10 Women Working in the Music Business

An Alumni Study

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Introduction: From a Wrecking Ball to a Reckoning

This research started with a feminist snap – a moment when I realised that the paper I had started to write back in 2019 for a keynote speech that I gave at isaScience International Conference for Interdisciplinary Research, entitled 'Free Music Free Labour – Women Producing Music In the Music Digital Economy', in which I was questioning the potential of women-led music communities to deliver any kind of liberation for women music producers, needed to be urgently rethought in light of the momentous events of a global pandemic and political unrest following the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the United States of America on May 25, 2020. The reverberations of these two events appeared to act like a wrecking ball as they fell upon the master's house of the global music corporations as they shook their professed liberal, egalitarian, meritocratic values (Bennett, 2018).

In the midst of the global crisis, this chapter transformed into virtual fieldwork, reporting back from a lockdown. I called out via Twitter, Instagram and email to my students, my friends and my co-workers. Inspired by the work of Ahmed (2017), and in the spirit of what she has called the 'Feminist Killjoy', this work proceeds as a form of questioning what it might mean to live a feminist musical life. The first question always being, as Ahmed (2017) notes, what do we mean when we say *women*? Her answer is 'all those who travel under the sign of *women*' (Ahmed, 2017: 14, emphasis in original) and that includes gender non-conforming and non-binary LGBTQ and Black, Asian and ethnic minority persons. I shall use the term women here in this fully inclusive sense.

This chapter additionally contributes to a growing body of discourse that considers the working conditions of music and the wider creative industries (Banks, 2017; Bennett, 2018; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), the relationship between culture and subjectivity (Ahmed, 2017; Born and Devine, 2015; DeNora, 2000; Gill, 2017; Gross and Musgrave, 2020; McRobbie, 2020) and the role of professional practitioners within higher education in the UK as intermediaries between the university and industry (Ashton and Noonan, 2013; Gross and Musgrave, 2020; Oakley, 2013). It adds into

these debates the ways in which social media activism, notions of feminism and post-feminist sensibilities inform the ongoing discussions of inequality, exploitation and exclusion within the UK music industry landscape. By hearing directly from these women, it aims to explore the ways in which music mediates their everyday lives and social relationships (Nowak and Haynes, 2018).

The discussions and new initiatives around gender inequality in the music industries in the UK can be traced back to the media storms created by #MeToo and what Bennett (2018) identified as a critical moment in 2013 involving Miley Cyrus and a Wrecking Ball (O'Connor, 2013)[1]. However, nothing from the gender debates sparked by #MeToo back in 2013 could have predicted the widespread acknowledgement of structural racism and inequality that followed the events of the summer of 2020. The global music industries responded with a display of solidarity, when they stopped working for a day to take time out 'to learn', #TheShowMustBePaused (Wheeler, 2020). This second wave of 'industrial reflexivity' (Bennett, 2018) was widely supported by artists and music professionals alike but it was equally heavily criticised by many Black artists and activists as a shallow gesture without any real political implications for Black music or the wider community (Music Week, 2020). By the end of 2020, all of the major music companies espoused support for racial equality, #BlackLivesMatter, gender equality, diversity and inclusivity as well as wellbeing and mental health (BPI, 2021).

Since 2018, the activity around gender inequality in the UK music industry has grown expediently. The publishing of the report *Counting the Music Industry: The Gender Gap. A Study of Gender Inequality in the UK Music Industry* (Bain, 2019) comprehensively revealed the level of gender inequality in terms of artists and songwriters within the recording and publishing industries and was widely reported in the mainstream media. Later in the same year, Bain created the *F List* by reaching out to women via social media. She did this as a reaction to the complaints from festival promoters and live agents who continually claimed there were not enough female musicians for them to book (Snapes, 2021). The *F List* provides an up-to-date directory of female musicians, songwriters and composers, and its creation was enthusiastically welcomed by female musicians. Additionally, *F List* members and directors actively use their platform to call out music events that lack diversity (Bain, 2019). In July 2020, WomeninCTRL, a non-profit organisation that lobbies for women's equality in the UK music industries, published its report *Seat at The Table*, which revealed the racial and gender inequities in leadership positions in music industry trade bodies (Khan, 2020). Again, these findings were widely reported and caused a storm of social media activity and discussion, which led to online events and fed into the initiatives that have subsequently been launched within the UK music industries.

Theoretical Pathways

Using the approach Ahmed offers in her book, *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), of writing oneself in as a way of developing a praxis to engage with the messy contradictory ways in which feminist thoughts and desires become entangled and embodied in everyday living, this chapter hopes to contribute to the ongoing feminist restoration project that seeks to place women and other marginalised subjects at the heart of music histories (Bennett, 2018: 36). In this pathfinding way, the research for this chapter is loosely based on a study conducted by my friend and sometime mentor Sheila Whiteley, alongside her two colleagues Elly Tams and Dan Laughey at the University of Salford, in Greater Manchester, UK, that was published in 2004. The research entitled 'Women and the Cultural Industries', funded by the European Union's European Social Fund, provides historic evidence that many of the issues concerning gender inequalities in the creative industries were already considered a barrier to the development of the creative industries. The Salford study examined the experiences of students and graduates from the University's Creative Industries courses, which included the UK's first-ever course in popular music production. The Salford study provides a historic snapshot in three ways. Firstly, it offers evidence of the ways in which women alumni considered the usefulness of their degrees in relation to their career ambitions. Secondly, it gives some insight into these women's experiences of work and looking for work. Thirdly, it gives the researchers an opportunity to examine how these graduates 'talk about and perceived gender relations in the cultural and creative industries' (Whitely et al., 2004: 48). Aiming as it was in a feminist mode to 'redress the imbalance by providing specific insights into the barriers to women's progression in the cultural industry' (Whiteley et al., 2004: V), thus provided a starting place and set of guiding questions with which to shape this research. Using the Salford study helped to historically contextualise the ongoing gender debates within the current music ecosphere (Gross and Musgrave, 2020). Additionally, the Salford study provides an opportunity to reflect on the role of the teacher-practitioners, the progression of feminist ideas and the integration of neoliberal entrepreneurialism that is now thoroughly embedded and entangled into the lives of musical subjects (Gross and Musgrave, 2020).

McRobbie, in her book *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience* (2020), suggests that this new formation of postfeminism once again appears to reinforce political ambition and conversations on solidarity as it simultaneously reduces such demands to individual action. Amidst this cacophony of activity, McRobbie offers up the '*dispositif*' of 'perfect-imperfect-resilience' as a way of thinking and making sense of what she calls this post-postfeminism. In her analysis, McRobbie suggests the 'perfect' is a white, heteronormative, upper middle-class, feminine ideal with a 'feminist underpinning' (McRobbie, 2020: 2). Such perfection then requires the 'imperfect'

as it offers a mechanism with which to deal with the majority that fall outside of the 'perfect', with the 'imperfect' acting as counter lever to the 'perfect'. The 'imperfect' allows for limited diversions from the ideal, for the striving to continue and also for the ideal to be held in place unchallenged. This then begats the need for 'resilience' – the point of recuperation, the point of self-recovery, so that one can return to the struggle for the 'perfect' with no rebuilding necessary, only self-care (McRobbie, 2020). As an instrument of postfeminism, the elements of 'perfect-imperfect-resilience' act to keep the neoliberal ideology of individualism and the myth of meritocracy in place like a tourniquet.

There is not enough space here to fully consider the implications or possibilities of these new formations of digital or neo-postfeminism, but the usefulness of a postfeminist sensibility as suggested by Gill (2017) and the naming of 'commodity-feminism' are still important as the contradictions and complexities of this new wave of feminist activists are clearly subject to them.

Chipping Away at the 'Brick Wall': On Becoming a Critical Practitioner

My own position as course leadership of the MA in Music Business Management at the University of Westminster (UK) is instructive here insofar as it is an example of the ways in which knowledge production on such creative industries courses can be shaped in often unpredictable ways. The figure of the industry teacher-practitioner was key in the expansion of industry-facing popular music courses that included music technology, performance and music business in the UK (Gross and Musgrave, 2020). The role of teacher-practitioner is to help students understand not only the skills needed to work within the creative industries, but also how it feels – the emotional and affective aspects of becoming a creative industry professional (Ashton and Noonan, 2013). The teacher-practitioners were siloed conceptually within the academy as part of the employability agendas of making students fit for work, rather than engaging in critical or theoretical work that might question these educational policies or industry agendas. Although teacher-practitioners are often a rich source of insider knowledge and industry networks that can benefit the students' career development, these supposed advantages are not easily measured within the academy.

Within the music department at the University of Westminster, the four courses on offer in 2016 and even now in 2021, reflect the hierarchy of technical abilities and tendencies that exist in music production cultures: master's programs in Audio Engineering and Music Business Management as well as an undergraduate provision that was divided into Performance and Commercial Music Production. These divisions have several opaque manifestations that impact directly on gender as well as racial and social economic outcomes and disparities, even though they are paradoxically

aimed at producing a widening participation agenda (Born and Devine, 2015). Specifically, they centralise individual, masculinised ideals of authorship/production (Born and Devine, 2015). In doing so, non-male students become 'contributors' – session musicians, marketeers, administrators – and additionally reproduce neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurship that again reinforce gender binaries and racial stereotypes (Born and Divine, 2015; McRobbie, 2016). The centralising of employability and transferable skills (Ashton, 2013) leaves little time for imagining different modes of production, let alone living (Gross and Musgrave, 2020). My own attempts within the department to challenge these practices and to develop new approaches were shut down in the male-dominated music department meetings. The MA in Music Business Management has produced 289 female graduates and 226 male graduates since 2004. In comparison, the MA in Audio Production at the University of Westminster, which was launched in 1998, has produced only 78 female graduates alongside 394 male graduates. This data reflects the sharp disparity in music production cultures whereby audio technology appears to create a wall of gender inequality, particularly within educational institutions (Born and Divine, 2015). In 2013, there was a change in leadership: a new female Dean was appointed and a restructuring of the school started. This led me to be resituated in a new cluster of creative industries management courses. At first, I felt completely adrift; however, in the end it allowed me the opportunity to develop new strategies away from the men in music. Space and distance, it turned out, was what I needed.

Creating space for women is a specific Second Wave feminist strategy that aims to give women an opportunity to explore and imagine new possibilities (Ahmed, 2017). As Nowak and Haynes (2018) point out, uncovering the mundane and purposeful practices of music knowledge acquisition is critical to highlight the multiple meanings that musical ambition takes in the life of non-male music production students.

In 2016, I and a small group of women instigated a 48-hour occupation of the recording studios situated at the university's Harrow Campus, which is situated in Middlesex, Greater London. The project, called 'Let's Change the Record', aimed to confront the issues facing women producing music by transforming the gendered space of the recording studio (Gross, 2017). One of the main takeaways from the event was how different it felt for all of the participants to be teaching and learning in an environment dominated by women – this was a totally novel experience for all of us.

Research Methodology

For this study, I adapted the format and questions from the Salford study (Whiteley et al., 2004), adding in new questions on the impact and use of social media in career development and working practices, as well as questions regarding the current debates on inequalities in music, specifically addressing sexuality, ageism, race, class and disability. I sent out the

questionnaire via email and then conducted ten one-hour, semi-structured interviews that took place online between November 2019 and January 2021.

For the most part, my relationship with this group of interviewees started when they joined the course as students and progressed as they graduated to one of informal mentorship and friendship. Most of this group contribute as guest speakers and some are employed as part-time visiting lecturers on the MA in Music Business Management. As such, we are a close group of friends and colleagues, frequently seeking support and guidance from one another. Hearing from them offers a unique opportunity to hear from an 'insider' perspective how the processes of musical subjectivities are experienced (Gross and Musgrave, 2020). As Nowak and Haynes (2018) argue, using friendship as a methodological approach enables access to the diverse cultural practices in which individuals are embedded and enables a deeper excavation of the mechanism through which music operates.

These alumni were aged between 28 and 55 years at the time of the interviews and had graduated from the MA in Music Business Management between 2010 and 2020. They are all in various stages of their career development. The majority described themselves as music industry professionals, with six employed in full-time positions at major music companies. Ten had additional music-based projects or music business ventures outside of their main 'day' jobs. Everyone in this sub-group described their activities as 'work'.

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As Bennett (2018) notes, there are concerns with regard to the gendering of roles within the music industries, preferencing as they do positions for women within administration and communication. All of the interviewed women employed full-time as music professionals work in the areas aligning with 'normative feminine coding' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). One woman is employed full-time in book publishing; the others work in music education as well as pursuing careers as self-employed recording artists, event promoters, independent record label directors, artist managers as well as writers and broadcasters.

The interviewees were also asked about their ethnic origins: six identified as Black, one as Brown, four as White European and two as White British. For 50 per cent, English is not their first language, and 50 per cent had moved to London to attend the MA program at the University of Westminster.

On Bridge Building

All of the alumni said that they joined the Music Business Management MA course hoping that it would improve their music industry career prospects. This was specifically true for those alumni who studied part-time and were

new to London and the white Europeans in particular found adapting to the culture of the music business 'stressful':

Moving to London and joining the course – it was all stressful for these reasons:

a) The catch-22 of needing experiences even if it is a non-paid internship;
b) you feel bad about reaching out and trying to get help – the cold shoulder;
c) work as a waitress meant I did not have time – pressure of London.
(female, music analytics digital media, 29)

The white British alumni interviewed also spoke about the cost of living in London and the difficulty of 'juggling' it all. They had additional creative music work outside of the university but lacked the direct industry contacts they felt they got from the course.

> I think I was kind of open-minded. I guess I knew that music and any creative industry is tough to get into, so I guess I just wanted to see what could come out of it. So, I actually went straight into a full-time position at a major music publisher before I had even finished the masters.
> (female, music publishing, 29)

The London-based alumni who already had music experience before entering the course can be divided into two groups, one being the two white British women who were in their twenties when they entered the course, both of whom immediately found full-time employment on graduation. Anecdotally, it has been my experience when finding work placements for students that the group easiest to place are young, white, female Londoners. The other group comprised the women of colour over the age of 30 and one European who had been living in London for over 25 years. All of these women said that they joined the course hoping it would increase their industry knowledge, but also importantly improve their own 'self-confidence'. However, the women who were over 30 spoke of the importance of validating their music own business experience in a formal way by gaining a master's degree. This group were already embedded in the entrepreneurial culture of the London music scene. Just as Gill (2017) and McRobbie (2016) observe, what was important to these women was a sense of empowerment and self-improvement, developing their self-image in order to progress.

> I wanted to work in the live music sector and the course enabled me to be interviewed for full-time roles in live music. It also enabled me to make contacts who always call on me for part-time work, I wouldn't have been able to make those contacts without the course.
> (female, live promoter/book publishing, 34)

The alumni who had started their careers in music as artists, although they had not 'given that up', mentioned wanting to work on 'both sides of the industry' as a reason for completing the course. They also saw having additional entrepreneurial ventures as necessary in the face of the challenges they experienced in terms of both racism and sexism.

> I wanted to be equipped to run my own company and gain a job within the music industry for experience.
>
> (female, artist/youth worker/music education, 40)

In the Salford study, their alumni also spoke of having 'sidelines' and unpaid work that they hoped would help them to develop their creative careers (Whiteley et al., 2004: 53). They talked about their 'passion' and the trade-off in terms of the loss of work/life balance (Whiteley et al., 2004: 55). This informality and boundaryless characteristic of music labour has a specific impact on non-males, as Gadir (2017) points out, quoting Conor, Gill and Taylor (2015): 'where work is competitive and limited, women and people of colour are particularly susceptible to discrimination' (Gadir, 2017: 5).

In Gross and Musgrave's study (2020), the definition of what constituted work was found to be particularly problematic for music workers. It was clear that an economic transaction alone was not applicable; being paid for doing work was often considered a bonus. Just as with the alumni here, all the activities our musical subjects did that were music related were considered to be work. However, they frequently described the time they spent going to gigs or meeting with friends as being work related. The division between work and leisure and any sense of work/life balance appeared to be very difficult to grasp at best and potentially non-existent at worst. For these musical subjects in Gross and Musgrave (2020) and the alumni here, who had joined them in 'the music industry', being entrepreneurial was an essential characteristic. The alumni in my study mirror this pattern of embodying their work even as they acknowledge the contradictions and potential problems caused by having boundaryless relationships between work and play, between friends and colleagues. These issues were summed up by one interviewee as being three of the low points of working in the music industry:

> Work/life balance, confidence and encountering others who behave unprofessionally…
>
> (female, record label marketing, 28)

These women talked about themselves in terms of 'brands', 'self-promotion' and 'network developing'. Even the interviewees above the age of 40 were engaged in self-promotional and networking activities, in spite of the fact that they expressed feeling ambiguous or resistant to these concepts. All the interviewees laughed or made jokes about the endless cycle of self-promotion

and several of them talked about how anxious it made them feel. They were all totally aware of the paradox but also felt it had to be done. Thus, they seemed to understand their position in terms of McRobbie's (2020) notion of the 'imperfect', since they felt themselves to be outside of the ideal of the 'perfect' and were committed to the need to be 'resilient' as a strategy for coping in the face of inequality.

For these women, the role of social media goes hand in hand with self-promotion and being entrepreneurial, and these activities were only questioned in terms of their implications for their mental health. Again, rather than resist these strategies, they needed to be prepared to deal with them through self-care.

> I've struggled with health problems that relate back to (and grew from) my juggle with a salaried professional role as a teacher and the upkeep of my musical ambitions. That has been the hardest part of the journey, and one that I'm still on. Although I'm positive about my recovery process, and what I've learnt in terms of what it means to have a sustainable career (and functioning body and mind), I do wish that I didn't have to struggle so hard to build a career in music, as it's unfortunately been a traumatic experience for me.
>
> (female, brand management/musician/activist, 27)

Very few interviewees had a 'back-up plan': they were all totally committed to the idea that they would 'make it' in the music industry and had a 'belief' in themselves and paradoxically in the possibility that their hard work alone would deliver their desired outcomes.

> I think the advantage is to manage your own development and then obviously it just depends on you, and you can quickly enhance your profile, you can quickly build up your value and your worth – I think it is much easier in that sense.
>
> (gender non-conforming, digital distribution/music manager, 31)

In the Salford study, it was easy to observe a postfeminist sensibility in the way these women talked about gender because the female alumni did not see gender as a problem. They saw the creative industries as being about hard work, and being entrepreneurial was part of what you had to do. They did not identify as feminist and expressed negative ideas about 'bossy' women (Whiteley et al., 2004: 63).

On Inequality – The Lift is Out of Order

Once inside the industry, these women found new challenges both in terms of employment and progression as well as the work they felt they had to do to promote themselves. However, for all of them, the issues of sexism and

racism in the music industry were ever-present, as the following quote by a live music promoter illustrates:

> In my opinion the music industry is the worst of all the industries for racial equality. This industry stereotypes. It doesn't have specific access schemes to help those from Black, Asian or minority ethics backgrounds access the industry. There just is not enough work done. In fact, during my master's, somebody in the music industry asked me if I had any ideas. I mean I don't have all the solutions because I'm from an ethnic minority background, but also that person should be looking at their organisation and making changes.
>
> (female, live music promoter, 34)

All of the interviewees were sensitive to the way intersectionality operated in subtle ways within the music environments they worked and lived in. Several of the Black alumni were also actively involved in online events and debates around colourism, specifically misogynoir that is the specific hatred towards black women (Joseph, 2020; Anyangwe, 2015). In the UK music industries, there is also evidence that lighter skinned women are favoured to the disadvantage of darker skinned women and the subject of colourism has generated a lot of social media activity:

> The gender debate is important but I find the angle can be superficial; there are immense issues for Black women, and colourism is a huge problem.
>
> (female, music education/record label and live event promotion, 48)

These discussions have grown and the interviewees here believe that gender conversations should not just be centred on female artists (Jones, 2019) but need to include those working across the music sector:

> Three problems that have hindered my career development; a) ethnicity – racism being female and black; b) gender – sexism; c) lack of access from the lack of privilege.
>
> (female, music business/academic author/record label owner, 49)

Social class was seen to be a significant issue and they were all acutely aware of what they saw as class barriers, especially when it came to entering the industry:

> I feel that my background and my story slowed things down a lot. So, for example there are many younger people in this industry that maybe because they are British or because they come from a different economical background, they manage to have more working experience unpaid because they could afford to work for free or they just started to work when they were way younger, when I was just trying to sort

out getting my national insurance number. I am not British and I come from a middle-low economic background and didn't have the opportunity to work for free. That all definitely had an impact on my career progression.

(gender non-conforming, digital distribution/music manager, 31)

In the Salford study, little mention was made of class background, with their alumni repeating that working hard was the most important factor, and issues of race were not mentioned at all by the interviewees. In this study, the comments of the interviewees echo the findings of Gross and Musgrave (2020), who found that music professionals would simultaneously refer to structural inequalities whilst appealing to the ideal of meritocracy to explain success or failure.

After a year or two at a major, I'd like to leap into full-time entrepreneurship, grow my businesses around my music and hope re-enter the system in about ten to fifteen years, but as a senior executive with my eyes on heading up a label or doing a joint venture with a major label to create an artist-led and friendly talent-development education hub.

(female, brand management, musician, activist, 27)

For some of the Black alumni, these everyday struggles and contradictions presented a difficult position to maintain:

Being a minority and a woman who is self-managing often means that you're not taken seriously and can often be belittled by both other artists and industry professionals (predominantly men). So, the effort it takes to shrug that off and keep your sanity and vision clear has been challenging and almost made me quit.

(female, artist, youth worker, music education, 40)

The problems of work/life balance continued as a theme for these women, as did 'unprofessional' or 'disrespectful' behaviour and the opportunity to have a family:

Moreover, the music industry isn't empathetic to the caring responsibilities that women choose to take or are given. How can you be a live music promoter or tour manager as a woman if you have children or look after parents and you're freelance?

(female, live music promoter, 34)

On Knowledge Production

Digital platforms and social media have become new centres of knowledge exchange and production across the music industries. The ways in which these women have been actively using social media to reach out to and

build relationships have become a daily practice and part of their lives. It is also how they participate in knowledge production and disrupt existing narratives:

> In the beginning, social media was crucial for me to understand who was working in the industry and who I should speak to – to understand what were the jobs in the industry. It was by going to Twitter, and Instagram was everything, and LinkedIn. I lived on LinkedIn to really understand the market, as well being on social media really helped me to start building a network fairly early even when I wasn't yet working in the industry, and then allowed me to have a very solid network fairly quick and quickly got me recognised as I started to work in the industry.
>
>   (gender non-conforming, digital distribution/artist manager, 31)

Some expressed anxiety about being asked to speak at events and one event organiser talked about it often being difficult to book women for panels:

> Sometimes in my current position we invite women to speak at conferences on panels and they say no or say their boss would be better. So they seem reluctant to take up the offer. It is frustrating.
>
>   (female, music analytics digital media, 29)

Others expressed doubts about the 'endless conversation' and felt there needed to be more research to support arguments for inclusion and historic inequalities and exploitation:

> There needs for more research and factual information to be brought into these discussions from experts, as well as from those with real-life experiences. There are too many people who pander to the industry included on inclusivity panels.
>
>   (female, artist/youth worker/music education, 40)

However, contrary to feeling depressed by this data and the volume of conversations, most of the alumni feel excited and positive about their futures. The renewed urgency of the situation brought about by #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo has encouraged several of the alumni, and particularly the Black alumni, to become increasingly vocal and actively participate in several of the newly formed initiatives. They see their involvement within these debates as empowering and also as part of their own development, both personally and as music professionals, while also recognising the entrepreneurial opportunities and benefits to their career and reputational development. At the same time, however, they expressed caution about the general outcome, even for themselves:

> I think the other challenge is how can we support minorities in positions of power to feel safe enough to stand for these others – to be supportive and to look after people's mental health, too. There is a lot of work to do to make an infrastructure that can support people taking action.
>
> (gender non-conforming, digital distribution/artist manager, 31)

Interestingly, it was some of the white alumni who expressed their anxiety and doubts about the potential impacts of these debates, referring to the need to 'wait and see'. They were, however, open and able to talk about their own privilege and what they saw as the difficulties of bringing about meaningful change. One spoke about all the senior management being white, middle-class men, but noted how that these men 'knew the business' and 'had the knowledge'. They described the senior roles as being difficult and pressure-filled, and said they did not think they would want that kind of pressure. Another spoke of the possibility that other women coming in might not be collaborative and might just be competition. Several spoke of their bad experiences working with other women and of good experiences working with cis-gendered white men.

All of the Black alumni were seriously concerned that the 'pressure might drop'. There was a lot of discussion about what might happen as we come out of lockdown and concerns that the urgency would be lost or just dissipated like 'yesterday's news' or 'on to the next thing'. Several of them organised events and initiated their own forums online to debate. This was particularly the case for the Black and queer alumni, who were keenly aware of the debates. The majority felt that they were under pressure to get things done, to be part of the action and to get their voices heard. They expressed this as stressful and 'more work', but also as necessary and urgent, very much reflecting the mood of these discussions. These activities were expressed as an extension of the passion that is such a central requirement of music industrial culture (Bennett, 2018).

Conclusion

When comparing this new position of embracing feminism with the findings of the Salford study, which talked of the danger of women being seen as 'wanting to have it all', as well as Bennett's (2018) article, in which bringing up feminism or gender discussion was derided by a senior white male manager he had spoken to, the findings of this research indicate a marked shift. The alumni interviewed for this study were very conscious of structural inequalities and how their own positions were impacted by them. However, it was clear that the recent amplification by women-led initiatives, coupled with the impact of the global pandemic and the events of #BlackLivesMatter, have caused a critical moment of industrial reflexivity in the music industries, and that these events in turn have given these women a new sense of

urgency and optimism. When we lack the time, space and knowledge of feminist theory to reflect in these critical moments of our lives, we must work with what we have, and it is always messy. The clearing of new paths is not easy and these moments are sharp and painful, already being experienced in our 'bones'. The process is ongoing, as Ahmed (2017) makes clear, the ground is shifting but the obstacle of the fantasy of meritocracy is embedded in the language of higher education and central to the creative industries and espoused by the music industries, especially in this 'critical moment'. It is important that in creative industry courses we centralise critical thought, which includes decolonising the curriculum and actively addressing issues of social justice.

Acknowledgement

Note

1 In 2013 Miley Cyrus the former Disney Channel 'tween' star Hannah Montana released a new song entitled 'Wrecking Ball' with an accompany video in which she appears naked swinging on a wrecking ball and simulating oral sex with a sledgehammer. The video attracted much criticism for the way in which the youthful Cyrus appeared to be sexualised and the video was considered to be pornographic. The Irish artist Sinéad O'Connor published an open letter to Miley Cyrus on her blog warning her of the exploitation of the music industries and the damage she might do to herself, the letter was reprinted in full in *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK.

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