact that the relationships, networks and activities that comprise Liverpool rock culture are predominantly male works to exclude women from music creativity and collaboration. (1997:30)

It would be misleading, however, to imply that there is only one narrowly defined version of masculinity that influences the 'structure of feeling' of Manchester's pop culture. Morrissey, the lead singer of The Smiths[18], confounded conventions of working class masculinity and found an avid, widely dispersed fan base. Manchester's city centre 'Gay Village' has acted as a disruptive spatial and symbolic presence with regard to constructions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity in Manchester (see Fitzpatrick and Ryan 1996, Whittle 1994). The degree to which the Village is able to

provide a more 'women-friendly' space, particularly at night, is however,

increasingly unclear.[19]

Informal knowledge networks play an important, even crucial, role in the

cultural industries and much of this networking takes place at night in

bars and clubs. This, however, continues to be an area many of the women

interviewed find problematic.

> The negative side of [being a woman] is I think - for
> obvious reasons - say you have got to see a band playing
> in a venue in Sheffield on a Thursday night and you are
> on your own. That's NOT good. [A&R consultant]

For women issues of personal safety, domestic responsibilities and the fear

of appearing sexually available inhibit participation in out of hours

networking. In this way the factors which inhibit women's involvement in

leisure spaces spill over into their access to those places essential to work.

The live music scene, based within the leisure spaces of bars and clubs, is

seen to be particularly inaccessible to women:

> The live music scene is controlled wholly by men I think.
> It's like all the promoters and most of the venues are run
> by […] men. …all the successful tour managers - because
> [of] the late nights, you have to deal with aggressive
> promoters and so on. I have always found that the most
> difficult part of management was having to deal with the
> […] the live performance side of it, because it is a bit of a
> man's world unfortunately. [A&R consultant]

These 'practical' barriers have always dominated discourses about women

and urban spaces but there are also cultural barriers where women are

made to feel uncomfortable invading male dominated drinking spaces and

talking about masculine subjects.

> A&R-people sort of stick together a bit. And so there's all
> of the taking drugs, being a man, being a lad, being
> comfortable in going to clubs and bars on your own.
> Which is difficult for women sometimes. [record label
> manager]

Given the acknowledged importance of networking to the cultural

industries there is an abundance of literature to support the claim that

women are often excluded from networks (Nicholson, 1997; Davidson and

Cooper, 1992; Tickell and Peck, 1996).

> I used to feel very much part of a well-defined group of
> people that were all working towards an aim and [who]
> all had similar kind of lifestyles. [..] But I don't feel so
> much part of that any more, mainly because I am a single
> parent. I don't have that sort of freedom after hours that I
> used to have. […] The majority of people that I would
> have counted as being part of that well-defined group,
> tend to be men and it's something to do with my attitude
> towards them and their attitudes towards me that puts a
> sort of barrier to it and effects the networking really. I am
> aware it sort of goes on around me but (..) I am also aware
> that I am not as involved in it. [music convention co-
> ordinator]

> it is very difficult to locate yourself within that circle [of
> music industry insiders] if you are a single woman in that
> industry. […] within that particular environment if you
> are single, and if you are a woman, and you are hanging
> out with all these people who are colleagues and friends
> and male, it can become a fairly complex kind of set up.
> [night club manager]

The informal networking practices of the sector reinforce what Lady

Howe, chair of the Hansard Society Commission on 'Women at the Top',

called Hansard's Law: 'The clubbier the culture, the less likely women are to make the top' (Franks, 1998).

Conclusions: consuming women, creating women

The processes outlined above demonstrate some of the ways in which relations between men and women are played out in these spheres of production and consumption. It was evident amongst our interviewees that, although other indicators of identity - such as those tied to particular understandings of class - were not strongly articulated, perceptions of gender difference remained powerful. These perceptions persist without explicit attachments to feminism and in the context of highly individualised notions of identity. The women interviewed often assert their individuality in a way that can be seen almost as a refusal to assume the 'burden' of gender identity.

> You are a person. You are not a woman first and foremost.
> [recording studios manager]
>
> I think I am quite an individualist [..] I represent myself .
> [..] I [know that I] represent women even if I don't want to
> [laughs]. I know it's quite harsh really, but I don't really
> feel like I represent a woman, I feel like I represent myself.
> I refuse to represent anybody else. [night club manager]

Despite this pervasive sense of distance from feminism as a movement and equal opportunities as an organisational intervention, the young women interviewed continue to allude to processes that subtly undermine their aspirations and restrict their access to higher occupational positions.

These were most frequently evident in discussion of the performative and sexualised aspects of the job (Adkins, 1995). The emphasis upon physical appearance can be related to wider processes which shift women from the sphere of action to the sphere of representation (Warner, 1985).

In settings rich in cultural capital the role of women is often sexualised. The iconography and imagery of consumption – which uses the female form as a commodity – shapes the range of roles available to women in cultural production. Whereas men in this sector are able to move into a wide range of senior positions as they age, women perceive that their credibility is based significantly upon the 'beauty function' (Forrest, 1998).

> The clock is sort of ticking - much more so than it is for a man. You are aware of the ridiculous element of a middle-aged woman running a night club. […] So I have to hope that [..] when I am 30, I will look 20.. You already have to start thinking about alternatives. [night-club manager]

> It's alright for men to be either younger and in a position of power or older than it is for women. So when you are in that middle level and say when you get older, you know, unless you have eternal youth in your looks, you know you've got an expiry date in what you are doing. That's probably partly based on the way you look. [record label manager]

> You have to convince people and it can be quite hard for me because - first I am a girl and secondly I am a bit younger. And, physically, I am tiny - so that can be quite difficult to overcome. I think most of the time I manage it. And that can be half of my job some time. Just convincing people that I'm not just a fifteen year old girl that's been left with a bunch of keys. [night-club manager]

These experiences echo those of female musicians who often find themselves pigeon-holed as vocalists who are required to be aesthetically pleasing in a way that their male counterparts are not.[20] Dance tracks[21] frequently parade female vocalists for individual records where they are seen to be interchangeable and largely peripheral to the creative process.

> I did not want to be perceived as the girl in the band who just sang. You know, the pretty thing at the front. This sort of love interest. I wanted to make sure that my creative input wasn't limited to singing and writing the songs. Because I had ideas on ALL levels. […] I just remember being interviewed and people automatically assuming that [male partner] produced [the band] and I was just a singer. And it is really hard to turn that around, that whole perception. You know that people come with that perception. [musician]

Although the above quotation is from a performer our research demonstrates that the differentiation made by Urry between 'front-line' service staff who have high contact with consumers and those who have minimal contact is less evident in the pop cultural sectors (Urry 1990). Even women in more background roles frequently share the perception that their 'social characteristics' (looks, age, gender, race) play a significant part in the way their competency in the workplace is judged. Although we would argue that patriarchy is not an immutable, unassailable and universal condition it is evident that patriarchal practices and symbolic structures continue to influence social relations. From our research this also includes those sectors – such as popular music and the cultural industries – that are seen as heralding a new era in employment practices

and which close the gap between consumption and production. This is not to argue that these sectors could not provide new opportunities for meaningful and flexible employment but that it should not be *assumed* that 'low barriers to entry' (Pratt, 1999) and novel working arrangements will bring greater gender equality. The women we have spoken to are in various ways attempting to reconcile, compromise, adapt, undermine and transform these structures in order to create new ways of working and consuming. Understanding women's strategies in this arena becomes increasingly important as cultural industries development forms a more central part of employment and social cohesion strategies at a local, national and European level.

Notes

[2] Manchester has the largest creative industries sector of any British city outside London. Tom Fleming, (ed.) *The Role of the Creative Industries in Local and Regional Development*, report by Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber & FOCI, May 1999.

[3] From 1983 onwards many new pop cultural businesses began to be located in a city centre area now known as the Northern Quarter and promoted as a pop cultural quarter. This area had become run down because of the relocation of retail and other industries out of the are during the 1970s. However because of its dilapidation rents were relatively cheap and proved attractive for these pop cultural businesses (Milestone 2000, Milestone, Lovatt and O'Connor 1994)

[4] Similar schemes such as those offered by Prince's Youth Business Trust and New Business Support provided similar opportunities to those of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme.

[5] And, it is often argued, the youth cultures in turn attract more students to the city. It has long been a piece of city folklore that applications to the city's universities increased following the 'Madchester' explosion.

[6] See for example, Simon Frith on Sheffield in T. Bennett et al (editors) (1993) *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies and Institutions*, (London, Routledge), p.15-17; Phil Johnson on Bristol in (1997) *Straight Outta Bristol: Massive Attack, Portishead, Tricky and the Roots of Trip-Hop*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton); and on Liverpool, Sara Cohen, (1991) *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making*, (OUP).

[7] London obviously also has a wealth of underground or non mainstream music and clubcultures.

[8] See for example Ronnie Spector's (1990) *Be My Baby* London:Macmillan

[9] This project is joint funded by the European Social Fund New Opportunities for Women programme and Manchester Metropolitan University.

[10] All quotations are from women unless otherwise stated. In the text interviewees are identified only by their job title - in some cases the same title applies to multiple interviewees.

[11] Manchester Polytechnic became Manchester Metropolitan University in 1993.

[12] Cara Aitchinson raised these issues in her paper 'Researching Gendered Space: developing a discourse in leisure and tourism studies' presented at the Women's Studies Network Conference, Hull, 1998.

[13] Julie Burchill, 'Off their rockers', *The Guardian*, April 17 1999.

[14] See for example OECD report (1998) *The Future of Female-Dominated Occupations*, p.66.

[15] See for example Chris Smith (1998) *Creative Britain*, (Faber: London); LEDA report, (1995) *New Opportunities for Employment Creation Through the Cultural Sector*; Bianchini and Parkinson (1993) *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration* (Manchester University Press). Women's position within the sector is, however, unclear and research such as the 'mapping document' produced by the Government's Cultural Industries Task Force does little to enlighten. *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1998.

[16] Deborah Curtis (wife of Joy Division's Ian Curtis) writes an interesting personal account of the marginalisation of women in Manchester's punk scene in *Touching From a Distance*, Faber, 1996.

[17] It should be acknowledged, however, that Sarah Champion was a key *female* journalist of the period.

[18] The title of this article makes reference to a Smiths' song – *What Difference Does it Make?* (Morrissey and Marr), Rough Trade, 1994.

[19] In recent years Manchester's Gay Village has been increasingly heterosexualised by the expansion of corporate-run bars and clubs. This has made the Village much less an exclusive 'safe space' (for gay men and women) and much more a mainstream urban quarter based upon the night time economy. The Village has also long been criticised for marginalising lesbians.

[20] Similarly in a recent journal article Mary Ann Clawson argued that in alternative rock music women play the electric bass as a way of getting into bands. Opportunities for women exist in this area because men see the bass as an 'easy' instrument and therefore inferior to other instruments. Clawson argues 'the entrance of women into rock bands via the bass may provide them with new opportunities and help legitimate their presence in a male dominated site of artistic production, yet it may simultaneously work to reconstruct a gendered division of labour and reproduce dominant gender ideologies'.

[21] 'Dance music' is a generic term for a range of contemporary club and rave music such as that associated with 'super-clubs' such as Liverpool's Cream, Pete Tong's programmes on Radio 1 and the magazine MixMag.

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