



## **Student Essay: Can the Creative Industries Cater for Women? Female Graduates and Gender Boundaries: A Bourdieusian Approach**

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### **Abstract**

This research examines the gender boundaries perceived by five female graduates currently working in the creative industries. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, and thematically analysed using the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. Five significant trends appeared in the data: (1) male dominated offices and the sexual division of labour; (2) the importance of social capital and negative networking encounters; (3) females experiencing confidence issues; (4) negative perception of the gender pay gap; and (5) the need for more female role models. This project argues that the interviewee's negative experiences are internalised and the gendered social order is anchored in the habitus of both males and females, to maintain the position of the dominant in the creative industries.

### **Introduction**

What do we mean when we talk about 'feminism'? Once a word denoted to a small, sidelined, boundary-breaking movement, but recent years have seen it become a part of our day to day vocabulary and integrated into mainstream culture. Gender equality remains a hotly debated issue, which features heavily in UK newspapers and popular press (Vincent, 2014). The Sony email hack, which revealed Hollywood actresses Jennifer Lawrence and Amy Adams were paid considerably less than their male equivalents for the film 'American Hustle' (Needham, 2013), evoked a strong reaction from the industry and Jennifer Lawrence herself (see: Lawrence, 2015). It may not be



splashed across newspapers in the same way, but people in everyday jobs experience the gender pay gap, too. We may be talking hundreds rather than hundreds of thousands, but the discrepancies are just as alarming. The BBC (2015a) predicts that if the current rate of change continues, the gender pay gap will not close before 2133. This is a statistical example of the injustice every day women face, and if true, is likely to affect female graduates - including myself - throughout the entirety of our working lives. This article will therefore adopt a bottom-up approach, looking at female graduates, in an effort to gain insight into the creative industries.

The main research question is: *'what are the gender barriers that female graduates experience while working in the creative industries?'* In order to answer this question the following secondary questions were devised:

- In the interviewee's office, who holds the most power? What affect does this have?
- How important do the interviewees view networking? Do they have any examples of networking experiences?
- What do the interviewees identify as their strengths and weaknesses at work?
- What are interviewee's opinions on the gender pay gap?

The article will first provide an extensive literature review introducing the seminal concepts of Pierre Bourdieu - habitus, fields and capitals - as well as feminist engagements with his theoretical model, and important definitions and regulations. It will then outline the investigative strategy; following that the main discussion will use Bourdieu's conceptual framework as a lens through which to analyse the data, before drawing conclusions.

### **Literature Review**

The creative industries are defined as "those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation

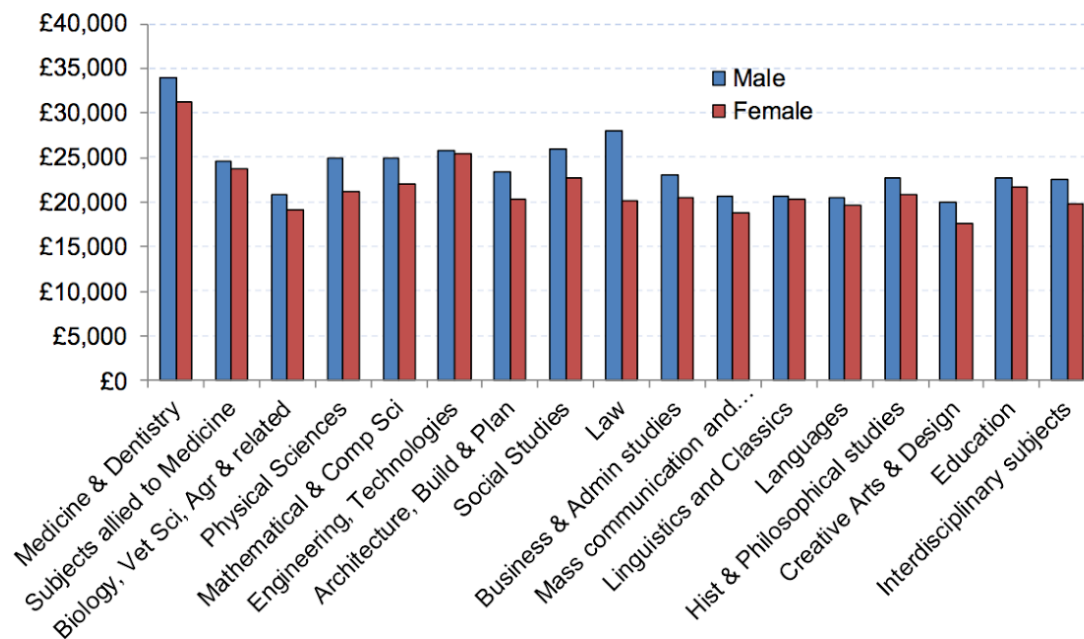


through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Gov, 2001, p.5). The definition includes industries such as publishing, film distribution and performing and visual arts (DCMS, 2015).

In the UK, gender equality is regulated by the ‘Equality Act 2010’, which provides a legal framework to protect individual rights and promote equal opportunities for all. The Act requires equal treatment in access to employment, regardless of sex, and explicitly addresses the gender pay gap (‘GPG’) (Gov, 2010). The GPG is defined as “the difference between men’s and women’s pay, based on the average difference in gross hourly earnings of all employees” (EC, 2014, p.2). On average in the UK, for every £100 a man earns, a woman earns £83; and only two in five senior officials, managers and legislators are female (BBC, 2015a). The GPG generally widens as women age (Allen, 2016), however, according to statistics, the gap also appears when comparing graduate earnings. The Futuretrack (2012) report shows graduates income by both gender and subject choice. Graduates who studied creative arts and design constitute the lowest paid subject group, and (like all other subject choices) experience a gap in earnings due to gender (*Figure 1*).



**Figure 5.5: Average earnings of graduates in full-time employment in 2011/2 by subject studied**



*Figure 1: Futuretrack (2012, p.50)*

This is surprising, as in the UK young women are 36% more likely to apply to University than young men (UCAS, 2015a); and in 2015, 14,000 more women were accepted to study creative arts and design degrees than men (UCAS, 2015b).

The publishing of GPG statistics has evoked strong reactions from wider society. A collaborative campaign between Elle Magazine, Mother and the Feminist Times urge females employed in the creative industries to “make him pay” and “if he does the same job as you, ask him his salary” (Mother, 2013, p.1). Also, the former UK Prime Minister, David Cameron has issued statements looking to tackle inequalities experienced by women (see: BBC, 2015b).

**Pierre Bourdieu**

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The work of French social philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu (1930 - 2002), is primarily concerned with the dynamics of power; specifically, the subtle ways power is transferred between actors within society, and how this maintains social order (Grenfell, 2012). In his texts, *'Outline Of A Theory Of Practice'* (1977) and *'Distinction'* (1984), among others, Bourdieu introduces and expands on his seminal concepts - habitus, field and capital.

### **Habitus**

Habitus is essentially the property of social actors, it is structured by past (e.g. family upbringing) and present experiences (e.g. educational achievement). Habitus is constantly refined and developed through everyday occurrences, including experiences in the workplace, and as the actor understands their place in the social structure (Correll, 2004). Bourdieu (1977) uses the term “disposition” to “express what is covered by the concept of habitus” (p.214), these dispositions are durable and thus generate practice, perceptions and beliefs.

### **Fields and Capitals**

Bourdieu (1977) identifies the social world as divided up into a series of distinct fields of social forces. In order to explain the dynamics and competitive nature of these fields he uses the analogy of a game; just as with say, a football game, social spaces are competitive, and the actors within the fields use different strategies to maintain or improve their positions of power (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) conceive the struggle for the means of power as the accumulation of different forms of capital, of which there are three: cultural (knowledge, aesthetic, and cultural preferences), economic (money and assets), and social (networks and affiliations). The three capitals become symbolic capital (prestige, honour and celebrity) when they are legitimated in society and the field. Unlike a professional football field, there are no level playing fields in the social spaces Bourdieu describes; individual actors possess different levels of capital, with some players at an advantage from the outset, using this advantage to accumulate more capital and advance further than other game players (Grenfell, 2012).



## **Bourdieu on Gender**

In '*Distinction*' Bourdieu contends that "sexual properties are inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity" (1984, p.107); despite this acknowledgement, his theorising of gender remained underdeveloped and 'gender blind' (Huppertz, 2012) until reasonably late in his academic career, when he published '*Masculine Domination*' (Bourdieu, 2001). Here he conceptualises gender as a dominant/dominated relationship, with males dominating women as a part of the natural social order, which is then embodied and reproduced in the habitus of men and women.

Bourdieu (2001) argues that masculine domination is maintained through 'symbolic violence'. Symbolic violence operates through face-to-face interactions, and is an invisible and subtle way of dominating. It relies on the oppressed, in this case women, being submissive and accepting the gendered classification of society. Kraus and Williams (2000, p.59) illustrate this: "anyone who has seen women laugh along with men over sexist jokes knows what this incorporation of the dominant vision means: we always carry within us whatever attacks, disparages and even destroys us". Through everyday, banal acts of symbolic violence, sexist jokes for example, women are subtly pushed back, without any overt recognition of the symbolic violence taking place (Bourdieu, 2001). This forms part of their disposition (habitus) and ensures the reproduction of both masculine domination and distinctions between masculinity and femininity (McNay, 1999).

## **Bourdieu and Feminism**

'*Masculine Domination*' (Bourdieu, 2001) evoked strong criticism from feminist theorists; they argue that it is androcentric and somewhat oblivious to important feminist work on gender and power (McCall, 1992; McLeod, 2005). Lovell (2000) and Skeggs (2004) also criticise Bourdieu for ignoring women's capital accumulation strategies - they believe he recognises women are capital-bearing objects - which they disagree with.



Despite criticism, feminist scholars including Corsun and Costen (2001), Huppatz (2012), Kraiss and Williams (2000), Lovell (2000), McCall (1992), McNay (1999) and Skeggs (2004) recognise that an appropriation of Bourdieu's seminal concepts and contemporary feminism would be mutually profitable. Recent feminist engagements with Bourdieu's concepts include: Karacam and Koca (2015) who use Bourdieu's theory to examine the experiences of women managers in Turkish sport organisations, where gender inequality is institutional practice; and Miller (2014) who builds upon a gendered understanding of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to compare two cultural fields: the heavy metal music scene, and the contemporary folk scene in Canada.

Therefore this research will use Bourdieu's conceptual framework to understand and deconstruct the gender barriers experienced by female graduates working in the creative industries.

## **Methods**

A qualitative research strategy was used - specifically, semi-structured interviews - which gives the ability to ask both structured and impromptu questions, to broaden and expand the discussion (Matthews and Ross, 2010). This strategy can record judgments and emotions; and despite the low sample number, the "richness and subtlety" of this data method can lead "to great insights into human society" (Walliman, 2011, p.73). Following the advice of Tracy (2013), the first few minutes of the interview aimed to set expectations (e.g. time and ethical considerations); the first questions look to build a rapport - these questions are non-threatening and open-ended, such as "where did you attend university?" This creates a trusting relationship and allows for more serious questioning (Tracy, 2013).

The qualitative data collected was then analysed thematically, looking for themes and commonalities in the data, which can then be evaluated against the relevant literature (Bryman and Bell, 2015).



## Sample

To ensure the interviewees selected were relevant to the research question, a purposive sample was identified and asked to participate. A purposive sample involves identifying participants in a strategic way, only selecting those who have things to say which will help answer the question. It is a practical sampling method when there are heavy time constraints (Neuman, 2014). However, as purposive sampling is a non-probability approach, it does not allow for any generalisations about the population, but rather offers 'insights' (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The purposive sample includes: five female graduates all currently working in the creative industries (see 'appendix 1' for interviewee employment history).

As the topic discusses sensitive issues, ethics were an important consideration. The interviewees were briefed both before and after the interview about the purpose of the research, and were assured that their answers would be treated sensitively. During the briefing, as recommended by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009), the participants were reassured that their real names would not be used, and were then, as advised by Walliman (2011), given the option not to continue.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Male Dominated Office Space:*

All five interviewees said that their bosses, the ultimate authority in the office, were male:

*"I can't think of anyone who works somewhere with a female at the top of the company"*  
(Interviewee 3, Publishing).

Bourdieu (2001) sees society as characterised by masculine domination, with males dominating females as a part of the social order. Those who dominate are able to use their position to ensure the field functions to their own advantage. The interviewees





acknowledged that despite there being either more females, or an equal number of females : males in the office, men hold the most power as they occupy the top positions; this finding was consistent throughout all of the interviews:

*“On the actual desks, it just about seems equal in terms of numbers; but there is an imbalance of power I guess” (Interviewee 1, Journalism).*

The dominant (men) seek to maintain their power; they do this through manipulating the field boundaries, the capital required to enter, and the definition of success in the field – acting as gatekeepers. In order to be successful in a field dominated by men, women such as *Interviewee 1*, must follow the rules established by men (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Corsun and Costen, 2001); she acknowledges these rules here:

*“The women doing the digital stuff don’t seem to get the same kind of respect as the print staff do, I guess their work seems a little bit more menial and isn’t taken as seriously as the print work, which is done by the male senior editors and lead critics” (Interviewee 1, Journalism).*

The “print work” completed by men is ‘success’ and holds the most status, whereas the women “work so hard and are so integral to the website running but are still so inferior” (*Interviewee 1, Journalism*). Here the male lead and senior editors are the ‘dominant’ as they complete the integral “print work”. Through this segregation the gendered doxic order is reproduced; women’s work is viewed as ‘menial’ and ‘inferior’, which makes advancing past certain positions difficult (Moi, 1991).

This is also an example of the sexual division of labour, which is problematic because men’s work is “issued with more status and more pay”, which acts as a barrier to women reaching the top positions (Huppertz, 2012, p.3). *Interviewee 3* spoke about a particular



example of occupational segregation, in which a female intern was hired permanently as an “assistant”:

*“She was basically made to walk the boss’s dog, she went and got coffee, she had to read out the quiz questions when the boss wanted to join in – she wasn’t treated well” (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

The newly hired “assistant” started working at the publishers interning the same position as *Interviewee 3*, and was hired permanently, not as a part of the publishing team, but as their assistant. Ann Oakley’s (1974) study addresses this type of gender stereotyping. Oakley found that women who were incorporated into the labour market occupied positions which were an extension of their ‘traditional’ role as carers. Huppatz (2012) believes this hasn’t changed and the gendered economy still exists, and the hiring of the “assistant” at the publishing house also suggests the continuity of occupational segregation. It’s problematic as it gives the best roles to men, and restricts women from reaching the top positions and earning the highest salaries (Karacam and Koca, 2015).

The interviewees habitus is dynamically modified by their experiences; women see other women hired as “assistants” (*Interviewee 3, Publishing*) and working “relationship based jobs” (*Interviewee 2, Film*) and not getting the same amount of respect as the male “senior editors” (*Interviewee 1, Journalism*), and this is internalised in their habitus (Laberge, 1995). Habitus helps explain how fields, like the creative industries, become a self-perpetuating cycle of gender inequality, which act as a barrier to women visualising progression and promotion (Bourdieu, 2001); as (*Interviewee 1, Journalism*) shows when she acknowledges that as “most of the top editors are male, it looks like it’s very difficult for women to advance past a certain position”.



*Social Capital and Networking:*

The importance of social capital has long been acknowledged in the creative industries, as it is a major method of recruitment, and a proven asset used by actors to reach the top positions (Holgate, 2006; Townley, 2015). All interviewees said they see the value in networking and forming social connections, both during and outside working hours:

*“It’s just so important in the industry” (Interviewee 5, Film Editing).*

*“Particularly in publishing, I know how important it is to make social connections” (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

Despite Bourdieu focussing on men’s capital accumulation tactics, as Lovell (2000) and Skeggs (2004) suggest, the female interviewees also adopt capital-accumulation strategies. However despite their efforts to acquire social capital, when asked about their experience attending social events, four of the interviewees had negative stories:

*“My unofficial line manager was so drunk and he gradually became more and more touchy feely.. It got to the point where he was full on grabbing my bum... I think at this point he finally realised that I was absolutely not interested in him, so out of nowhere he turns and starts critiquing my work performance as some kind of retaliation. “You’re really slow at work, aren’t you?” (Interviewee 4, Copywriting).*

This symbolic violence is used by the dominant to marginalise and control (Bourdieu, 2001). As Cockburn (1991) contends, sexual harassment is “an expression not of men’s unbridled desire but of power” (p.139). This concealed form of violence reproduces domination through direct interactions between people, and is an assertion of male power. It maintains the gendered social structure, and constrains women’s actions so they are in



line with the gendered 'doxic' order (Huppatz, 2012). Another interviewee spoke about office quizzes organised by the boss, which the men's team always won:

*"He'd always do boys versus girls... he would always choose rounds that favoured the boys... one of the guys was currently studying History at Uni so he would pick sections of History he knew he was learning at the time.. who ever had won the most quizzes by the end of the week, he would take out for lunch" (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

This can be deconstructed using Bourdieu's analogy of the 'game' (Hofbauer et al, 2015). *Interviewee 3's* boss dominates and controls success in the game. Through selecting questions he knows the men's team can answer correctly, he ensures their success; this segregates genders and, as the women's team always lose, reinforces their inferior status in the office. The weekly quizzes are a 'fun' and 'light-hearted' activity so the players do not openly question and contest the mistreatment. This is both symbolic violence, and a conservation strategy, used by men to safeguard their dominant position (Karacam and Koca, 2015). In this case it also limits *Interviewee 3's* opportunity to accumulate social capital, which may restrict her moving up from a subordinate position in the office, which she acknowledges here:

*"The guy who started interning at the same time... got to go for lunch with the boss about three times...huge opportunities to socialise and network with the boss who has so many connections in publishing, which is just so valuable, and I never had that opportunity" (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

In these cases the mistreatment isn't seriously contested, over time these incidents converge into a steady stream of symbolically violent acts. The pervasive nature of these acts contribute to the interviewees 'feel for the game', and ensures the social order is anchored in the habitus of both males and females, to maintain the position of the dominant (Krais and William, 2000; Corsun and Costen, 2001).



*Confidence Issues:*

The interviewees made comparisons between their own confidence at work, and that of their male equivalents:

*“Male runners generally seem to be a lot more relaxed in their role” (Interviewee 2, Film).*

*“The other male intern was a lot more comfortable and sure of himself. I just questioned myself quite a lot and was left feeling uncertain” (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

This is significant as it shows a developed self-consciousness, they see their male equivalents are more comfortable, and more deserving of the job. Women are taught that they are inferior to their male equivalents through acts of symbolic violence, like the quiz at the publishing house, and they begin to believe this as the natural order. The effect of the mistreatment is shown by the interviewee’s lack of confidence, and can act as a barrier to their perception of their ability to succeed and reach the top positions:

*“I could see him [the male intern] getting it [a permanent job] rather than me” (Interviewee 1, Journalism).*

While the cultural capital accumulated by *Interviewee 1* and the male intern is relatively equal - both achieving similar degrees from good universities - she sees her male equivalent as superior, even at this early stage in their careers. She then linked this back to education:

*“I noticed at University, even if there are only two men in a group of 12 in a seminar group, which there often was, they tend to be the loudest and the happiest to speak and make their opinions known.... I’ve always thought that boys in our generation have been*



*brought up to believe that their opinion matters, whereas women tend to think about things before they say them and to doubt themselves and their abilities, and I think that is true in the workplace as well” (Interviewee 1, Journalism).*

*Interviewee 1* is suggesting that her confidence issues stem back to education. Feminist scholars have asked why, if women are subordinate at school and receive weaker wage returns to educational success, do they consistently outperform boys? Obstacles aside, *Interviewee 1* excelled in education, and intends to complete her Masters degree in Art History in the future, despite not thinking that it “*would help [her] advance in [her] career*”. Dumais (2002) suggests that women may have a habitus structured to believe that educational and occupational success is possible, but that they are likely to encounter some boundaries. *Interviewee 1*’s Masters degree, in which she will further acquire cultural capital, may help overcome some of the obstacles being a female poses in the workplace. As well as this, Mickelson (2003) suggests women are more likely than men to evaluate returns to education “not only of the income, status and careers it brings, but of their education’s potential to enhance the quality of their personal, familial and community lives” (p.373); which may explain her intentions to go back to education, despite her view that women are subordinate in school.

Experiences in education and at work, whether negative or positive, form part of the habitus. Negative experiences are gradually internalised, and effect the present; changing the way a person thinks, their perceptions of the world, and the opportunities available to them. The embodiment of symbolic violence is gradual but insidious; the interviewees are young and optimistic, however, their lack of confidence when comparing themselves to their male equivalents may imply that their negative experiences are sticking, and restrict the opportunities they believe are available to them (Huppatz, 2012).



*The Gender Pay Gap (GPG):*

Four out of the five interviewees said they wouldn't be surprised if there was a GPG in their office. The GPG discussion features heavily in the news and the popular press; with more and more celebrities working in the creative industries - Lena Dunham, Jennifer Lawrence and Meryl Streep - openly discussing feminism and gender equality (see: Vincent, 2014). This is important as it motivates women and men to contest any pay gaps due to gender; for example the Elle Magazine campaign which urges women working in the creative industries to "ask him his salary" if he does the same job as you may mean that more young women and men come forward to contest inequalities (Mother, 2013, p.1).

Despite this, talking about the GPG helps, but doesn't necessarily mean change. One interviewee, who had worked in the industry for less than a year, was pessimistic about the GPG:

*"My only advice [to young women starting in the creative industries] would be to be prepared that you may not be treated the same [as men] at this level" (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

She implicitly suggests an acceptance of gender inequalities, which could imply that her past experiences have been internalised. *Interviewee 3's* negative perception - which three other interviewees also held - is important because if they assume the GPG exists without concrete evidence, this may imply that they expect it, which may turn into reality. The GPG appears in graduate earnings (see: Futuretrack, 2012), and is part of Bourdieu's social world of '*Masculine Domination*' (Bourdieu, 2001). It is a part of the social structure and as women internalise this idea they determine what is possible, and develop their goals and aspirations accordingly. Hence, as *Interviewee 3* demonstrates, they may not



agree with their subordinate position, but they unconsciously internalise it in their habitus, which restricts their ambitions and acts as a barrier to women achieving the top posts.

#### *Female Role Models:*

More positively, all five interviewees expressed the need for more female role models at work. They agreed that having more women in positions of power would help them, and other graduates, feel more comfortable working in the creative industries. As Cohen et al (1998, p.723) suggest “it may be that what is thought of as a glass ceiling is actually a glass door, which can only be opened by women if other women have opened it previously”. One interviewee explicitly stated that if she were ever in a position of authority she would:

*“Exert positive leadership; I would want to make women feel as though they were valued in their position and deserved to be there” (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*

The interviewees all recognise that more women need to reach the top positions and act as role models for the younger generation; more importantly they conceive themselves as able to do this in the future. However, while they themselves want to exert positive leadership, three of the interviewees had experiences with other women who reached positions of power, but were particularly unapproachable:

*“Well the only women on the arts desk with lots of power is the one who makes things harder for me, it’s kind of a Margaret Thatcher situation [laughs]” (Interviewee 1, Journalism).*

*“I found her very stern, she’d send me very generic and unfriendly emails despite the fact that we’d been working together very recently. She wasn’t as approachable as you’d expect” (Interviewee 3, Publishing).*





This description of powerful women is not uncommon. Ann Oakley noted that: “the career women whose work requires assertive characteristics may meet disapproval from other women as well as from men, who consider her ‘sexless’ or ‘unfeminine’” (Oakley, 1990, p. 89). This fear of appearing unfeminine - undoing their gender capital (beauty and likeability) - may stop women entering positions of power, deemed ‘masculine’ (Ashall, 2004). A lot has changed since Oakley’s study in the 1970’s, but this stereotype of the bossy and unfriendly powerful women still exists. In the current U.S elections Hillary Clinton - the candidate on track to become the first female U.S president - is subject to “implicit sexism of the political and media punditry” such as an American news reporter tweeting “Smile. You just had a big night” after a victory speech she delivered in March (Streisand, 2016, p1). Strong and determined women are still threatening to contemporary society. If we disparage competent women, how do we ever expect them to reach the top positions at work? As Oakley noted the fear of this stereotype “discourages many women” from pursuing the top positions and “is one of the main reasons why occupational equality shows as yet no signs of being achieved” (Oakley, 1990, p. 89).

## **Conclusion**

Due to the low sample number, this project does not claim to be representative of the population; it does however offer *insights* into the gender barriers experienced by female graduates in the creative industries. It suggests that negative experiences and acts of symbolic violence feed into the habitus of the interviewees, which generates practice, and acts as a barrier to women visualising success and promotion in the creative industries (Corsun and Costen, 2001). When asked what would help them succeed, the interviewee’s responses included: challenging the ‘feminine’ stereotype, education about gender and more positive female role models. We “need to challenge the terms of the game itself” (Lovell, 2000, p.27) and further feminist engagements with Bourdieu may help deconstruct the masculine power and help close the GPG in the creative industries.



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## Appendix 1

The sample includes:

- **(Interviewee 1, Journalism)**: Currently interning on the arts and culture desk at a major UK newspaper.
- **(Interviewee 2, Film)**: Worked as a runner at a major film festival, and several small film distribution companies; currently working in PR at one of the largest film distribution companies in the UK.
- **(Interviewee 3, Publishing)**: Interned at an independent sci-fi publishers over the summer, and currently proofreads for the same company on a freelance basis.



- **(Interviewee 4, Copywriting)**: Completed work experience at a major UK newspaper; part of the product and editorial team for a video on demand service - now works as a copywriter at a health and fitness magazine/retailer.
- **(Interviewee 5, Film Editing)**: Worked as a runner at London Fashion Week, then as a camera operator for an online hairdressing company. Currently an assistant producer and editor at a small film and advert production company.