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Gender parity at executive level: non-homophilous networks and

executive appointments in UK publicly subsidised arts organisations

by

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Acknowledgements

Declaration

This thesis is my own work, and does not include any material I have used before or previously published. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

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Abstract

Against a background of women's widespread under-representation at executive level, publicly subsidised arts organisations in the UK have collectively, as a sector, appointed equal numbers of women and men at executive level. This thesis uses qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 63 executives, chairs and headhunters from across the sector to bring a deeper understanding of the factors at play in this unusual gender parity.

It is argued that the UK publicly subsidised arts sector's atypically non-homophilous instrumental networks include effective mentoring between men and women, and which feed into genuinely formal recruitment and selection methods alongside open advertising and selection decisions based on agreed criteria, contribute to this parity. At the same time, increasingly widespread flexible working practices include co-executive positions and working patterns that can accommodate executive responsibilities alongside childcare and other caring activities, the majority of which are still undertaken by women. These factors combined seem to provide the conditions that have enabled this sector to achieve gender parity at executive level sooner than other sectors, particularly those in which homophilous networks play a central role in discrete, unadvertised executive appointments in ways that disadvantage women. However, the UK publicly subsidised arts sector's relatively low executive pay levels, and its remaining intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class, are noted as important context to this gender parity since there is some indication that the gender pay gap persists, and the advantage extended to white, middle-class women has not yet been extended to all women.

By focussing on arts organisations, this thesis provides a unique empirical contribution to studies of executive gender inequality. By uncovering a link between inter-organisational collaboration, and openness towards sexuality which allow for men and women to mix professionally without judgment, it also expands on current theories about how homophilous and non-homophilous networks can be formed.

Abbreviations

AD	Artistic Director
ACE	Arts Council England
ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
ACW	Arts Council Wales
AFO	Annually Funded Organisation (Arts Council of Northern Ireland)
CCIs	Creative and cultural industries
CScot	Creative Scotland
DCMS	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
ED	Executive Director
NPO	National Portfolio Organisation (Arts Council England)
MPVA	Music, performing and visual arts
PSAO	Publicly subsidised arts organisation
RFO	Regularly Funded Organisation (Creative Scotland)

Chapter One: The UK publicly subsidised arts sector's gender parity at executive level

Introduction

Against a background of women's widespread under-representation at executive level, publicly subsidised arts organisations in the UK have, against the odds, achieved gender parity at this level by the end of the 2010s. While women made up only 10.9% of executives in FTSE100 corporations by 2020 (Vinnicombe, Atewologun & Battista, 2019), 28% across UK charities (Jewell & Bazeley, 2018) and 47% in NHS trusts (Ellwood, Garcia-Lacalle & Royo, 2020), in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector women made up 51% of executives in England by 2018 (Arts Council England, 2019) with a peak of 58.5% in Scotland by 2015 (Creative Scotland, 2017a). Wales and Scotland categorise their statistics slightly differently, but by 2018 Wales PSAOs were reporting 48.7% of their senior management teams were women (Arts Council Wales, 2019a) and in Northern Ireland this figure was 67% (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2020).

The UK publicly subsidised arts sector's anomalous gender parity has, however, so far gone unnoticed amongst the studies that are, quite rightly, still highlighting the issue of continued under-representation of women elsewhere.

This thesis sets out a study that explores an under-researched setting in industrial relations – arts organisations as work organisations – and argues that this field has achieved gender parity at executive level by forming and leveraging professional networks differently which has benefitted some, but not all, women in ways that organisations in other sectors have failed to do. Within the arts sector, and therefore within this study, the term 'executive'

represents employed executive directors, such as Chief Executive Officers, Artistic Directors, Executive Directors, Directors, or Executive Producers. For the sake of clarity, the non-executive director roles found on corporate boards are not included in the term 'executive' in this study since the organisations within the publicly subsidised arts sector are non-profit making, their board members are unpaid, and more commonly referred to as Trustees.

This first chapter sets out the need for the research carried out in this study, by describing the landscape of women's underrepresentation at executive level within most work organisations and highlighting one area of the UK economy – the subsidised arts sector – which is unusual in that as many women as men seem to have reached executive level.

We start by outlining the levels of underrepresentation of women at senior levels identified within critical organisational studies literature, and within the context of existing legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sex and gender, and the concept of the ideal worker as unencumbered male (Acker, 1990).

The UK's subsidised arts sector's particular organisational ecology is then described, with explanations of how many organisations receive public subsidy across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, what kind of public funding is provided, what organisational structures are generally used, and how the arts sector sits within the wider creative and cultural industries (CCIs). The gradual increase towards gender parity at executive level within the UK's subsidised arts sector is noted, using data from the main providers of public subsidy to the sector – Arts Council England (ACE), Creative Scotland, Arts Council Wales, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

By focussing on the anomaly in gender outcomes in the arts sector compared to other sectors, it is argued that this study provides the first insight into executive appointment processes that have actually resulted in sectoral gender parity. This can therefore add to a more detailed understanding of how executives are appointed within the arts and how gender inequality could be overcome within work organisations elsewhere, thus providing an opportunity for other sectors to learn from the UK publicly subsidised arts sector.

Subsequent chapters consider the academic literature on gender inequality in executive appointment processes, emphasising the role that networks play in holding women back from such appointments, and what research questions arise from this literature, before moving on to a description of this study's methodology and findings. The concluding discussion will demonstrate how this study's findings make an empirical contribution to the literature around homophilous and non-homophilous professional network formation, gender inequality at executive level, and arts organisations as work organisations.

Underrepresentation of women at executive level outside the arts

The legal requirement to treat women and men equally in the workplace has been a growing part of UK legislation since 1975. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 made it illegal to discriminate on grounds of sex or marital status; the Equal Pay Act 1970 (which came into full legal implementation in 1975) enshrined the right to equal pay for men and women in the same or largely similar roles within the same organisation; and the Employment Protection Act 1975 brought in rights to maternity leave and pay (Dickens, 2007). All of these were huge steps forward in the social movements for women's liberation from unequal treatment, including in the workplace. The Equality Act 2010 brought together a range of equality legislation under one Act, combining 35 years' worth of anti-discrimination and equality

rights. When it comes to women in the workplace, they have now been seen legally as equals to their male peers for over four decades. Furthermore, provisions for family-friendly rights, such as requests for flexible working, have the potential to benefit women disproportionately given women still take on the majority of domestic caring responsibilities (Acker, 2011; Scott & Clery, 2013; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016). Despite this legal protection, gender parity is not seen at senior levels within work organisations (Jewell & Bazeley, 2018; Vinnicombe et al, 2019, 2020) and, as set out at the start of this chapter, is still some way off for women at executive level in particular.

The normalisation of male dominance within work organisations is observed most acutely at executive level, and provides the context within which potential executive candidates develop and are sourced.   Acker's (1990, 2006) descriptions of the "gendered organization" and workplaces as "inequality regimes" fit with Cockburn's description of workplaces as power structures, which within a patriarchal society will only ever replicate male dominance (Cockburn, 1991). In this view, work organisations are structures in which inequalities and oppressions within society at large are reflected and replicated. This then indicates that achieving gender equality in the workplace cannot happen if inequality persists in wider social structures (Cockburn, 1991; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). The male worker becomes the norm by which women are judged; the "unencumbered male" is taken as the ideal worker (Acker, 1990), fully available for work without biological interruption for pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, menstruation or menopause, or the social demands for childcare or other caring activities within paid working hours.

The idea of the unencumbered ideal male as the norm for leadership roles, however, is increasingly challenged by scholars (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Billing, 2011; Campbell & Mínguez-

Vera, 2008). Eagly & Carli (2007) used their findings to suggest that management is no longer stereotypically masculine, with men and women managers both displaying what would be formerly described as masculine <u>and</u> feminine traits within their leadership roles. Billing (2011) also argued that the way that women described their lived experiences as senior managers showed that women no longer have to adapt to male norms in order to gain or maintain executive positions, and the concept of the male norm as a management ideal is too simplistic for today's work organisations.

While some of the older women in Billing's study described themselves as having to behave in more career-oriented, non-family-focussed ways to reach management levels in the past, most of the younger women in the study did not encounter such expectations, and they – along with the younger men – felt the constraints of work demands on addressing family needs and neither gender in this younger group felt the need to hide any family commitments in order to progress. With men and women both able to display family commitments at work, and the new generation's expectation that men and women managers have the same level of work commitment and ambition, Billing argues that the old binary of male/masculine = manager and female/feminine = subordinate no longer holds. This "dissolution of the symbolic cultural connection between men and leadership" (ibid, p.305), alongside the argument that a diversity of women and men in leadership positions makes for better run organisations (Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008; Ely et al, 2011; Cook & Glass, 2014; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Vinnicombe et al, 2019, 2020) and the outlawing of unequal opportunities should mean that gender equality at executive level should be achievable. However, when even working cultures which may have included women throughout their organisational history do not end up with gender equality at senior levels (Dean, 2015), then winning the argument that women are as good in leadership roles as men, that diversity of

men and women at leadership level supports the success of an organisation, and knowing that active discrimination against women is illegal, is clearly not enough to bring about gender equality at executive level.   There must therefore be barriers in play to prevent women making the step from the wider workforce into executive level positions.

Regardless of legal protection of equal opportunities, it is argued that women can only progress to executive roles – where almost constant availability of worker to the organisation becomes more expected - if they display what is seen as a fully-available, unemotional, masculine approach to work (Bierema, 2005; Bourdieu, 2001; Cockburn, 1991; Hoobler et al, 2011; Wajcman, 1996, 1998).   This sets organisation-wide expectation of women being physically and socially different from the ideal worker, with unpredictable bodies and domestic commitments that limit their capacity, if not capability, to prioritise their paid work activities over their unpaid home and family activities. This appears to be particularly relevant within organisational structures that rely on, explicitly or otherwise, availability, presence and effort from their executives that goes beyond their contracted hours. This then sets the context in which executive roles are described, filled and judged in ways that favour men over women (Jewson & Mason, 1986; Collinson et al, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Wajcman, 1998; Cook & Glass, 2014; Jewell & Bazeley, 2018).

Studies to date agree that women are a long way off being appointed into 50% of executive roles (Acker, 2011; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Ryan et al, 2016; Bushell et al, 2020), despite women now forming at least half of the workforce (Hoobler et al, 2016). Even with anti-discrimination legislation, and alongside arguments that expectations of men and women at work are becoming less differentiated, the appointment

outcomes still result in underrepresentation of women at executive level across the UK as a whole.

For example, in the corporate sector the number of women holding FTSE100 executive positions has grown, but only from 8.6% in 2015 to 10.9% in 2019 (Vinnicombe et al, 2019) and 13.2% by June 2020 (Vinnicombe et al, 2020). Equal gender representation at executive level is closer in the public and charity sectors but is still some way off. In higher education institutions in the UK, just 31% of senior academic positions and 29% of university Vice-Chancellor roles were held by women as of 2019 (Jarboe, 2019); 28% of UK charity Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) were women, and 30% of CEOs of UK professional bodies were women (Jewell & Bazeley, 2018). The National Health Service (NHS) – the UK's largest single employer – was closer to 50/50 gender equality at executive level with 43% of director positions on the boards of NHS foundations and trusts and 47% of NHS Trust CEO positions held by women by 2017/18 (Sealy, 2017; Jewell & Bazeley, 2018, Ellwood et al, 2020) and yet even these initially encouraging percentages are less positive when viewed in light of the NHS's 77% female overall workforce (Sealy, 2017). Yet there is a section of the UK economy with an unusual level of gender parity at executive level which has not yet been studied – the publicly subsidised arts sector.

The UK's publicly subsidised arts sector

This study is defining the UK publicly subsidised arts sector as that part of the UK economy which is made up of the organisations receiving regular funding from one of the UK's four arts councils. These councils are Arts Council England (ACE), Creative Scotland (CScot), Arts Council Wales (ACW) and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). These arts councils are all arm's length bodies from the UK government, and between them they

distribute UK government and National Lottery funding for public benefit to organisations undertaking activities including live performing arts (theatre, dance and music), visual arts, literature and craft. In the case of Arts Council England, libraries and museums also fall within this group of funded organisations, and in the case of Creative Scotland and Arts Council of Northern Ireland this also includes film and television production. Funding does not cover the full running costs of an organisation, but provides a subsidy that organisations then augment with other income generating activities, such as ticket sales, philanthropic donations, corporate sponsorship and applications for additional grants from charitable trusts and foundations. To receive public funding, an arts organisation must not generate profits for shareholders, so most publicly subsidised arts organisations are incorporated as charities, community interest companies or private companies limited by guarantee without share capital. Many will also operate a trading arm alongside their charitable activities, but with profits from the trading arm being covenanted back into the non-profit making parent organisation. Such organisations will therefore have boards of trustees, or directors, but none of these will be paid for their board membership, and there will be no shareholders taking dividends from the organisations. This means that rather than shareholder value and scrutiny as a driving force for governance and operations, publicly subsidised arts organisations (PSAOs) will instead create value and receive scrutiny from multiple directions - funders, donors, sponsors, audiences and the UK charity commissions.

Arts Council England provides three to four-years' worth of regular funding to arts organisations, libraries and museums, commonly known as National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs). Arts Council England's 2018-22 portfolio included 828 NPOs which received £409m in total (Arts Council England, 2019a), with a Covid extension of one years' funding to 2023. Creative Scotland provides three years' worth of regular funding to arts and screen

organisations, commonly known as Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs). Creative Scotland's 2018-21 RFOs totalled 121, receiving in total £101.6m of funding over three years (Creative Scotland, 2018). Arts Council Wales provides five years' worth of funding to what it refers to as Arts Portfolio Wales, a total of 67 revenue-funded organisations receiving annual funding totalling £28.7m in the current 2018-23 funding cycle (Arts Council Wales, 2019a) – with a Covid extension of one additional year's funding to 2024. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland provides funding to a group of organisations, reviewed on an annual basis within its annual funding programme, that it refers to as Annually Funded Organisations (AFOs); at 2018/19 ACNI had a total of 102 AFOs which shared a total of £13.1m of funds (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2018, 2020). This makes a total of 1,118 organisations within the UK's publicly subsidised arts sector, applying the defining characteristic of organisations in receipt of regular funding from one of the UK arts councils.

Before moving on to examine this sector's reported gender statistics, it is important to note that this study's definition of the UK's publicly subsidised arts sector does not map directly onto any existing UK government definition of the sector. The arts are included in a wider category of the CCIs (creative and cultural industries), and before any comparisons can be made between the arts gender statistics and the wider CCIs statistics, it is also helpful to understand the differences in categorising and therefore making claims about representation across this disparate sector.

There is no fixed definition of how to describe the categories within the CCIs. Dodd (2012) set out the three main UK definitions in use most clearly when she explains that the standard industrial classifications (SICs) of craft, cultural heritage, design, literature, music performing arts and visual arts form the basis of only one definition of CCIs. This definition is

the one used by the CCIs' sectoral skills council, Creative & Cultural Skills. She notes that the UK government's DCMS has only the category 'design' in common with this list; DCMS merges music & visual and performing arts (MPVA) into one sub-category, uses the category publishing rather than literature, and adds in advertising, architecture, art & antiques, designer fashion, film & video & photography, software & electronic publishing, digital & entertainment, and TV & radio to its definition of the CCIs. In addition to these two ways of defining the CCIs, Dodd notes that Skillset – now known as Screen Skills – is another UK skills council with a remit for developing skills across screen industries, which uses yet another version of CCIs in its work in the sector. This third definition does not include music, performing or visual arts, but lists instead advertising, animation, computer games, facilities, fashion & textiles, film, other content creation, interactive media, photo imaging, publishing, radio, and TV (Dodd, 2012, p.159). Meanwhile, O'Brien et al (2016) define the CCI sector as including television, radio, film, animation and games, music, performing and visual arts (MPVA), and museums, galleries and libraries. These differing definitions are offered here to help explain that any workforce figures ascribed to the CCIs may vary depending on which definition is used, as will any interpretation of whether the arts sector can be assumed to be included in those figures or not.

For the purposes of this study, the group of PSAOs is being used to define the publicly subsidised arts sector. The closest category from the CCI literature is the field of music, performing and visual arts (MPVAs). However, Creative Scotland provides funding to the Scottish film industry as well as MPVAs, and Arts Council England grants funds to craft and literary organisations, as well as libraries and museums. This means that this study's definition of the UK subsidised arts sector cannot be correlated exactly with one precise sub-category of the CCIs, whichever definition is used.

Gender parity at executive level across UK arts organisations

As part of their funding agreements, each UK PSAO collects audience and workforce diversity figures and reports them in summary to their respective arts council at least annually. These figures are then aggregated and published by each arts council, in greater and lesser granular levels of detail. The diversity figures published by the UK's arts councils between 2017 - 2020 indicate that the publicly subsidised arts organisations across the UK had reached apparent gender parity between 2015 - 2019. In England, 51% of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations were led by a female Chief Executive by 2018/19 (Arts Council England, 2019). In Scotland, the 58.5% proportion of women Chief Executives first seen in 2015/16 (Creative Scotland, 2017a) had fallen to 39% by 2017/18 (Creative Scotland, 2020). Meanwhile in Wales, numbers of women in senior positions are mixed in with non-executive board members, which are made up of volunteer Trustees. This makes it difficult to identify whether the 48.7% of women reported on boards of management and advisory committees combined (the former which would include executives, but the latter usually would not) of its regularly funded organisations (Arts Council Wales, 2019a) is a true reflection of women's representation at executive level across Wales. While the Arts Council of Northern Ireland does not break down management roles into executive or otherwise, it highlights that 67% of managers in its regularly funded portfolio were women in 2018/19 (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2020).

Given the differences in reporting across the UK arts councils, the full range of women's representation at the most senior positions may not be exactly 48.7% (i.e. in Wales) to 67% (i.e. in Northern Ireland). But the 51% in England, with the largest number of publicly subsided arts organisations, suggests that there is an atypically high level of women in

executive positions compared to other sectors. In England, this atypical gender representation first started appearing in Arts Council England figures from 2012 onwards, when 48% of regularly funded organisations in the UK had a woman Chief Executive in the funding year 2011/12 (Arts Council England, 2012), up from 46% in 2009/10 (Arts Council England, 2011a), with this figure steadily increasing until it reached the 51% 2018/19 figure cited earlier. Despite this apparent success story of gender equality in executive positions, gender equality at executive level within the UK arts sector seems to be an under-studied phenomenon.

This atypical representation of women at executive level not only appears to go against the expectations set by the literature on other sectors, it also seems to be atypical when it comes to CCIs, the wider economic sector that includes the arts.

These figures showing gender equality at executive level across publicly funded UK arts organisations would be unsurprising to those who believe in the "powerful myth" (Gill, 2014, p.510) that the arts sector is inclusive and open, or see it as a sector peopled with workers with liberal and open-minded attitudes towards social justice (McAndrew et al, 2020). Such attitudes might logically lead towards this level of equality, however these liberal attitudes are ascribed to the whole CCI sector (Conor et al, 2015) and none of the non-arts sub-sectors are even close to gender parity at executive level. As of 2016, in television only 36% of executive level positions were held by women, 28% across film sub-sectors, 24% in radio, 28% in animation and 27% in games (Screenskills, 2016). Using 2019 Labour Force Survey data, Brook et al (2020) observed a difference between the wider CCI sector's gender inequalities and the two sub-sectors that include arts organisations (MPVA and museums, galleries & libraries). They noted that these sub-sectors were the only CCI sub-sectors that

had more women than men in their overall workforce (54% in MPVA and 81% in museums, libraries & galleries) compared to the whole CCI workforce which was made up of only 47% women. This difference suggests that there is something different happening within the sub-sectors that include arts organisations, and those that do not.

However, it is acknowledged by those who study CCIs in detail that there is so much disparity across the sector, and such inconsistency in how the sector is defined by various bodies, that it can be difficult to generalise findings from one part of the CCIs to some or all of the others since the sub-sectors have such different demographics (Dodd, 2012; Parkinson, Buttrick & Wallis, 2013; Conor, Gill & Taylor, 2015; O'Brien, Laurison, Miles & Friedman, 2016; Taylor & O'Brien, 2017).

While gender inequality (among other inequalities) is found across CCIs in recent studies (Dodd, 2012; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012; O'Brien et al, 2016; Brook et al, 2020), there are no studies yet of arts organisations as work organisations that look specifically at women's representation at executive level. So little study has been made of arts organisations as work organisations (Conor et al, 2015) that executives within this sub-sector are doubly invisible in the literature: they are neither included in wider studies of executive appointments or gender representation, nor are they studied within the arts or CCI literature on inequalities which tend to focus on 'creative' roles rather than operational or management roles (Dean, 2008; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Oakley, Laurison, O'Brien & Friedman, 2017; Brook, O'Brien & Taylor, 2020) . While the arts sector has also been described as one which is "often mentioned as a sector where women come into their own" (Tutchell & Edmonds, 2015: p.27), this same study uses Equality and Human Rights Commission data to note that at the time of writing, orchestras and theatres in particular had men outnumbering women in executive and board

positions by at least three to one and, furthermore, examples of grossly unequal treatment of men and women in British orchestras were still to be found.

The studies that look at inequalities across gender, class and race in the CCI workforce as a whole show that women are "significantly underrepresented" (O'Brien et al, 2016, p.122) and that there are "persistent and in many cases worsening inequalities" (Conor et al, 2015, p.1) across the CCI workforce, but they do not separate executive level positions out from the whole workforce population. Where gender representation at executive level in the arts is discussed in as part of a study of CCIs, there is a shared view that women (among other minoritised groups) are under-represented across all CCIs in senior management/executive positions (Dodd, 2012; Parkinson et al, 2013; Neelands, Belfiore, Firth, Hart, Perrin, Brock, Holdaway & Woddis, 2015; O'Brien et al, 2016), and some argue that inequality is getting worse in terms of gender as well as ethnicity, disability and class, across UK CCIs (Gill, 2014; Neelands et al, 2015; O'Brien et al, 2016; MacAndrew et al, 2020; Brook et al, 2018, 2020), although minoritised groups fare better at senior levels in larger, stable organisations (Gill, 2014).

There have been studies of women's under-representation in one particular section of the arts – theatre – that have long highlighted men's over-representation in executive positions (Herron et al, 1998; Long, 1998; Erkut & Ceder, 2016; Tuckett, 2019a).   While other work highlights the norm of unpaid student placements and low paid entry level positions in the arts that are likely to privilege workers from wealthier backgrounds at the start of an arts career (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012), it is not clear in the literature if there is anything that specifically privileges or disadvantages women in the arts when it comes to executive appointments.

By drawing on available demographic reporting from the four UK arts councils, and verifying it by independently identifying and listing the executive positions and role holder names in each UK subsidised organisations, it is clear that gender parity, on paper at least, has been achieved across this group of organisations.

With literature indicating that women are under-represented at executive level outside the arts, and across the CCIs, the gender parity now found at executive level within publicly subsidised UK arts organisations is unexpected. This study therefore aims to explore how one UK sub-sector has achieved gender parity when other sectors have not, using the overall research question:

> How have UK publicly subsidised arts organisations achieved gender parity at executive level across the sector when other UK sectors have not?

The next chapter therefore explores the literature that sets out the long-standing expectation of women's under-representation at executive level and the reasons behind this inequity. It uses this literature to highlight how the UK arts sector's statistics are even more unexpected and worthy of study, and to draw out the questions that the literature cannot yet answer, and that this study aims to address.

Chapter Three will then present the research methodology for this study, which included 63 qualitative, semi-structured interviews based in an epistemological position of gaining socially, co-constructed knowledge through dialogue. It also sets out the research design, the researcher position, and the interviewee selection approach, while acknowledging the potential weaknesses in the methodology, and the additional quantitative data that was gathered to shape the interview design, data analysis and subsequent findings.

Chapters Four to Six present the findings, grouped into three areas – networks, appointment processes, and financial precarity, flexible working and intersectional inequalities. The final discussion chapter reflects on these findings, linking them back to the relevant literature. It concludes by noting this study's empirical contribution made to the study of executive appointment processes and gender outcomes, and networking patterns between men and women, and the practical contribution to other sectors who may learn some valuable lessons in reaching gender parity at executive level from the UK publicly subsidised arts sector.

Chapter Two: Executive appointment processes, and the role of networks and other factors in unequal gender outcomes

Introduction

Having set out in the previous chapter how unusual it is that the UK subsidised arts sector appears to have reached gender parity at executive level gender parity and how it leads to this study's overall research question, this chapter moves on to explore the related literature that identifies and tries to explain the underrepresentation of women at boardroom or executive level found elsewhere. By considering what explanations have been offered elsewhere for women's underrepresentation at executive level, it uses this body of literature to develop the key research sub-questions that research to date cannot yet answer, and this study aims to address, namely why the UK subsidised arts sector has achieved what other sectors have not. Exploring the presence, absence, or diminished impact, of existing well-established explanations is the basis for this study's research design and subsequent findings.

The first section looks at the contemporary literature that argues that the most significant reason for women's executive level underrepresentation centres on networks. It is argued that women and men's professional networks are formed and leveraged differently (Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1997, 2010), with women excluded from the male-dominated networks that are relied on heavily in executive appointment processes studied to date (Bushell et al, 2020). This has led women into what Bushell et al (2020) have termed a 'network trap', holding them at pre-boardroom levels while men advance thanks to the access to mentors, introductions and sponsorship from within their mainly male networks. This literature has not yet explored the arts sector, and therefore the network trap explanation of women's underrepresentation has not yet been tested within a sector where, rather uniquely, gender

parity has been achieved at executive level. This study therefore provides the first opportunity to find out if women's networks in the UK subsidised arts sector are formed in ways that go against the literature's expectations, and/or if the UK subsidised arts sector has found other ways around the network trap.

Consideration of whether the absence of such a trap is what explains the UK arts sector's gender parity is noted, before drawing on three other potential explanations of gender differences at executive level found elsewhere, so that they can also be researched for confirmatory purposes by asking if part or all of such factors can contribute to explaining how the UK arts sector has achieved its executive gender parity. These three explanations are Jewson & Mason's (1986) argument that even apparently formal, rational recruitment and selection processes will only replicate the dominant group's interests within bureaucratic work organisations, Ryan & Haslam's (2005, 2007) glass cliff phenomenon, and Hakim's (2000, 2002) preference theory.

Finally, this chapter notes the literature that highlights intersectional inequalities within work organisations, and that gender inequality does not exist separately from race and class. While gender is the focus of this study, this literature is engaged to acknowledge that any research into gender inequality cannot present white, middle-class women's progress towards parity as a sign of progress for all women.

Gender homophily in networking for work purposes

The idea that networks operate for men and for women differently, and disadvantage women looking to move into executive level positions, forms the keystone of this study. This is because it appears to be robust enough to explain continued under-representation of women in boardrooms but has not yet been applied to a sector where gender parity has been achieved. A better understanding of how men and women form, maintain and leverage their networks for work purposes was sought through the existing literature, followed by an exploration of how networks are used within appointment processes, and executive appointment processes in particular.

Networks are made up of formal connections between people based on their work relations with each other, or informal connections based on social and other non-work interactions (Ibarra, 1993). Networks are a dynamic, evolving collection of connections made possible based on access to others through introductions, meetings, work or social interactions, and maintained or allowed to lapse based on a combination of individual effort and the network group's continued acceptance (or not) of a member (Cook, 2014; Crossley et al, 2015). Information and support are provided via these connections that may lead to advantages within the workplace such as promotions or new opportunities (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1995, 2005; Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1995; Burt, 1997, 1998), and may lead to cooperation or competition within the network (Crossley et al, 2015).

The connections within a network can be explained as a series of interpersonal ties that are strong, weak or absent between each of the people that make up the particular network (Granovetter, 1973). The strength of a tie is based on length of time the people have known each other, the emotional involvement between the connected people, and the

reciprocity of support and benefit found within the exchanges between connections (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1995).

Granovetter described the combination in a network of strong ties (being those links with people in regular contact and with similar social characteristics to the individual at the centre of the network) and weak ties (being those links with people in irregular contact and with whom there are more social differences). Since those with strong ties, in regular contact with the same group of people, are likely to have access to the same kind of information, so new information – in particular, information about work opportunities – is most likely to reach an individual through a weak tie. Those weak ties also take new information from one network to another, in both directions, which makes it likely for information from one network to reach another and be circulated within that network through strong ties (Granovetter, 1973).

While Granovetter's detailed studies look at networks outside work organisations that have impact on work outcomes, Ibarra included the formal networks created within organisations, based on role interactions, in her studies of how networks form and shape career outcomes for members (Ibarra 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997). Ibarra's work supports Granovetter's concept of weak ties leading to new information and adds that two types of work-based networks are formed – instrumental where network connections help members carry out their work or advance their career, and expressive where network connections provide members with emotional support beyond task- or functional-based benefits. Ibarra also observes that formal networks arise out of work-based relationships (where connections are made because of work requirements), and informal networks arise out of personal, out-of-role contact built up by individuals and groups within a work setting.

Ibarra's (1992) network analysis showed that men and women formed and used networks differently. Men tended to form a homophilous network (connecting with people most like themselves) that they used for both expressive purposes (for friendship and emotional support) and instrumental purposes (to help work and career). Women in contrast also formed homophilous expressive networks but less homophilous instrumental networks (Ibarra, 1992). Within an organisation that has more men than women in senior positions, it would thus make sense that women need to include higher status men in their instrumental network while men would not need to connect with women to help further their career: "preferences for homophily and status will tend to coincide for men and exist in competition for women" (Ibarra, 1992, p.425).

A recent study by Bushell et al (2020) looked specifically at the role that networking played in boardroom appointments in FTSE listed companies, which in this context included Chief Executive and Executive Director members of corporate boards. With one of the authors using her own former senior executive experience to gain unprecedented access to the Chairs, senior executives and sub-boardroom senior managers in this field, the study demonstrated how women's networks were less valuable than men's when it comes to career progression into senior executive level positions. The formation of men's homophilous instrumental networks described in Bushell et al's study started in university and then developed once in the workplace. These networks then provided mentorship, introductions and recommendations from senior connections that helped men's career progression. This benefit arose from the FTSE companies in the study relying on discrete executive search headhunter services to source long-lists, based on network connections and recommendations, and from appointers checking with their own networks for opinions and knowledge of potential candidates before shortlisting for interview. Thus, membership of

networks that included senior appointers also acted as an informal proxy for quality assurance by the very fact of being known to an appointer directly or via the appointer's network. Meanwhile, women in this study were excluded from such networks, with the exclusion dating back to school days, and continuing in a working world where the majority of senior positions were held by men, who networked predominantly with other men. Women's networks were found to be of little instrumental value where they were homophilous, with so few women reaching influential corporate positions that network connections - while often socially supportive and useful in navigating day to day operational matters - rarely led to the kind of active sponsorship and mentorship that results in boardroom level appointments as seen across men's networks. Bushell et al's 2020 study went on to demonstrate that these differences between the quality of men and women's networks left women in what the authors term a 'network trap', holding women back from boardroom selection processes since such processes relied heavily, and almost exclusively, on information coming to executive search headhunters, and subsequently appointing Chairs, via networks rather than formal methods that would use open advertising and shortlisting based on objective selection criteria.

While the homophily within women's expressive networks may be constructed through choice, just as social norms are reflected in organisational structures, these same norms set constraints on relationships within networks. Current social norms make it unlikely that expressive, social relationships will form across sex and race groups (Ibarra, 1993, 1995), and inequality within society will be replicated through restricted access to networks based on social characteristics (Granovetter, 1973, 2005; Ibarra, 1992; Burt, 1998; Bierema, 2005; Cook, 2014; Bushell et al, 2020).

Within such network connections, the importance of a powerful mentor or sponsor, actively advocating for an individual, has been shown to be key to an individual's career progression (Jewson & Mason, 1986; Cockburn, 1991; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). At the same time, women's mentors appear to be less effective than men's in making introductions or recommendations for executive opportunities, either because the women within the mentoring relationships did not want to work outside what they see as fairer, formalised recruitment processes (Singh et al, 2006), or the women mentors did not have access to the same levels of boardroom appointment decision-makers as men and did not sustain the same kind of long-term career sponsorship relationships that men did within their networks (Ibarra et al, 2010; Bushell et al, 2020). Indeed, Bushell et al (2020) found time and again that men have more regular, friendship-based and longer lasting contacts within their networks than the women in their study, and that men were more likely than women to tell their network when they were actively seeking new career opportunities. Men were in turn more likely to receive active sponsorship and advocacy when it came to consideration for executive appointments. Women appeared to use their networks differently, partly because the majority in Bushell et al's study thought that career progression was achieved through performing well at work rather than by leveraging network contacts, but also as a rational but seldom articulated response to having a homophilous network that would be unlikely to produce sponsorship from a contact in a senior position of influence, by virtue of women still being in the minority of such positions. Indeed, none of the women in this study had had a woman as a boss, so staying touch with previous bosses was more difficult for women than men, because of the preference for homophilous networking, and because of the concern that a woman's intentions in making and maintaining active contact with former male colleagues and bosses would be misinterpreted.

With men overrepresented at executive level within most organisations, and men forming homophilous networks and men holding more positions of power and influence than women, men will benefit more from their networks than women will from their expressive and instrumental networks that predominantly include women (Ibarra, 1992; Bushell et al, 2020). Low status networks will maintain only low status without access to contacts that have more organisational power (Skeggs, 1997; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Cook, 2014), so the career benefit to women within networks is more likely to come from connecting with people directly or indirectly higher up organisational hierarchies (Burt, 1998). Added to this is the organisational cultural norm that some observe, where men and women networking professionally may be misinterpreted at best as a socially unusual – and normally avoided – interaction, and at worst a sign of inappropriate sexualised behaviour at work or relating to work, which may prove particularly problematic for high visibility senior role holders (Oakley, 2000; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014).

Another gender difference in how networks are constructed and used is found in timeframes – men are more likely to have longer-term useful relationships within their instrumental networks than women, while women use their instrumental contacts for shorter-term, immediate functional work needs (Bushell et al, 2020). Bushell et al found that network connections formed during university studies often outlasted graduation but were also likely to be homophilous; since more men than women reach senior and influential positions thus becoming more useful in career terms, men's longer-lasting homophilous networks therefore became more valuable when it comes to gaining access and building profile to those making executive appointments. Where these network interactions extended into club memberships, including golf clubs and private members' clubs, then men benefitted again from forming deeper bonds and gaining greater access to potential career sponsors.

Meanwhile, as women's homophilous networks became decreasingly useful for career purposes, and as women put more value on meritocratic appointment processes, then women tended to put less time into developing, maintaining or leveraging their instrumental networks.

There appear to be further restrictions to how women network, beyond the difficulty of forming and maintaining connections with higher status individuals. While it was thought in the past that the amount of available time for out-of-hours networking work reduces drastically for working mothers in a way that it does not for working fathers (Ibarra, 1993), more recent study has shown that mothers and fathers are equally unwilling to extend their working hours with networking events, but women still spend less time networking than men even at the role levels where it is more acceptable to take time for networking during traditional working hours (Bushell et al, 2020). Where the restrictions arise is where networking events take the form of traditionally masculine activities, such as golfing (Oakley, 2000; Bushell et al, 2020) or other sporting events or clubs from which women felt excluded (Linehan, 2001). There is also an argument that women would prefer to be appointed to an executive role on the basis of their merit rather than their connections, and so opt out of networking on the principle that it is a fundamentally unfair process (Singh et al, 2002; Ibarra et al, 2010).

Despite the studies finding in common that women's networks appear to give fewer career progression rewards than men's (Linehan, 2001; Ibarra et al, 2010; Bushell et al, 2020), some organisations have set up women-only networks to counteract the gender inequality seen (particularly) in senior positions. However, as long as network access and benefits reflect society's inequalities, then it is argued that such women only networks will only at best

provide emotional support, and are very unlikely to provide career benefits to women without including senior men as active mentors or sponsors (Cockburn, 1991; Linehan, 2001; Bierema, 2005; Tutchell & Edmunds, 2015; Bushell et al, 2020). Given the need found in this literature for connections with senior men to act as career sponsors when progressing to executive level positions, it is perhaps unsurprising that creating women's networks does not lead to career advancement for women. Indeed, such homophilous networks not only fail to address the exclusion from the level of resources and knowledge that men access in their own networks that leads to their advancement, but they potentially harm women's prospects even further by embedding stereotypical concepts of women's distance from the perceived masculine traits needed to undertake leadership roles in the workplace (Bierema, 2005).

If executive recruitment decision-makers are mostly men, and men network with mostly men for work purposes, then they are likely to hear about men and trust the opinions of men when looking to make a new executive appointment. The women who are hired into such roles will therefore need to be connected with senior men who will advocate on their behalf if they are to hear about and be taken seriously as applicants (Burt, 1997, 1998; Bushell et al, 2020).

Such reliance on networks in the executive recruitment process can be seen as an example of Jewson & Mason's (1986) description of recruitment processes which include formal elements in order to appear fair and rational but which in the end still include discrimination by including a reliance on recommendations via networks, leading back to the disadvantage of women in workplace progression observed in the literature outlined above. Indeed, networking behaviour and membership itself can be formalised into a list of selection

criteria, as a sign of political and influencing skills (Singh et al, 2002), at which point Bushell et al's network trap becomes further embedded into executive recruitment practices.

Even acknowledging warnings of the difficulties of 'untangling' causal relationships (Ibarra, 1992, p.443), the conclusion from the literature noted in this section is that gender inequality at executive level is in part brought about by reliance on networks in executive appointments, so equality is likely to come about by reducing the reliance on the information that comes through networks in these recruitment processes (Bohnet, 2016; Bushell et al, 2020).

This part of the literature leads us to expect that men and women create and use their networks for the benefit of their careers differently, and men's easier access to other men within their networks means that they will benefit more from their networks than women will from theirs. This is the basis of the network trap that Bushell et al (2020) identify - networks, just as organisational structures, reflect and replicate social regimes, and with women trapped in less effective networks than men, gender equality at executive level cannot be achieved while executive recruitment processes rely so heavily on networks. If homophilous networks, the lack of effective sponsorship from senior men and women for junior women, and the reliance on networks executive appointment processes have led to women trapped below executive level elsewhere, then the UK arts sector provides an opportunity to examine if changing the nature of networks holds the key to releasing women from the network trap. The literature examined above that sets out the advantages that homophilous instrumental networks give to men, but not to women, therefore leads to this study's first research sub-question:

> Do men's and women's networks within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector follow the homophilous patterns that the literature leads us to expect, and if not, how has this happened?

By understanding how networks are relied on heavily in recruitment, and knowing that networks lead to unequal outcomes in work and career rewards for men and women, it could then be expected that the use of networks in recruitment should replicate the gender inequality seen in networks. Add to this that networks are relied on heavily in executive appointments (Ibarra, 1993; Cook & Glass, 2014; Bushell et al, 2020) because the hirers seek trusted opinions about candidates regarding their acceptability, and it would appear inevitable that women will remain under-represented at executive level without changes to recruitment practices. The literature exploring the role of networks in appointment processes is covered in more detail in the following section.

The role of networks in executive appointments

Given that the instrumental value in homophilous networks is higher for men than for women, the effect that such differences have on executive appointment processes is explored in this section as a way to better understand why men's homophilous instrumental networks act as an advantage to them in their career progression, while women's weaker non-homophilous instrumental networks act as a barrier.

The appointment processes detailed in Bushell et al's (2020) study of UK corporate sector executive appointments showed that all parties involved in the appointment process rely heavily on their networks as part of the recruitment and selection process. They observed this reliance on networks throughout the recruitment chain, from the candidates sourcing information and advocacy from mentors, through to appointing committees, Chairs and head-hunters when they make their decisions on whom to invite to apply and/or to interview. In this world, it is rare to publicly advertise an executive vacancy, so networks are central to the recruitment process itself, where knowledge gained from networks forms the basis of search and selection of suitable short-list candidates. Bushell et al found that when a longlist of potential candidates to approach is created, it is drawn up based on connections within the longlister's (often a head-hunter) network providing suggestions.

Subsequently, when a shortlist is condensed from the longlist, the active recommendations come from connections within the shortlister's network; given that Bushell et al studied FTSE 350 companies, the shortlister in question here was usually the Chair of the organisation's executive board of Directors, and this Chair was usually a man. Thus, a candidate's profile within the Chair's network will be just as, if not, more important than an

objective match to a person specification (which, in many cases had been discarded as a selection tool by interview stage).

The UK Corporate Governance Code, which applies to all companies with a premium listing on the UK stock market, sets out governance principles which listed companies have to comply with or explain any non-compliance in their annual reports, available to shareholders and regulators. Included in this Code is the principles that "appointments and succession plans [for board and senior management] should be based on merit and objective criteria and, within this context, should promote diversity of gender, social and ethnic backgrounds, cognitive and personal strengths" (Financial Reporting Council, 2018, p.8) and adds a provision that boards should ensure "the development of a diverse pipeline for succession" (ibid) and to use external search consultancies (head-hunters) and/or open advertising for Chair and non-executive board appointments. Bushell et al (2020) found that companies did indeed use head-hunters frequently, although not always, for executive board appointments, but that these head-hunters operated using the same reliance on networks as the hiring organisations. Using head-hunters did not seem to lead to the kind of meritocratic and objective appointment decisions presumed by the Code, nor did they widen the candidate pool much beyond the appointing Chair or nominations committee's networks since it would be a rare head-hunter who would preclude any names offered by the client for consideration. At the same time, the discretion needed around changes in leadership in FTSE companies in order to avoid stock value fluctuation, and the head-hunter business model being based on the added value their market knowledge can bring to a recruitment process, meant that open advertising for executive level appointments was not seen in this study. It was therefore likely that in the absence of open advertising, being known to the shortlister through network connections was a major factor in a candidate making it onto a shortlist. Having already

established that women's instrumental networks were less instrumentally useful than men's, Bushell et al found that even with the UK Corporate Governance Code in place, that reliance on network information was seen throughout appointment processes and gender parity was still not even close to being reached across the listed companies in their study.

Furthermore, Bushell et al (2020) found that even where there is an exceptionally clear articulation of what qualities, skills and experience are being sought to fill an executive role, personal recommendations through network contacts on a candidate's acceptability, and by default the likelihood to conform to an employer's organisational norms, are as important as any formalised measurements of suitability. Executive candidates must be judged to be both suitably qualified and acceptable. A head-hunter, for example, is likely to put as much weight on how someone comes to their attention, based on the status and influence of the recommender, as they would on measured performance and qualifications. This rings true with earlier studies, where qualifications, testable skills and work experience may indicate if somebody is suitable for a role but judging how acceptable, i.e. how well someone may 'fit' into an organisation, is harder to describe and measure (Collinson et al, 1990; Ibarra, 1993).

Assessing acceptability is where networks come into their own; opinions and recommendations from trusted sources within a network will play a large part in hiring decisions, and membership of a particular network can be enough of a signal for those employers looking to hire in their own image that the network member will be a good fit (Cockburn, 1991). Using such information is also justified as a time- and cost-saving process that shortcuts lengthy and costly formal recruitment processes (Burt, 1998). It is argued that not only can network connections channel information about individuals through to

recruitment decision-makers quickly, but such information is also particularly trusted because it has come through a network to which the decision-maker is connected (Ibarra, 1993; Burt, 1998). There is an implied recommendation in both directions of information, based on the trust that is built up between connections within a network: "prospective employers and employees prefer to learn about one another from personal sources whose information they trust" (Granovetter, 2005, p.36). In this argument, a potential applicant hearing about a job opportunity from a network connection assumes that the individual sharing the information thinks that the person they are sharing it with would be suitable for the job, while a hirer hearing about somebody who should be invited to apply assumes that the individual sharing the contact details thinks the hirer will find the contact suitable (Granovetter, 1973). If membership of a network is based on common interests, characteristics or status, then the individuals within the network will use those elements as a measure of whether other people should have access to the network, its information and resources. In a work context, this can translate into screening out "troublemakers" and appointing "acceptable" individuals (Collinson et al, 1990).

Only two detailed studies (Herron et al, 1998; Erkut & Ceder, 2016) have been found so far on career progression to executive positions in arts work organisations. Both studies took place in the USA rather than the UK, so an assumption that there are sufficient similarities between the US and UK arts work organisational structures and work activities is needed to find these studies' conclusions relevant and useful. Herron et al's study of medium-sized, publicly subsidised museums, dance companies, symphony orchestras, opera companies and theatres, found that among male interviewees there was a perception of the sector having equal men and women at executive level, while the women they interviewed reported it was much harder to advance as a woman than as a man. The women's point of

view was supported by the demographic data in this study: 67% of the most senior positions were held by men, with men getting their first middle management job younger than women and staying longer once they got to senior management positions such as Artistic or Executive Director. In Erkut & Ceder's study of US theatres, they found that theatres used formal and informal search techniques, heavily reliant on seeking information from their boards' network connections and via third party search firms, both of which were primarily led by white men, working within homophilous networks of other white men: "who is well known and respected by other well-known and respected people tends to be a relatively small circle" (Erkut & Ceder, 2016, p.33). Furthermore, they found that despite some theatres adopting proactive approaches to counteract such small, homophilous networks and actively encouraging women (and people of colour) to apply for executive positions, in theatres with a single leadership role 19% of these roles were held by women, and where the leadership role was split between Artistic and Executive Directors, 21% of the Artistic Directors and 36% of the Executive Directors were women.

If it is established that women have less valuable instrumental networks than men, as found in other sectors, but are reaching executive level positions in proportions not found in other sectors, then perhaps UK arts executive appointment processes do not rely on networks in the ways that Erkut & Ceder (2016) identified. In that case, whether women's networks are homophilous or non-homophilous should not matter in terms of their career progression.

Where the role of networks in appointments specifically in the arts have been noted, there is an indication that networks are seen within the sector as a barrier to equality in appointment processes (Arts Council England, 2011b; Parkinson et al, 2013). The reliance on homophilous networks, dominated by white, middle class men, in appointments has been

well documented in other areas of the CCIs, notably in advertising (Ibarra, 1992) and film & TV (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012), and in these areas such reliance on networking leads to privilege for men and under-representation for women.

What is not yet clear in the literature is to what extent the arts sector specifically relies on networking in a similar way when it comes to appointing permanent, employed positions such as Executive or Artistic Director rather than the freelance, project-based engagements more commonly included in CCI networking studies (Antcliff et al, 2007; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Saundry et al, 2006). With gender parity having now apparently been achieved in the publicly subsidised arts sector at executive level, the question arises of which factors highlighted as barriers elsewhere may have shifted in this sector. One of the few scholars to specifically address women's progression to leadership positions within the CCI sector, Dodd (2012) notes that both men and women in her survey of the UK's creative industries included their networks as positive factors in their career progression to executive level. Dodd does not explore whether these networks were homophilous or not, but her findings that the women she surveyed cited organisational structures and inflexible working practices as more of a barrier than networks suggests that the expected network trap may not be manifested in the same way in parts of the CCI sector as it is elsewhere.

The first research sub-question, shared in the preceding section, asks whether men and women's networks follow the expected homophily patterns, and if not then how those differences may have come about. What the literature on networks in executive appointment processes has found so far is that networks are central to career progression to senior levels, and that women are held back by such processes because of their exclusion from men's homophilous networks and the low levels of instrumental benefit within their own

homophilous networks. An understanding of how far networks differ within the UK subsidised arts sector cannot answer the overall question of how this sector has achieved gender parity at executive level if it does not also include an understanding of whether or not these networks are relied on in the sector's executive appointment practices. In order to move closer to an understanding of the impact of any similarities or differences within networks in the publicly subsidised arts sector has on gender parity at the top of work organisational structures, this study therefore sets out a second research sub-question:

Are networks relied on within UK arts executive appointment processes, and if so, why has this not held women in the network trap as identified elsewhere?

Formal recruitment and selection processes

Any reliance on networks in executive appointment processes, where candidate suggestions, introductions and recommendations would be gathered through networks rather than measuring candidates against formal job criteria, would be the basis of the informal recruitment and selection processes that lead to unequal appointment outcomes that favour already dominant groups, such as men (Collinson et al, 1990; Burt, 1998; Acker, 2006; Bushell et al, 2020).

However, as already discussed, it is illegal to make appointment and promotion decisions based on sex or gender (the exception being where an employer takes positive action to appoint one of two equally qualified candidates where the appointee is at a disadvantage because of a protected characteristic (Equality Act, 2010, s.159)). Those employers wanting to comply with – or, at worst, be seen to comply with - equal opportunities legislation, would therefore need to demonstrate that their recruitment decisions were based on merit, rather than protected characteristics.

The form that this merit takes, when it comes to executive appointments, would be the knowledge and professional experiences embodied within a candidate, the education and training (through formal courses and on the job) that Becker (1994) described as the basis of human capital. While Becker argues that building the kind of human capital needed to advance in a workplace would include preserving physical health and instilling social values that align with an organisation's values, it is education and training that he sees as the foundation of economic progression. Becker's work describes a rational world of work that provides a return on investment – in the form of increasing wages alongside career progression – that relates to the levels of human capital an individual has gained. In this

world, higher educational qualifications and transferrable job experience lead to higher work performance, rewarded with higher wages.

The idea that formal selection decisions are based on demonstrated human capital presupposes that appointments are rational decisions based on qualifications, skills and work-based experience that meets an agreed set of criteria needed to carry out the role being filled. With different levels of career rewards leading then to different levels of work-based skills development, knowledge and experience, inequality in human capital theory arises from different levels of investment in and accumulation of human capital. Underrepresentation of women at executive level would, therefore, reflect lower human capital in women compared to men, and therefore until such gaps in human capital are addressed then women cannot be appointed into executive positions which are filled using what organisations claim are fair and formal recruitment processes. This argument is also compatible with some studies finding that organisations are more likely to give men more challenging and high-profile work assignments than women (Eagly & Carli, 2007), making it harder for women to accumulate and then demonstrate the levels of strategic experience that executive recruiters seek.

Such arguments do not stand up to recent scrutiny, however, where women at executive level or just below executive level have been shown to have equal if not more university-level qualifications than men at comparable levels (Billing, 2011; Bushell et al, 2020), and comparable board and international work experience and knowledge (Singh et al, 2008). Even the recruiters in Bushell et al's study (2020) did not describe a shortage of women under consideration for executive positions with the same level of experience and skills than the men under consideration.

Jewson & Mason (1986) found that employers' responses to equal opportunities legislation was generally to make selection processes more formal, by using job descriptions that set out levels of education, skills and experience needed to perform a role and testing applicants against published criteria – what Jewson & Mason termed 'suitability'. They also found, however, that recruiting managers would also make judgments about how well a candidate may fit into a role or organisation – looking for what they describe as 'acceptability', that is hard to quantify within a rational, formalised selection process. Jewson & Mason found that formalising recruitment practices does not make them 'fair' in their outcomes; organisations' practices will be designed to protect the interests of the dominant group – in this case, white men - and perpetuate any inequalities that underpin its operations, with managers skewing formal selection criteria to favour candidates whom they had already decided they wanted to appoint: "circumvention by manipulation" (ibid, p.54). Even where formal processes are signalled and seen to be followed, some employers would still use informal information-gathering processes and judgements of qualities outside the published criteria alongside formal processes, that lead to unequal outcomes for applicants and candidates from outside the dominant group (Jewson & Mason, 1986; Collinson et al, 1990).

Not only does human capital theory as an explanation of inequality between men and women at executive level become insufficient when work-based experience levels are compared and found to be at least equal, it also depends on appointments being made based on role criteria that can be measured by levels of human capital. Such a rational, objective basis for appointment decisions was not found when Bushell et al (2020) interviewed Chairs and head-hunters in UK corporations. Indeed, Bushell et al found no clear consensus around what skills and qualifications are needed to become a successful executive. While some

recruitment processes included written selection criteria, the final appointments were not always based on pre-set levels of human capital, but rather more on 'fit' for the organisation.

Since the informal processes of acceptability being judged via membership of particular networks have been found in use in sectors where women and men have not yet reached equal representation at executive level, then using the UK arts sector as a field in which to study gender parity in action provides an opportunity to see if using formal, recruitment and selection processes really does lead to equal numbers of men and women at executive level, or if they still operate alongside the informal processes that Jewson & Mason (1986) and Collinson et al (1990) highlighted as problematic.

Whether appointment decisions are genuinely not being made based on illegal discrimination against women, or whether "the rhetoric and rituals of formal, rational-legal procedures may be solemnly, and indeed ostentatiously, followed" (Jewson & Mason, 1986, pp. 54-55) as a smokescreen for discriminatory practices, given that the majority of executive positions in most sectors are held by men, then the continuing predominance of men in executive positions therefore continues as a justified norm. It becomes part of the "patriarchal common sense" that justifies an unequal status quo (Danieli, 2006), or the narrative that male candidates are simply more qualified and better suited to a leadership position than female candidates in (what is signalled as) a meritocratic, competitive recruitment process (Acker, 2006).

It is clear that human capital is at equal levels between men and women at executive level (Billing, 2011; Singh et al, 2008; Bushell et al, 2020), however this human capital appears to be judged as less important than 'fit' in informing selection decisions (Bushell et al, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that women do not benefit from having equal levels of human

capital to men when it comes to being appointed into executive positions. These conclusions have only been drawn from sectors where gender parity has not yet been achieved. This gives rise to the question of whether the arts sector has found a way to apply formal recruitment and selection practices and appointing from a pool where women and men gain equal benefits from comparable levels of human capital, where suitability is as important as acceptability or fit. The unusual gender parity within the UK arts sector therefore provides an opportunity to study whether human capital – as shown through education, qualifications and work experience – is being considered as part of a more formal appointment process that considers suitability to an executive role as much as acceptability, such that women benefit as much as men from building up comparable levels of human capital within this sector. This gives rise to the question of whether the arts sector has found a way to apply formal appointment processes and thereby women with equal levels of education and experience as men benefit to the same levels as men within such processes. This study therefore includes a third research sub-question:

> How far do UK publicly subsidised arts organisations rely on formal recruitment and selection methods in their appointment processes over and above any parallel informal methods?

Remaining explanations of women's barriers to executive appointments

Having considered the role that the reliance on homophilous networks in executive appointment plays in disadvantaging women, and the role or otherwise that formal, meritocratic recruitment and selection processes may play in removing or cementing that disadvantage, this study wanted to allow for the possibility that the UK arts sector's gender parity at this level may be down to factors other than, or as well as, appointment processes.

Three additional factors were identified through the literature that may apply to the arts sector's executive appointments. The first was the financial precarity leading to 'glass cliff' appointments (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007), followed by women's individual choices as framed by preference theory (Hakim, 2000, 2002, 2003), and finally the role that progress for white, middle-class women may play in masking remaining intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class.

Financial precarity has long been a part of the UK publicly subsidised arts sector, with organisations relying on arts council funding that comes in short funding cycles, and the decisions of external additional donors or sponsors as a way to boost earned income while balancing ticketing/entry pricing with funder requirements to remain publicly accessible. Since financial precarity also forms the keystone for the glass cliff phenomenon described by Ryan & Haslam (2005, 2007), this study needed to acknowledge and note this as a possible explanation for gender parity in leadership positions within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. Meanwhile, the role of women's individual career preferences, as set out by Hakim (2000, 2002, 2003), is explored not because it is accepted as a robust explanation of individual decisions but as a way of exploring whether organisational barriers such as non-family friendly working practices, which go beyond appointment processes, and prevent women's

progression in other sectors may have been removed somehow within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. And finally, the inequalities encountered at the intersection of gender, race and class are explored, as found across the CCIs variously by Dodd (2012), Gill (2014), Conor et al (2015), Neelands et al (2015) and O'Brien et al (2016), to provide important context to any apparent improvement in gender under-representation so that white women's advancement is not misinterpreted as an advancement for all women.

Glass cliff appointments amid sectoral financial precarity

As an additional factor that explains the increased, rather than decreased, likelihood of a woman being appointed into a Chief Executive position, Ryan & Haslam's (2005) 'glass cliff' phenomenon is noted as potentially important in the context of the UK arts sector's funding cutbacks in times of austerity.

Writing at a time when a brief newspaper article (Judge, 2003) had recently gained popular traction following its claiming that appointing a woman executive could cause economic damage to corporate share price, Ryan & Haslam (2005) argued that the causal relationship was actually the other way around. Rather than the woman's appointment leading to economic underperformance, it appeared that when a corporation has undergone (or is undergoing) organisational crisis, or it is operating in an economic downturn that affects it in particular then a corporation is more likely to appoint a woman to take the executive lead (Ryan & Haslam 2005, 2007; Ryan et al, 2016). Ryan & Haslam warn against trying to offer just one particular reason for this phenomenon, but posit explanations ranging from the tendency to protect men's professional reputations during an organisation's difficulties, to having a reduced field of willing candidates and this lower competition making it more likely that normally overlooked candidates – i.e. women – are considered, through to the unusual

appointment being the last resort having tried the more traditional leadership choices (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). These precarious, 'glass cliff' appointments (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) do not, however, happen frequently enough to bring about gender equality at executive level across an entire sector – they are still the exception rather than the rule, but could still help to explain the relatively recent increase in numbers of women in executive positions within the UK arts sector.

The glass cliff explanation is noted here not because it explains the gender inequality in the demographic statistics shown at the outset of this chapter, and not because Ryan & Haslam ever claimed it as an explanation for sector-wide changes in women's executive appointments. It is raised amongst a background of concern across the arts sector at the tightening of public purse strings (RSA, 2011) as a point of interest because it may be important to explore (if only to discount) the possibility that publicly funded UK arts organisations are, as a group, in such financial precarity not previously experienced, and to levels not found elsewhere in the UK economy in the same period, that a series of coincidental 'glass cliff' appointments are the explanation for this sector's unusual gender equality.

While some would argue that the arts sector in the UK is thriving (Arts Council England, 2020a; Pharoah, 2010), others have identified that the sector has never been financially solid and secure, and that financial pressures on the sector have increased even more since the early 2010s onwards. For example, the call from government funders for arts organisations to move away from justifying their funding on the basis of the intrinsic value of the arts towards instrumental – and financially measurable – social benefits (Bagwell et al, 2015; Knell & Taylor, 2011), took place alongside significant cuts at local government level (Bertelli et al, 2013). At the same time, the drive for arts organisations to seek increasing shares in

unequally distributed private and philanthropic sources of funding (Méndez-Carbajo &
Stanziola, 2008; Pharoah, 2011) has put many arts organisations under pressure at the same
time that numbers of women at executive level started to reach equal numbers with men.
Even though Ryan & Haslam did not posit their findings as an explanation of sector-wide
decisions or shifts, to allow for the possibility that a parallel set of financially precarious
organisational models in some parts of the sector then led to more women being appointed
into executive positions, this study therefore poses a fourth research sub-question:

> Can gender parity at executive level in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector be explained
> by women being more likely than men to be appointed as executives in organisations
> facing financial precarity, as suggested by the 'glass cliff' phenomenon?

Flexible working

Women's persisting under-representation at executive level alongside equal
opportunities legislation led Hakim (2000, 2002, 2003) to explore the idea that perhaps it is
women themselves who create the reason for the lack of gender parity at senior levels in
organisation.

Indeed, the very existence of equal opportunities legislation prompted Hakim (2000,
2002, 2003) to argue that since equal opportunities are legally protected in UK workplaces,
the absence of gender equality at executive level can be explained by women's active
preference not to pursue such roles rather than others preventing them from doing so. Hakim
notes that her preference theory only explains underrepresentation in countries where equal
opportunities legislation exists and the business case for diversity in leadership has been
made, which she argues includes the UK. She goes on to argue that her studies show that the

only remaining barrier to gender equality at senior level is women making active choices themselves to either centre their focus on work, or family, or adapt work to their family: work-centred, family-centred or adaptive choices. Responses from US and UK surveys suggested to Hakim that work-centred women are in the minority, with most women choosing to adapt their working patterns around family commitments once they became mothers, and some choosing to leave paid work altogether. The adaptive preference is described by Hakim (1998) as the majority choice, and the ensuing flexible or part-time working patterns being incompatible with the demands of executive roles. Hakim still interprets this as women's choices – "women only make hard choices between a career and a family-centred life if, and when, they actually marry and have children" (Hakim, 2002, p.446) – rather than institutional barriers arising from role design and working patterns expected of executive roles from the employing organisation. While Hakim does note that organisational barriers may still exist, her central argument is that overall working and legal conditions now make an executive career available to all qualified women should they desire it, so the continuing underrepresentation of women at executive level indicates that women themselves do not want such careers.

This argument that individual choice is the main reason for working mothers leaving senior roles has been extensively and robustly challenged by studies such as Crompton & Harris (1998a), where they found "complex and variable" (ibid, p.127) attitudes towards work and family wherein women did not prioritise one over the other but navigated the balance as best they could, given the constraints of employment options available to them. Eagly & Carli (2007) also found that women in executive positions or on executive promotion tracks would like to stay on such a career trajectory once they become mothers, but can only do so when an organisation allows family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, and working

cultures where "the best managers manifest both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine qualities" (ibid, p.158).

Flexible working hours are seen as a crucial response to the increased demands on women's time once they become parents compared to men's. The differences in demands on working women's time compared to working men's is shown in various ways, with women still taking on the majority of childcare responsibilities in family life (Hurley & Choudhury, 2016), with men being lauded for taking the time out for childcare activities that women would be penalised for (Brook et al, 2020), or benefitting from more career advancement once becoming a parent than women do (Dent, (2020). Flexibility, however, is only a useful response to working mother's time commitments if it is a mutually beneficial flexibility to both worker (in meeting her family responsibilities) and employer (in maintaining high performance levels) where the worker has some control over the flexibility (Grönlund, 2007, Chung & van der Horst, 2017, Tomlinson et al, 2018). The level of a worker's control over such mutually beneficial flexibility is found to increase with her position in the organisational hierarchy, meaning that a woman at executive level is more likely to have agency over her hours than someone below that level (Crompton & Harris, 1998, Tomlinson et al, 2018).

For example, where flexible working practices are offered, they are more likely to be taken up by women than men (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016) because of the unequal division of many mothers' and fathers' childcare (Chung & van der Horst, 2007). Where these flexible working practices include part-time work, it becomes less likely that women will build up work experience or be perceived as ready to take on executive positions by their employer (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). These can be interpreted as organisational barriers rather than individual preference (for both the men and women involved), particularly as Hakim's

adaptive preference thesis consistently does not lead to career progression for women to executive level, but it does for men.

All of these factors have been found to lead to lower numbers of women than men in executive positions, the argument over whether this is because of individual preference or organisational barriers has largely been resolved by findings that demonstrate mothers navigate a mixture of individual agency within organisational and social constraints (Crompton & Harris, 1998a, Tomlinson et al, 2018). While Bushell et al (2020) find echoes of preference theory in some of the responses in their interviews with Chairs and head-hunters involved in executive appointments which display assumptions about women's insufficient availability for executive demands once they become mothers, these assumptions on behalf of recruiters are yet another example of organisational barriers rather than women's own choices as they progress through their careers.

Looking specifically at Arts Council England's regularly funded organisations between 2012-2015, one study found that 46.9% of the workforce was women, and 58.4% of managers were women (Parkinson et al, 2013) and noted that women's advancement to leadership positions appeared to depend on them not being mothers. Parkinson et al (2013) argued that women still face significant challenges in balancing family responsibilities with career advancement in the arts. This is supported by McDowall et al's (2019) report on working parents in the performing arts in the UK, which highlights lower median earnings and more precarious contracts for carers and parents in the UK performing arts sector than for those without caring responsibilities. McDowall et al (2019) call for more flexibility and support from employers to enable workers to keep working in the performing arts once they become parents, particularly because only 10% of their survey respondents reported support from

employers enabling them to continue working at the same level as before they acquired caring responsibilities.

Accepting the argument that women's barriers to executive positions are down to lack of support from work organisations, rather than individual preference, then the question arises not of whether women in the publicly subsidised arts sector have chosen not to have children alongside their executive careers, but whether organisations in the arts have created executive roles that do not include the barriers of demanding workload and inflexible working hours, and therefore enabled more women to take up executive positions. This links back to the question asked earlier, when considering Billing's (2011) findings that women (and men) aiming for executive level positions were no longer held back by organisations applying the ideal of the 'unencumbered male' (Acker, 2006). Perhaps part of the explanation of the different gender outcomes in the UK arts sector is that UK arts organisations have recently started to structure executive level work in flexible ways such that women do not have to make the kind of choice that Hakim (2000, 2002, 2003) frames as individual, Eagly & Carli (2007) frame as organisational, and Fitzsimmons & Callan (2016) flag as detrimental. Perhaps Parkinson et al's 2013 findings that women without children are more likely to reach executive positions in the arts have been superseded in recent years. Perhaps women in the UK subsidised arts sector are now working within organisations that make space for what Crompton & Harris (1998a) argue are women's "complex and variable" (ibid, p.127) approaches to maintaining a managerial or professional career alongside a family. This study therefore includes the fifth sub-question:

Can gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by the widespread adoption of flexible working practices?

Intersectional inequalities in the UK arts sector

Looking at entry level positions within the arts sector, Tatli & Özbilgin (2012) found that despite other inequalities in the arts, women and gay men are not discriminated against to the same extent, and in the same ways, as in other sectors - as long as they are white and middle class. While Tatli & Ozbilgin's paper concentrated on students and graduates entering the arts sector for the first time rather than provide insight to what may be happening at executive level, it flags the issue of white privilege and class inequalities at the very start of a career in the arts.

While gender is the focus of this study, the body of work that explores how gender, class and race intersect with each other and create different inequalities within work organisations should not be ignored. Indeed, Kirton & Greene (2005) are clear that efforts to eradicate workplace inequality should include characteristics such as disability, sexuality and age alongside gender and race, while Acker (2011) is firm in cautioning scholars of gender inequality that "studies of gender inequality often implicitly assume that gender means women who are white and, often, middle class" (ibid, p.77). This kind of criticism is echoed in Alvesson & Sködberg's (2000) warning against claiming one homogenous experience for all women if that claim is based only on the experience of white middle-class women. Despite such admonitions, Lee & Maite (2021) found that the majority of industrial relations study is still dominated by white-only viewpoints and urge industrial relations scholars to include race in their critical scholarship of workplace inequalities. The existing research field of intersectional inequality is therefore acknowledged as the context for this study, to guard against any uncritical acceptance of a homogenous experience for all women reaching executive level within the arts.

The concept of intersectional inequality is one where an individual's or group's combination of characteristic, such as gender, race and class, will affect the extent and experience of their inequality, whether that is inside or outside work organisations. While Crenshaw (1989) may have originated the term intersectionality within academic study, Hill Collins (2015) points out that practitioners and activists outside academia had long been conceptualising the shifting interconnection of gender, race and class in social reproduction of privilege and disadvantage. Acker (2006) used the term inequality regimes to describe work organisations where unequal hierarchies based on gender, race and class are built into organisational structures and processes. This goes hand in hand with the model of white, male, heterosexual and able-bodied people as the default ideal worker, which at executive level includes middle- or upper-class in that ideal (Cockburn, 1991; Liff, 1999; Bierema, 2005; Acker, 2006, 2011; Cook & Glass, 2014; Bushell et al, 2020). This study would therefore be remiss if it did not acknowledge intersectional inequality as part of women's progression to executive level within the arts sector, and if it did not attempt to provide the empirical insight that is missing so far in the literature into the different lived experiences of, for example, white, Black and Asian women and executives from working class backgrounds and middle class backgrounds, as they reach executive levels within the sector.

Since organisations tend to monitor equality within their workforce in separate categories, it may be difficult to identify where the workers are with multiple characteristics that disadvantage them within organisational processes and decision-making (Woods, Benschop & van den Brink et al, 2022). Furthermore, organisations may find it too challenging to effect the kind of change that monitoring equality at an intersectional level would support, and therefore may adopt "pragmatic choices for what seems to be the most manageable [changes to the status quo]" (ibid, p.103). This tendency to take the easiest route towards

apparent gender equality, by not taking intersectional inequality into consideration, is echoed in Clarke et al's (2005) argument that where organisations attempt, or want to create an impression of attempting, to enact equality policies, it is white, middle-class women with high levels of educational qualifications who will benefit the most in practice from such policies.

In order to produce a study that helps organisations see beyond single categories of inequality and to recognise that achieving gender parity may not mean parity for all women, and with Acker's (2006) caution as a compass that "theory and research on inequality, dominance, and oppression must pay attention to the intersections of, at least, race/ethnicity, gender, and class" (ibid, p.442), this study therefore asks a sixth and final research sub-question:

> Has this sector achieved gender equality at executive level while preserving other intersectional inequalities of gender, race, and class?

Summary of research gap and resulting research questions

In the UK arts sector we have a small but important part of the UK economy that operates within the same legal environment as other UK sectors, recruits executives with similar leadership and statutory responsibilities to other sectors, and is part of a wider CCI sector which, the literature tells us, relies heavily on networking in its appointment processes. Yet, unlike all other sectors, PSAOs have achieved gender parity at executive level while other sectors and sub-sectors have not.

The literature outlined above is used to consider whether existing well-established explanations of women's under-representation at executive level are present, absent, or have a diminished impact, within the publicly subsidised arts sector. The emerging research questions also allow for an explanation of possible reasons behind any absence or diminished impact of the expected barriers to gender parity. It is by examining the presence, absence or diminished impact of barriers within the arts sector, and the possible reasons behind such differences, that this study moves towards an explanation of the different gender outcomes in the UK arts sector's network formation and executive appointment processes.

Understanding whether the difference lies in recruitment practices not relying on networks at executive level, or in the nature of UK arts executives' networks, could then provide valuable lessons for other organisations or sectors who are trying to reach the same level of equality.

Given the body of work that has highlighted women's under-representation at executive level and the reasons behind this, and the data that indicates the UK publicly subsidised arts sector has gone against the literature's expectations, this study poses a question that the current literature cannot answer:

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1. How have UK publicly subsidised arts organisations achieved gender parity at executive level across the sector when other UK sectors have not?

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This study's subsequent sub-questions arose in response to the explanations for women's under-representation at executive level identified in the literature. The first three sub-questions explore the absence, presence or diminished impact of the explanations that show a reliance on networks within executive appointment processes and informal appointment processes that result in Bushell et al's network trap for women trying to progress to boardroom level positions. The remaining sub-questions then address possible reasons for any absence or diminished impact of such barriers by drawing on Ryan & Haslam's explanation of glass cliff appointments at points of organisational financial precarity, the possible differing provision of flexible working practices that would then negate Hakim's preference theory, and the possibility that it is only white, middle-class women's progress that has led to gender parity at executive level. In summary, these sub-questions are:

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1.1. Do men's and women's networks within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector follow the homophilous patterns that the literature leads us to expect, and if not, how has this happened?

1.2. Are networks relied on within UK arts executive appointment processes, and if so, why has this not held women in the network trap as identified elsewhere?

1.3. How far do UK publicly subsidised arts organisations rely on formal recruitment and selection methods in their appointment processes over and above any parallel informal methods?

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1.4. Can the gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by women being more likely than men to be appointed as executives in organisations facing financial precarity, as suggested by the 'glass cliff' phenomenon?

1.5. Can gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by the widespread adoption of flexible working practices?

1.6. Has this sector achieved gender parity at executive level while preserving other intersectional inequalities of gender, race, and class?

These sub-questions are used as the basis for the research methodology set out in the next chapter. Subsequent chapters then go on to develop the discussion of whether existing well-established explanations are present, absent, or have a diminished impact within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector that has led to gender parity, and potential reasons behind these findings and how they have affected appointment outcomes in this part of the UK economy.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Having posed the overall research question based on empirical observation of the UK subsidised arts sector, and the relevant sub-questions based on the literature, this chapter describes how this study's research methodology worked to answer the identified questions. It will start by outlining the study's epistemological position of the social, co-construction of knowledge through dialogue, and the adoption of qualitative, semistructured interviews as the primary data collection tool in a study which seeks to explore research subjects' understanding of their world of work (Kvale, 1996) and to give women in particular a voice within the research (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). The interview transcribing process and data analysis methods are then described, along with the small amount of subsequent quantitative research that was added to the data collection process as part of a reflexive approach (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012) to the data analysis.

Epistemology

This study is founded on a pragmatist realist position, with the view that an objective reality exists but can only be interpreted via a researcher's and her readers' social values and context (Watson, 2011). It is a study of social processes – humans building relationships with each other, and navigating recruitment and selection processes – which aligns with Kvale's (1996) position wherein the subject of the research is not "objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted" (ibid, p.11).

Since this epistemological position acknowledges the role of researcher as an actor in the creation of knowledge, the chapter is written in the first person to better acknowledge my role as researcher in the creation of knowledge. This first-person position also better

represents Alvesson & Sköldberg's (2000) reflexive methodology, which I used to design, undertake and analyse the research project and its findings; not 'my' findings, but the findings co-created with my research participants.

I adopted a stance closer to Kvale's (1996) description of researcher as traveller than to his image of researcher as miner. In Kvale's metaphor, the traveler is gathering people's stories and reconstructing them for an audience and thus creating a socially constructed form of knowledge, while the miner is looking for research data that confirms objective, external facts. Since creating and maintaining networks and carrying out appointment processes are fundamentally social processes, I judged that only an approach that created knowledge based on social processes would provide answers to my research questions. This approach started with the 'mining' of UK arts council diversity data to uncover an objective set of statistics that signalled something may be happening differently with the PSAOs' social processes of executive appointments. Even that mining, however, indicated that each council reported and segmented its data differently, and was based on each organisation's own self-reported data, and that none of it could answer the 'how' and 'why' questions that came out of my review of the literature.

Having 'mined' diversity data from the UK arts councils, and crystallised other researchers' interpretations of how gender inequality was maintained through networks and appointment processes, I did not accept these alone as sufficient to understand how and why gender inequality may be redressed in practice. Undertaking a research study into networks and executive appointment processes needed to start with some external data – the diversity reporting from the UK arts councils – but would make little sense and provide minimal

practical application without understanding implicated actors' meaning and sense-making of networks and appointment processes.

Since I wanted to explore how the actors involved in the executive appointment processes made sense of the reported equal numbers of men and women at executive level within a sector, I chose to summarise quantitative data from the UK arts councils and then use that summary as the starting point for a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews. I adopted this interview approach to add to the understanding of the "lived everyday world" (Kvale, 1996, p.54). Rather than ignoring contradictions within social processes that Kvale (1996) noted, I combined participants' interpretation of the network and appointment processes they experienced with statistical data. My aim was to provide a contribution that is as close to the lived reality as possible in order to be practically useful in future similar social processes. While the numbers of men and women at executive level paint one part of the picture, a socially co-constructed understanding of this world cannot be formed without including people's own explanations of their experiences as necessary data to complete the picture.

Researcher position

The picture that I present in my findings and discussion (chapters 4 – 7), is inevitably based on my own interpretation of the significance of the various data that I collected. While the knowledge that I am creating within this study would not have been built without the interaction between me, as research interviewer, and my interviewees, I also reflected on my own position and possible presumptions in order to ensure I was drawing on the accounts and interpretations others shared with me, and not on what I assumed their accounts and interpretations would be. That is, I looked for clarification and confirmation in the interview

conversations so that I did not end an interview having assumed that my interpretation of what the interviewee was describing was the same as their own.

One of the reasons I worked hard to avoid my own experience and interpretation to overshadow others' was the potential for unconscious bias to cloud my judgement. To help inform any reader's judgement of how far my own identity and background may affect my research's validity, I set out my background here. I also do this since I asked my interviewees to share similar levels of information about themselves, as far as they were comfortable, so withholding the same information about myself would not provide the reader with the full picture of who has co-constructed (Cassell, 2009) the knowledge within this study.

I am a woman with a middle-class but relatively impoverished background. I am heterosexual, able-bodied, married without children, middle-aged, and undertook this study as part of a structured PhD programme within a business school. I started my career within the commercial and then subsidised theatre industries, and after a time in the talent agency industry, I set up as a management consultant and executive coach within the UK arts sector. Some of my work as a consultant has included designing and administering executive appointment processes. I did not directly undertake any executive appointment work over the course of this study, but I continued to support executives in various PSAOs through organisational development projects and HR reviews. My career to date has involved carrying out hundreds of interviews in different settings, and I have worked throughout my career to keep increasing my awareness of the inequalities present across the arts sector as a whole, starting with those I experienced myself as a young woman in theatre. I started down the road of doctoral research into this field in the hopes of finding some practical solutions to the often discussed but seldom solved issues of male dominance at executive level within the arts

and the exploitation of women within the sector. My personal background and motivation may be a strength when it comes to understanding my field of research, but I also needed to ensure that I remained open to new ideas and new ways of looking at the sector that I may not have experienced myself. I also needed to acknowledge that I would not be able to adopt what Kvale (1996) describes as "deliberate naïveté" (ibid, p.31) since sharing some of my own background and understanding of the sector would be part of the exercise in building trust with interviewees, but also because I would have crossed paths professionally with some of them as a consultant or former colleague. I therefore made sure in interviews with participants whom I had worked with professionally that I did not join in with my own recollections of events they mentioned, and that I invited them to reflect on as many other experiences as possible where our paths had not crossed.

Reflecting on the advantage that being white and middle-class has given me to enter and remain within the UK arts sector has been an important part of this research study. The strength of this advantage is evident not least in the level of access I had to the field, with enough contacts and levels of trust already in place to successfully invite participants to be interviewed, and to ask them to recommend or introduce me to further potential participants. It also provided me with access to the kinds of lifelong cultural experiences and levels of higher educational qualifications that made it easy to navigate the language and sector-specific terms in the reports and sector discussions that informed my data collection.

At the same time, the weakness of my position as a white, middle-class, middle-aged woman could have been that some participants with a different background may not have spoken as openly with me as they would have with someone who shared their background. My past professional experience of carrying out interviews in a variety of professional

settings, including those where I must put people at ease and try to judge whether they are describing their experiences authentically, played a part in minimising the risk of people not speaking openly once they had accepted my invitation. The 'Interview Selection' section below shows a summary of participant demographics and invitation conversation rates which demonstrates that I was able to carry out interviews with a range of people like and unlike myself on multiple levels.

The biggest potential weakness from my position was any unconscious bias arising from my privileged position that remains. While I think I have sourced, heard and understood experiences and viewpoints different from my own, it is possible that an unconscious blind spot remains that has clouded my interpretation. Others will be the judge, but I hope that my reflexive approach has at the very least ensured that I have not produced just one more account of the "'truth' of White, middle-class, Western feminists" (Hughes, 2002, p.65).

That all said, I also do not want to fall into the trap that Alvesson & Ashcraft (2012) warn against within a reflexive approach, where the researcher becomes so self-absorbed that their own position becomes as important as the subject being researched. As a woman and as a practitioner within the UK arts sector, I commenced on a study that addressed an area of personal and professional concern, but as a supervised researcher within an industrial relations research setting, I designed and undertook a study that would go far beyond my own initial limits of knowledge and experience.

Research design

This study design centres on my choice to use semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection mechanism. Taking what Alvesson & Ashcraft's (2012) would describe as the 'romantic' approach – in which I would build rapport and trust, aiming to gather

information that would shed light on an interviewee's own interpretation of an objective truth about the organisation – I considered what information I would need to share with potential participants to assure them that they could trust me with their personal accounts. Using my overall research question and sub-questions as the main themes, I created an interview framework that mapped onto each sub-question and allowed for interviewees to expand into related areas that they found important and relevant. This framework is shown in Appendix I. I started with questions to draw out recollections of each stage of their past appointment processes, and gradually widened the conversation out include the interviewee's explanations and interpretations of those experiences. Having tested my initial framework out on some personal contacts with arts industry experience, and reflecting on my PhD supervisors' feedback on the framework design, I created a final version of the framework that created an informal and conversation flow that would help put interviewees at ease and thus increase the chance that they would be relaxed enough to recall and share detailed accounts of their network and appointment process experiences and opinions. The framework shown in Appendix I also includes some advance questions that were ready to be sent out to anyone who asked for advance material.

Throughout my research project, I kept in mind Acker's caution that "focusing on one category almost inevitably obscures and oversimplifies other interpenetrating realities" (Acker, 2006, p. 442) and that "visibility varies with the position of the beholder" (ibid, p. 452, referencing P. McIntosh 1995). I therefore knew that analysis would potentially be complex, and yet the time limits of completing a PhD project meant that I would need to limit the scope of my focus or risk not producing any meaningful work. I therefore interviewed as many people as time and access allowed, so that I could see if there were some processes and experienced that were common to all or to just one particular group, and accepted that there

would be limitations to how far I could capture a comprehensive picture of how networks contribute to appointment processes that have led to gender parity. My design was then to stick to a focussed approach (Kvale, 1996) which based interview questions on overall sub-question themes, allowed for interviewees to describe their experiences around the same themes, but letting them focus on what they found the most important aspects of those themes.

The level and nature of detail shared with me in the majority of the interviews, and the feedback offered to me at the end of or shortly after each conversation, was such that I am confident that those who did speak with me shared reliable accounts of their own experiences and interpretations of their networking and appointment experiences.

Interviewee selection

Pulling together a list of all 1,118 PSAOs as of 2018, and listing the executive or equivalent of each organisation meant that I could start identifying potential interview subjects. These were initially identified on the basis of holding, or having recently held, an executive position in a UK PSAO, or being a Chair or Trustee of a PSAO board which had recently made an executive appointment. I also drew on existing industry knowledge to add a list of active executive search professionals, or headhunters, to the list if they had been named publicly as being involved in recent executive appointment processes.

From this list, I knew that I would need to create an invitation list on the basis that they would have, and be willing to talk about, what Alvesson and Ashcraft (2012) would call "rich (e.g. intricate, perceptive, insightful)" (2012, p.247) experiences that they would be willing to discuss. That willingness would need to be based on a certain level of trust, since I would be asking them to share experiences and views on processes that are normally kept

confidential and are sometimes criticised by PSAO stakeholders. This meant that I started my list with 13 professional contacts who were already aware that I was planning to research the role that networks played in gender parity at executive level in the UK arts sector, and who had told me they were willing to be interviewed whenever I was ready. This initial group was made up of four Chairs of appointment panels, and nine Artistic or Executive Directors.

My existing professional relationships with this initial group of 13 already interested and willing interviewees was based partly on high levels of trust, having worked with them all at various times on sensitive and confidential matters, and also on a shared value of widening access to and equality within the arts sector, expressed through working alongside each other on various projects over the years. These shared values presented both a strength and a potential limitation. The strength was the practical access to key players within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector, while the limitation could have been that any assumptions about my values and intentions could exacerbate the risk that interviewees may be tempted to present only what they think I wanted to hear, or what they ought to say (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2012). Having observed and worked alongside this initial group in a professional capacity, I was confident that I would be able to gain enough trust in my ability to maintain confidence, and also to understand whether any accounts or opinions they shared were an authentic reflection of their thoughts on the networks and appointment processes that formed the basis of this study.

I planned to ask for recommendations at the end of each interview, where the interviewee could recommend or introduce me to people in their network to invite to participate in the same interview, i.e. the 'snowball' approach used by many to access connections beyond the researcher's own networks, the "hidden" networks (Browne, 2005),

or individuals with levels of authority or power beyond the researcher's own (Noy, 2008; Conti & O'Neil, 2007). The existing levels of trust between the members of the initial group and me, and their signal of trust in me when recommending others or facilitating a snowball introduction, meant that I was confident that I would find a large number of interviewees through my immediate and extended network. By using this method, I was also aiming to find my way into otherwise inaccessible groups by making initial contact with women and men with different backgrounds to mine and using the method to then find my way into a more diverse set of interviewees that my own network could provide.

Despite the advantage of access to the research field, such an approach is not without limitations. Being aware of the risk of starting with my own network contacts, using a snowball approach to gain more interviewees, and therefore potentially ending up interviewing people with largely similar backgrounds to my own, I did not want to miss out on a more diverse set of viewpoints. To address this limitation, I also created a list of people unknown to me but within the kinds of organisations that my initial group had not worked in and, judging by their professional websites and social media profiles, from different backgrounds to my own. From this list I invited people 'cold', without an introduction or recommendation from others, approaching either by publicly-available work email addresses or via LinkedIn.

I sent out a total of 108 invitations to potential interviewees, and ended up interviewing 63 interview subjects. I sent 13 invitations to the initial group of contacts waiting to be interviewed, and another 16 to people within my own professional network who were also Chief Executives or equivalents, and also Chairs or Trustees whom I knew had been involved in executive appointments at some stage in their career. I sent out 15 cold

invitations, and once interviewing had started, 64 snowball invitations. 86% (n.25) of my

invitations to my own network were accepted, while 73% (n.47) of my snowball invitations

and 20% (n.3) of my cold approaches were accepted. That represents a total of 75 invitations

accepted, while 5 declined and 27 did not respond, a response rate that is largely in line with

those found in interview studies of those in elite organisational positions (Harvey, 2011). My

first interview was in May 2021, and the last in January 2022. One accepted interview was

not scheduled in time to be included in this study. Nobody but myself saw the names of those

I invited or interviewed, but I shared the types of the interviewees' organisations, although

not the names of the organisations, with my PhD supervisors at various stages of this study.

Between them, the 63 interviewees experienced executive appointment processes across at

least 134 organisations, including the very largest to some of the very smallest publicly

subsidised arts organisations in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. These included

theatres, galleries, festivals, orchestras, dance and theatre production companies, as well as

literature, community engagement, moving image and multi-artform organisations.

Organisation size ranged from single site and multiple site locations, with headcounts of fewer

than 10 up to c.700 employees (or c.1,000 including trading subsidiaries), and annual

turnovers as of 2017/18 ranging from <£100k to c.£117m.

By using a semi-structured interview, I was able to collect data that provided an overall

pattern of responses to my research question and sub-questions, while allowing for

interviewees to offer their own interpretation of how the arts sector seemed to be appointing

equal numbers of women and men at executive level. Reflecting on the importance to give

women a voice given that industrial relations and organisational research has not always

acknowledged women's differing experiences at work from the universal male worker

(Wajcman, 1996, 1998; Dickens, 2007), I interviewed more women than men. I did, however,

include men for two reasons – the primary being so that I could seek similarities and differences in women and men's experiences to use as a point of confirmation when it came to analysing how different or similar men's and women's experiences were in networking and executive appointments, and the secondary being a reflection of the predominance of men as Chairs of Boards, meaning that there were more men than women Chairs involved in recent executive appointment decisions.

I categorised interviewees by role and by apparent gender initially, in response to my research questions looking at how networks were formed, what appointment processes were in use, and what affect that had on gender parity at executive level.   The role and gender categories were populated as shown in Table 1 below.

Role	Women	Men
Current or recent Chairs of UK arts organisation board(s), involved in appointing executives	3	6
Currently or recently in an executive position within a UK arts organisation	31	12
Both a Chair and an executive	3	1
Head-hunter working with arts organisation(s)	3	1
Trustee involved in executive appointments	2	
HR Director involved in executive appointments	1	
Totals	**43**	**20**

Table 1: Total interviewees categorised by role and gender

Part of my interview design included an invitation for interviewees to share, as far as they were comfortable, their identity in terms of gender, race and class, so that I could address my research sub-question around gender parity potentially masking continuing intersectional inequality.   No-one identified themselves as anything other than woman or

man, so these remained the two gender categories used during analysis and describing the subsequent findings. Most people included their sexuality in their description of their intersectional identity, or while sharing their experiences; where that was included, I have used the language of the interviewees to create these categories.

I also asked interviewees to talk about their childcare and other caring responsibilities, in order to address my research sub-question around inflexible working practices that present barriers to women in other sectors. This meant that, once interviews were underway, I could create further categories of race, class, and caring responsibilities. While I did map these categories onto the roles as well as gender, Table 2 overleaf shows only how these categories map onto the gender of the Executives interviewed since the numbers in the other role categories above are too small to maintain confidentiality. The race categories are based on the UK census descriptions, while class and childcare are based on how interviewees described themselves.

I referred to these categories when deciding when to stop sending out invitations. I made this decision when people from each of the categories provided such similar answers to preceding interviews in that category that I arrived at "the point of saturation, where further interviews yield little knowledge" (Kvale, 1996, p.102). In order to avoid any gap between identifying the saturation point and having remaining interviews already scheduled, I slowed down the rate of interview invitations significantly once interviews were well underway. The biggest gap that I failed to fill was finding men to interview who were not white, despite snowball recommendations and introductions, and cold invitations, none of which received responses. I did not want to pressure anyone into accepting, particularly given the additional burden on workers of colour to explain to others how their experiences of

direct and indirect discrimination has affected them personally and professionally. After one

follow up request I did not pursue any individual further. This remains as a weakness in that

my findings and discussion will not include any voices from men who are Black, Asian or from

other minoritised racial groups.

	Women executives (n. 34)	Men executives (n. 13)
Race	18 White British 2 White Irish 5 White other 3 Black 3 Asian 1 Asian/White British	11 White British 1 White Irish 1 White other
Class	19 middle-class 8 working class 3 did not define	7 middle-class 3 working class 3 did not define
Sexuality	3 lesbian/gay 26 straight 5 did not define	6 gay 6 straight 1 did not define
Children	18 with children 16 with no children	5 with children 8 with no children
Other caring responsibilities	5 with other caring responsibilities	0 with other caring responsibilities

Table 2: Executives by gender, race, class, sexuality and caring responsibilities

Some interviewees included disability when describing their intersectional identity,

but I judged it to be too few to include as a separate category that could be used to track

saturation. No other protected characteristics were referred to, and since my research focus

did not specifically go beyond gender, race and class, I did not press anyone to disclose any

further characteristics as part of my data collection. While not including the full range of

intersectional identities in the research findings may be seen as a weakness, it nevertheless

meant that each interview created data that kept within the focus and themes of my intended

research focus, starting with gender and widening out to race and class. The issues around

sexuality became increasingly important as analysis started, and it ended up being a useful category to have tracked, albeit following the lead of the interviewees rather than any initial design.

The final group of interviews could draw on their experience of networking and executive appointment processes from within more than 150 organisations, ranging from the most highly funded to some of the smallest. While the majority of organisations discussed were based in England, others were in Scotland and Northern Ireland. I was unsuccessful in finding anyone with experience in a Welsh organisation to accept an invitation to interview. This is an additional remaining weakness in my study, with no accounts of Welsh organisational processes included in the data analysis.

Interviewing

Having received an invitation with an explanation of my research area, anyone accepting in principle then received a consent form which assured them that their participation would be kept confidential, their responses pseudonymised and aggregated, and that they could withdraw their consent to participate up to three months after being interviewed.

All but two interviews were carried out via a video platform, the remaining two by telephone. All interviews were recorded, with the full consent and knowledge of the interviewees. The original plan was to interview in person, but the Covid-19 pandemic had limited people's willingness to travel for non-essential reasons. Everyone I interviewed had been working remotely on a very regular basis by the time we spoke, which meant they were comfortable and experienced in using video platforms. Since I was not seeking to include non-verbal information in my analysis, I did not consider using the video platforms as a

limitation, and indeed using video calls meant that I was able to schedule interviews more frequently and affordably than if I had needed to travel across the UK. Indeed, at least two interviewees were shielding from meeting people outside their households because of clinical vulnerability to Covid-19 and would not have met me in person if that had been the only option.

Though I made it clear in my invitation and any initial conversations that I was not expecting interviewees to prepare anything in advance, five interviewees requested questions ahead of their interview. In these cases I supplied the prompt questions found at the end of Appendix I.

After the first few interviews, I used the framework more as a prompt to land on each theme rather than a script to follow exactly. Adapting each interview while sticking to the overall themes meant that I could still look for insights into people's understanding and how they find meaning, and continue co-constructing the knowledge as I moved through the project. It also allowed me to become more comfortable more quickly in each conversation which in turn helped put the interviewees at ease and therefore more likely to be open in what they shared, and able to recall events and articulate opinions without the pressure of a stilted, forced conversation.

The three main areas I told interviewees I wanted to land on during the conversation were around their experiences of executive appointment processes in the arts, either as an applicant or recruiter, their professional networking – how they had formed their own network and what kind of support and information they gained from it – and what role they thought their gender, class and race had played in their career to date. This allowed interviewees to start with telling me a relatively factual account of something that they would

be used to talking about – when and how they had applied for executive roles or created appointment processes. Once we had both settled into the conversation, then I prompted them towards more reflective and interpretive accounts of how they formed networks. For most people this was the first time they had considered that topic, and many needed time and additional prompts from me to recall and clarify how and when their professional contacts were formed. I left the topic of intersectional identity until the latter part of each interview so that the interviewee would be more settled and comfortable in the conversation and trust me enough to open up on what may have been a sensitive subject. Once we moved to the reflection on gender, race and class, nobody needed an explanation of why I was asking that question, and everyone had considered that topic on a professional level already. Some already used the term intersectional inequalities, and everyone shared at least some level of detail about themselves at this stage. I remained alert to any signs of discomfort or becoming too close to an interviewee's boundaries between professional and personal, and while many interviewees shared very personal and emotional experiences, I did not prompt beyond the first question with anyone who did not go into much detail in this stage. Where the interviewee's time was limited I focussed on appointment processes and networking, flagged the topic of gender, race and class as an area they may want to comment on, and closed each interview with an invitation to expand on any answers they had given and to share any views they had on executive appointments and gender parity in the arts.

One question from the original framework design did not last beyond the first five Chair interviews. This was the question about networking events where Chairs were introduced to potential executives. The first five Chair interviews all made it clear that no such events existed within the sector. I had also never heard of or experienced such events myself, but had included the question based on part of Bushell et al's (2020) study which had

explored the ineffectiveness of such events on leading to women being appointed to boardroom positions. The early Chair interview responses, and the time it took me to explain why I had asked them such a question, led me to be more confident that I had not missed out on any existing events, and that I could make better use of time by deleting that section and giving more space for answers to the other more relevant questions.

Transcription

Using video platforms for 61 of the interviews meant that I was able to capture automatic transcripts from the video platform software – 60 of them being MS Teams and one being Zoom. MS Teams automatic transcription software improved over the time I was interviewing, but each automatic transcript needed cleaning up and correcting while I listened to the original audio to make sure it was an accurate record of what we had both said (as tempted as I was to keep 'Hedgehog consultant' instead of correcting it to 'HR consultant' whenever that term was used). I took out the conversational repetitions, short pauses and 'ums' and 'ers', since my goal was not to carry out discourse analysis. I also replaced any repeated phrases that I thought may be identifiable to others in the field. I used a code for each interviewee so that transcripts were stored anonymously, using initials to indicate the gender and role of the interviewee and a number to distinguish each anonymised individual. Thus EW01 is Executive Woman 01, EM02 is Executive Man 02; CW03 is Chair Woman 03, CM04 is Chair Man 04; HW and HM are Headhunter Woman and Headhunter Man respectively, while TW stands for Trustee Woman, HRW for HR lead Woman. Some interviewees held two roles – Executive and Chair – in which case I used two sets of initials: EWCW and EMCM. I did not include reference to race or class in these initials since gender remained my primary category for analysis.

I pseudonymised organisations and other individuals if they were referred to as part of the interviewee's account of network formation or executive appointment processes. I kept names and organisations in the original where they were referred to as context to the wider sector that was common knowledge to all, such as when an interviewee noted that all the Artistic Directors at the National Theatre have so far been men as context for an answer about their own experience outside the National Theatre.

For the two telephone interviews, I typed up the transcript from the audio recording, and treated the data the same way as above. No-one else has read the transcripts.

Additional quantitative data collection

As interviews progressed, I started to gather the names and gender of each executive level role-holder within the UK PSAOs as of 2018 – the first year where the arts councils' collective data reporting seemed to reflect equal representation of men and women at this level across the subsidised arts sector. I had first considered this exercise as a way of confirming that the arts council data could be relied on but did not decide to carry it out until I was prompted by what I was hearing in some of the interviews. Part of my interview invitation included the reason for my research being a response to arts councils reporting 50/50 men and women at executive level for the first time, and part of the interview framework referred back to this figure and asked interviewees if they recognised this in the sector around them. A mixture of responses included some who doubted the reports were accurate, or who said that that may be the case for other parts of the sector but not for theirs. Other interviewees shared their interpretation of gender parity within theatres as being on paper only, having experienced models of co-executives where a man was Artistic Director, a woman was Executive Director, and as an arts-led organisation this meant that the Artistic

Director was in fact more powerful than the Executive Director, even if it looked equal in job title.

These doubts and questions from interviewees led to me list out the names and genders to each of the 1,118 PSAOs as of 2018. This exercise confirmed that the arts council reported proportions were largely correct at sector level. While there were was less than 50% women in executive level in the music part of the sector, there was more than 50% in dance. Within the theatre, the part of the sector flagged by interviewees as having gendered splits between a male Artistic Director and a female Executive Director, this was evident in the list of names and genders in theatre organisations, but was not replicated in the rest of the sector.

In response to a growing number of interpretations of the reasons behind gender parity, which included low salaries, I also reviewed advertised starting salaries for executive positions within the sector from 2008 – 2018, the decade leading up to the reported gender parity. This was done using a proprietary database that my own company has created and maintained, dating back to 2006, that tracks advertised starting salaries for UK arts sector positions. While this database is not publicly available, it is based on public recruitment adverts on platforms such as the Guardian online newspaper, arts sector trade publications such as Arts Professional, and a free listing that Arts Council England circulates on a weekly basis. While Arts Professional does provide average salaries of current roles, based on public adverts and self-reporting through an annual voluntary survey, this does not include the kind of historical quantitative data that can help build a picture of salary ranges and changes over time. While this data cannot reflect any salaries that were not advertised, nor does it capture

salaries once somebody is in post, it was the closest I could find to illustrating my interviewees' perceptions of salaries within the sector.

Analysis

I coded the transcripts using NVivo software based initially on each of my research sub-questions as the six main themes: whether networks are homophilous, whether networks play a key role in executive appointment processes, whether formal executive appointment processes are followed, whether organisational financial precarity plays a part in women's appointments, whether widespread flexible working practices that make room for caring responsibilities have contributed to gender parity, and what intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class remain beyond simply gender parity.   Noting Alvesson & Ashcraft's (2012) caution to interviewers getting too close to the content to think about it uncritically, I left at least one week between interview and cleaning up the transcript, and then coded batches of five to ten transcripts at a time. The length of time between conversation and coding meant that I was able to move from my personal responses in the moment of each interview's social interaction into a more distanced focus on the content of the conversation. That said, I still aimed to maintain a narrative thread, to share with this thesis' audience the authentic voices and experiences that my research participants had shared with me, so was careful not to extract short quotes for each NVivo coded section, but to maintain the surrounding sentences so that I did not lose the context of each comment. I also included some of my own comments as data to code, since there were frequent occasions where I responded to an interviewee's interpretation of how the arts sector had achieved gender parity – or not as some believed – by reflecting their points back to them and articulating connections between their points that I had identified during our conversation.

After the initial coding around the six initial themes, I then grouped the data in each theme into smaller sub-sections that could collectively provide different points of view, interpretations and experiences as part of the answer to each research sub-question. I used these sub-sections to form the basis of a first draft of my findings. This writing process in turn became a reflective and sense-making exercise of my own, with further connections and themes arising as I wrote up my early analysis that was not apparent to me in the segmented NVivo statements around each theme.

In order to keep a reflective, narrative approach going, I returned to each complete transcript after completing the second stage coding and re-read it to check that I had not lost any of what I saw as the key stories that could help illustrate the answers to my questions.

This reflection also gave me the opportunity to delete some of the findings which, on re-reading the initial findings chapter drafts, I realised that I had included because they aligned with some of my personal experiences in the sector, but not because they addressed the focus of this study. This means that not everything that everybody said in every interview is included in this study's findings and conclusions, but everything that remains is as close to a collective account of a group of people's description of the social processes of networking and executive appointments around them, while noting the exceptions and contradictions that Kvale (1996) urges scholars to see as equally valid as finding consensus in accounts.

Summary

By using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method, and combining this with some quantitative data around executive gender in PSAOs, I have approached this study as a co-construction of knowledge. I have designed a project that seeks out the experiences and descriptions of participants in the field of study - networks and

executive appointment processes – that will contribute to empirical literature on ways that women and men network and progress to executive level in equal numbers that other sectors have not seen. I have taken the position that knowledge about social processes is formed in conversations between social actors, in this case the research interviewer and her research interviewees.   How interviewees were selected, and my position as researcher with experience in the field and an intersectional identity of white, middle-class woman, are detailed as part of this knowledge co-creation process to help any reader better understand the strengths, and potential weaknesses, of my methodology.

The following findings chapters are grouped around the same three main areas that I guided my interviewees through – network formation, appointment processes and factors beyond appointment processes that contribute to gender parity and which gender parity may be masking.

Chapter Four: Network formation in the UK arts sector

Introduction

The differences between how professional networks serve women compared to men were in mainstream sectors were highlighted in Chapter Two. Men's largely homophilous strategic networks provide access to mentorship, sponsorship and information from senior decision makers that benefit their career progression. Women's homophilous networks do not provide access to as many men in senior positions as men's, and therefore women's exclusion from men's homophilous networks plays a large part in their underrepresentation at executive level. With a sector that has reached gender parity at this level, this chapter shares the findings that reveal what may be happening differently within the UK subsidised arts sector when it comes to women and men's network formation and maintenance.   The question being addressed is whether men's and women's networks within the UK arts sector follow the homophilous patterns that the literature leads us to expect. Finding that the sector does not appear to follow the same homophilous patterns, the chapter then presents data on sector-specific networking activities including inter-organisational collaboration, an openness towards sexuality, and in some part a sector-wide approach to professional development.

Predominantly non-homophilous strategic networks

Contrary to the findings in earlier studies of women's networks (Ibarra, 1993, 1997; Ibarra et al, 2010; Bushell et al, 2020) the women interviewed in this study consistently reported that their groups of professional contacts which supported their career advancement in various ways, included both men and women: "it wouldn't have occurred to me not to form equal bonds with men and women" (CW02); and, "[my network is] probably more women than men, but interestingly two of the people that I formed very close

friendships with in my working context were men" (EW19). A commonly shared picture of non-homophilous strategic networks came through strongly across all interviews, with men also reporting influential women within their networks:

"I think [my network's] probably fairly even, but I think it might be slightly more female to male. So I'm thinking of former trustees, former chairs that I've worked with here and elsewhere, and they tend to be more female than male. Certainly our board is. I mean, I think it is a mixture but it's certainly not male dominated." (EM04).

. As many women as men reported having support in their career advancement from men and women, with many women sharing examples of having a key supportive, influential male mentor or peer who had encouraged them throughout their career.

Executive women, some of whom also now chair other arts organisations, shared examples of having a male peer, colleague or manager who provided practical help in building their confidence, providing valuable experience opportunities, and guidance in their career progression from early on. As one Executive Woman put it, "I was fortunate in that I had a [male] director who empowered you to do things and to take chances and to take risks" (EW10), while one Chair Woman, who is also an Executive, described making a proactive choice early on to build a network of men to help her progress in her career: "when I was in my 20s and 30s I was much more of the opinion that you kind of hung out with the power base and the power base was the guys and that was how you moved in life more generally, not just in work" (CW02).

The most common examples were of former male managers or colleagues forming part of a professional network that provided emotional support but also practical support in developing in current jobs, and instrumental support in their career progression. One

Executive woman talked about two male managers at key points in her career – the first being the head of a major television department when she was an entry level employee, whom she approached, "naively" in her words, for advice and guidance without realising that it was very unusual for someone at her level to form a professional relationship with the head of department. She described her approaches as positively received, and resulting in career guidance that she still remembers to this day. That relationship did not last much beyond the workplace, however, but the next male mentor she had became a central part of her professional network as she progressed to, and remained at, executive level within the arts sector, and their relationship has outlasted working at the same organisation together.

Another described a core group within her network, formed at a mid-career conference, which included both men and women and which has lasted throughout her career, with at least annual meetings in person (online during the Covid-19 lockdowns) and many points of contact in between. While this group does appear to have provided what Ibarra (1992) would call expressive, or emotional, support that proved valuable in helping women develop within their current role, it also seems to have provided career progression advice and alerts to opportunities arising – the instrumental, strategic support that the literature so far describes as being mostly homophilous. While one Executive Woman described what she thought, in retrospect, could have potentially been an abuse of power from the senior man who sponsored her in the earlier parts of her career, others were at pains to point out that what might sound like inappropriate attention from an older man to a younger woman was in fact a genuine professional interest:

"[My manager] was a bit of a maverick and he used to take punts on people and he particularly used to take, this sounds a bit creepy that he sort of was nice to young women,

but he wasn't creepy at all. He was very, very straightforward, and happily married, but he had a kind of very diverse workforce of people coming through various routes." (EW04).

In other examples of men acting as supporters or sponsors in women's career progression to executive level, one particular man was named as a source of career guidance by at least four executive women working, or having worked, in the visual arts sector. This man was the Director of a high-profile English arts organisation for almost twenty years before becoming Chair of another. In one case, he was named as actively supporting the career progression of one of the executive women, encouraging her to consider a role which she would not have otherwise considered, and was key to her gaining her first executive position.

There were also other examples shared of men encouraging women to apply for senior positions even when the woman herself did not feel ready for the step up. With some examples including husbands or male partners, women executives described being encouraged to apply for their first, and sometimes subsequent, executive position when they themselves did not think they were ready or would meet the person specification requirements.

The examples shared go against findings elsewhere, particularly in Bushell et al (2020)'s study of UK FTSE 100 and 250 companies, where women were less likely than men to keep in contact with former male managers and where men and women would certainly network with each other for day to day, operational level support but predominantly with the same gender as themselves for career advice and sponsorship. This predominance of non-homophilous strategic networks described by interviewees indicates that strategic networking behaviour in the UK arts sector is different from such behaviours observed

elsewhere. Before accepting this as the case for all, some homophilous networks were described, and are explored in the following section.

Homophilous strategic networks

While the findings outlined above suggest that men's and women's networks within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector do not follow the homophilous patterns that the literature has come to expect, this would not reflect the whole picture. Not all interviewees described having a non-homophilous strategic network. A small number did seem to follow the patterns found elsewhere in the literature, with men networking largely with other men, and women with women. In the men's homophilous networks, the kinds of mentorship and career sponsorship from senior men to early career men found in other studies were described:

"[my first ED job] was the best first executive director job that anyone can ever get 'cause I had the best person in the history ever to do my job as my Chair. […] He appointed me to that job and he's the person I'm calling about stuff now [three ED roles later]" (EM07).

Where the networking patterns differed, however, were within women's homophilous strategic networks. Albeit these were the case for the minority of women interviewed, those who described having homophilous strategic networks shared multiple examples of senior women successfully playing a part in another woman's career advancement within such a network:

"I'll never forget [my female mentor] in particular, when I was like an administrator at [a performing arts company], I mean really bottom of the rung somewhere, and she was a director at Arts Council at that point [...] her PA rang me up and said she would like to take you as her guest [to an opening night] [...] then she meets me in the reception and walked me

into that room where all the great and the good were. She starts to introduce me: 'Have you met [EWCW03]? You know [EWCW03], she's at [performing arts company], don't you know her?' And I was being introduced to the head of this and that and I'm thinking 'I am nobody' but I just played along and met everybody." (EWCW03). In this example, EWCW03 is still in touch with this mentor, and is now working at the same level as her mentor in the sector.

There were also some examples of women's homophilous networks including a number of women who rose through the organisational hierarchies together, reaching executive level alongside each other and actively sponsoring other early career women in their wake. This would suggest that even where women's strategic networks are homophilous, rather than this homophily acting as a barrier to career progression it can be as beneficial to the women in such networks as it is for men in theirs. This is something that Bushell et al (2020) would suggest is rarely the case in large mainstream organisations, such as the FTSE 350.

Within the small number of homophilous networks, however, three names in particular came up in multiple examples of men supporting men and women supporting women by playing a key part in mentoring or advocating for them in ways that led to their progression to executive level roles. Two of the names were a woman and a man who worked at the highest executive level within one of the largest English arts organisations, and the third was a woman who has held senior positions within two hugely influential arts sector bodies. These three mentors' career pathways are summarised below, as a way of contributing more empirical detail around how the arts sector works in practice.

The man was artistic lead at one of the largest ACE NPOs for over ten years before becoming Chief Executive at a non-subsidised organisation, and Chair of various smaller arts

organisations from 2015 onwards. He was named by three separate executive men as having put their name forward to a headhunter or alerted them directly to an upcoming executive opportunity, (including one at an organisation where he was Chair), to which the executive men were subsequently appointed. One of the women was executive lead alongside this man at the same NPO, and was named by two separate executive women as being a mentor and source of advice around career progression, with one forming a professional relationship that far outlasted the time they worked together in the same organisation: "I do kind of consider her to almost be my big sister more than a mentor these days because she's looked after me since [my twenties] […] she did things to help me progress in London and then through the years" (EW20). The other woman was a senior Director in an influential arts sector body for ten years before becoming Chief Executive of another, and was named by four women executives, one of whom also works as a headhunter, as influential in their career and their attitudes towards similarly supporting other women themselves:

"[she has been] influential and constantly bringing women and particularly culturally diverse women with her, and therefore because she's done that, we've followed that example" [HW01].

An important aspect of this finding is the apparent efficacy of senior women supporting other women to executive level, which has rarely been found elsewhere.

Homophilous expressive networks

The answer when it comes to strategic network patterns following the literature's expected patterns is therefore not a simple yes or no. Most strategic networks were described as non-homophilous, a few were homophilous, but the women's strategic networks

in these examples had led to career progression in ways that the literature would suggest was unlikely elsewhere.

The answer is also neither a simple yes or no when considering what Ibarra (1992) would call expressive or informal networks, where emotional support is provided between professional peers. Where interviewees described their network formation and maintenance, more women than men described having an inner circle of professional contacts of the same gender who provide emotional support. The few men who described part of their network in this way, as providing emotional support, named women as part of this smaller group as well as men. This finding is largely consistent with the literature for the women interviewed, but not for the men. The examples of expressive network support included examples of receiving and providing crucial advice around practical operational challenges, but also support in maintaining individual morale and engagement while facing the challenges of holding a leadership role. These expressive networks were of the kind described by Ibarra (1992), since they are valued by their members as sources of operational and emotional support, but not for career progression. The difference, however, is found in the small number of men who described parts of their network in ways that suggest they had a non-homophilous expressive network as well as a non-homophilous strategic network.

Networking activities

The findings above suggest that men's and women's networks in this sector do not follow the patterns that the literature leads us to expect. Instead, they are largely non-homophilous, but even where they are homophilous they do not appear to be excluding women from career progression opportunities as the literature would suggest. Attention

therefore turns to the second part of the research question – if the network patterns do not follow the patterns found elsewhere, what accounts for this?

The answer to this part of the question seems to lie partly in the kinds of networking activities described by interviewees. Whereas other studies have noted the nature of networking activities, timings and costs acting as a barrier to women entering men's homophilous networks (Ibarra, 1993; Oakley, 2000; Linehan, 2001), this study found consistent accounts across all interviewees of more accessible and inclusive networking activities. The most common examples of how network contacts were formed and maintained were introductions and catch-ups at the many arts sector opening nights and launch parties for shows and similar events, or through collaborative projects undertaken between organisations as part of core business operations:

"[at the start] we didn't have really any networks except we knew artists [...] we knew a lot of the artists we started to work with and you grow your network through that [...] through the work you are doing. And you would always attend things, you go out, you ask one another to things [...] it wasn't necessarily the show, but it was the informal chat in the bar" (EW18).

Attendance at opening nights and launch parties (and similar) are normally by invitation only, but these invitation lists are based on organisational contacts. For example, the audience at the first night of a producing theatre's play would comprise senior employees from other theatres, as well as the producing theatre's board of trustees, theatre critics, casting agents and talent managers, all of whom would be invited based on their job rather than based on their personal relationship with anyone involved in the production. While personal contacts – for example, friends and family of the cast or the production team – may

well be added to the invitation list this tends to be only once any other spaces have been assigned. Once the audience has watched the show, drinks are often provided afterwards to attendees, including the cast and production team, where everyone mingles and meets, sometimes late into the night.

The launch of an art gallery show would have a similar guest list, but with more freelance artists and creative workers on the list. The (usually) larger physical space within a gallery or museum than a producing theatre's auditorium allows for a larger guest list. These events often include some speeches, but once those speeches are over then guests have only to look at the exhibition and talk to each other for the whole evening, often with free drinks in hand. The free catering is a recurring theme – with no entrance fee, and no expectation of having to pay for anything during such an event, even those guests on the lowest salaries (and with no expense accounts to draw on) would be able to stay as long as everyone else.

Such networking activities are almost always in the evening, usually a weekday evening, but can also take place during the day. This means that those with caring responsibilities who could not arrange cover for such evening events may well be excluded from participating. That said, those interviewed who do or did have caring responsibilities, said that they attended such events frequently during their career since they were seen as integral to their job, not in addition. One Executive Man also pointed to the example that he and his wife (not interviewed, but also an executive in the arts) made a decision to take their children to evening private views and launch events as a way of setting an example to others that combining family and work-life is not always about doing one or the other. This suggests that the costs, timing and nature of at least some of the arts sector networking events are inclusive enough to allow parents to feel comfortable taking their children along. This

provides a deeper impression of a sector which forms and maintains networks around activities that are less exclusive than those found in other parts of the literature, such as Bushell et al's (2020) golf games and costly corporate hospitality events. No examples were offered in this study of executives or chairs playing golf together, visiting strip clubs, or socialising in single-sex private members' clubs, all of which exclude women, intentionally or unintentionally. The training courses were seldom residential, with one notable exception which is included in the later section on childcare responsibilities.

That is not to say that combining caring responsibilities with non-residential network activities, even in the day-time, was easy for everyone, as one Executive Woman vividly described:

"One daughter's sports day clashed with a massive opening of a massive project one afternoon we were doing it and I remember running up the school path, nearly weeping and missing the very race she'd been running in because I had to get to the other thing." (EW18).

Other opportunities to meet and build professional networks seem to come from organisations within the arts sector working together on projects. As one man who is both a Chief Executive of one arts organisation and Chair of another, described his network building and maintenance:

"I wouldn't say I do it consciously, it's more through my work and it's to do with the work itself is basically about doing things with people […] it's usually through the programmes, the projects, conversations and being invited to be part of other things." (EMCM01).

As well as working on specific projects, two executives described joining sector-wide steering groups or committees as another way of forming and maintaining professional

networks – the man doing this quite deliberately as a networking strategy, while the woman seeing a side benefit of building her personal network through this method as another way of proving her worth to organisations:

"this was a sort of tactic I agreed with my first Chair […] I've deliberately joined a lot of committees, advisory group steering groups over the years initially as a way of trying to build some connections." (EM04);

"at a certain point, you know, reputation becomes part of the selection process […] how well plugged in is somebody as well because that serves the organisation" (EW07).

Other work-based activities that led to network formation and relationship maintenance included joining formal industry networks or organisations – such as the Independent Theatre Council, Society of London Theatres, or the Contemporary Visual Arts Network – where membership was based on organisational role rather than interpersonal relationships. These formalised networks are generally created to offer opportunities to share ideas and operational level advice amongst members, as well as formally lobbying funders or policy makers on arts sector issues, particularly during the recent Covid-19 lockdown. While few interviewees named conferences and training courses as key to their network formation and maintenance, there were notable examples of career-long bonds being formed at early career events, such as the annual Arts Marketing Association conference or – more frequently cited – the Clore Duffield Foundation's cultural leadership programme, the Clore Leadership programme, which is explored in some more detail below.

Beyond the work-based activities, such as opening nights, collaborative project groups or formal training or conferences, other networking activities seem to revolve around informal drinks, coffees, meals and (latterly, due to the Covid-19 lockdown) Zoom conference

calls. The nature of the drinks, coffees or lunches seem to come out of the need and desire to share sector and business information – a practice that, notably, is not prohibited within the sector and indeed is expected by more funders, such as local authorities who want to ensure arts organisations in their area are providing best value for money in return for public investment. These informal interactions seem to be a source of regular peer support and advice, from whence social friendships often develop alongside professional co-operation.

Contrary to the problems of perceived or actual exploitation or inappropriate behaviour between senior men and more junior women in semi-social, informal networking activities (Oakley, 2000; van den Brink & Benschop, 2014), no-one in this study expressed any concerns about taking part in such activities with different gender colleagues. Many described examples of men and women initiating and engaging in these kinds of semi-social activities equally comfortably. While one Executive Woman described interacting with one particular man cautiously and only ever in public, having been warned about predatory behaviour from other women in the sector, she did not seem to have experienced his presence at some events as a reason not to attend or engage fully with others at the same networking activity.

It is difficult to pinpoint any causation between inclusive networking events and non-homophilous network formations since the nature of the events may be shaped by the nature of the network rather than the other way around. Further accounts of networking formation, maintenance and motivations were therefore sought, and brought together below to paint a more detailed picture of what seems to make the UK arts sector's networking patterns so different from other sectors' more homophilous networking.

Sexuality

In offering their explanations of why men and women network together more readily and (in terms of career progression) more productively than found elsewhere, another distinct theme came through. Enough examples were shared to indicate that an openness about sexuality, particularly male homosexuality, within the sector may be making an important contribution to a non-homophilous networking culture between executives, and those on their way to becoming executives. Where men included women in their strategic network some, but not all, of those men also described themselves as gay. Some of the women who included men in their strategic network noted that some, but not all, of those men were gay, although one did reflect that:

"my networking with men I think includes a disproportionately large number of gay men". (EW16)

Sexuality was raised in the interviews by some as a way of explaining why men and women felt comfortable mixing with each other professionally in this sector. A number of women, in various roles, explained that the presence of openly gay men in the sector meant there was no social taboo if a man and woman were seen together in an informal setting, such as an opening night party, since it was less likely that there was anything other than a professional or friendship relationship was being formed. Their interpretation was that it also meant that their contact with the gay men in their network was unlikely to be misinterpreted as sexual interest by the men. None of the interviewees expressed a view on whether the presence of openly gay women in the sector had a similar effect.

Apart from the issue of other people's perceptions, one Executive Man with a predominantly female professional network shared an additional insight into why he

personally networked with more women than men. He placed the origins for this preference to build networks with women rather than men as far back as his schooldays:

"I'm gay and I suppose, I mean, I don't think that's particularly, I've never known that to be a problem in the arts. It's probably one of the reasons why I am less inclined to build personal relationships and networks with men, actually, because I think if you if you go to school gay you know girls tend to be more mature and kind". (EM06).

Six of the 12 Executive Men interviewed in this study were gay, but only one of them shared this interpretation of his preference for building a non-homophilous network. This example is presented, therefore, not as an experience or motivation that was common to all, but as an additional insight into why this sector is one where the pattern of non-homophilous networking seems to be common practice.

The women in the study who defined themselves as gay or lesbian did not necessarily make the link between their sexuality and their non-homophilous networks. One Executive woman did, however, describe a very real shift around attitudes in the sector towards being out as a lesbian. She described one experience near the start of her executive career where she was told quite openly by a member of an executive appointment panel that her sexuality was seen as "a skeleton", in the panel member's words, that the panel should be wary of, and which was discussed and considered as a factor before her appointment was made. In her most recent executive appointment, however, when she mentioned her sexuality at the start of a recruitment process – in case this selection panel also needed to consider the risks of hiring a lesbian – the information was of no interest at all to the headhunter involved, and (she learned after the fact) was not discussed by anyone else before her appointment to that role.

All of this indicates at the very least that the arts sector is one in which openly gay women and men reach executive level. That this inclusive environment is described by so many in this study suggests that the liberal attitudes identified by McAndrew et al (2020) across the cultural and creative industries are indeed experienced by those who are open about being a gay man or woman while progressing to executive level in the arts sector. Based on the examples shared above, this recognition and acceptance of the presence of gay men and lesbian women across the sector seems to have played a part in creating a working culture across the sector which supports non-homophilous networks as less problematic, and therefore more likely, than in other sectors.

Clore Leadership programme

The Clore Leadership programme was described as an influential organisation within the sector, and came up as a factor in some of the non-homophilous networking activities experienced by interviewees in this study.

The Clore Leadership programme is a series of courses aimed at early to mid-career arts and creative sector managers (or those with potential to manage), which started in 2003. It is funded by the Clore Duffield Foundation under the direction of Dame Vivien Duffield, to address the skills gap identified and articulated by a commissioned working group as the inability to apply relational leadership approaches that best serve non-profit-making, values-led organisations (Hewison, 2004). The Clore Leadership programme includes year-long Fellowships, awarded to approximately 20 people per year since 2004 based on a competitive selection process, and short courses lasting one to two weeks, for emerging leaders and leaders with five or more years experience. The Clore Fellow programme lasts around a year, and includes residential training workshops, access to coaching and mentoring, a research

budget, and a six-week management-level placement in an arts organisation. Fellows and former participants of shorter courses then join an ongoing network, with regular newsletters and alumni events. As one Executive Man put it, "the Clore was another amazing network […] as a group we meet up every few years" (EM10). One Chair woman, who had previously been an Executive Woman as well, noted that it was not the course content that helped her progress her career, but the opportunity to make connections with peers outside her organisation that led to career advancement: "I'm on record as crediting Clore a lot for the second half of my career. Not so much because Clore taught me stuff but more to do with that network opening up actually" (CW02).

Despite Clore being mentioned frequently as an active network within the arts sector, only 12 of the 63 participants in this study had completed any kind of Clore course – two men and ten women. Only one of those men and eight of the women were now executives. This suggests that being excluded from the Clore network did not preclude others from reaching executive level within the sector, but the programme maintains a high profile across the sector and is – perhaps mistakenly – credited with advancing the careers of many current and former executives.

Those who mentioned Clore, but who had not participated in any of its courses, could be split into two groups, based on their opinion of the programme's role in the sector. The first group were generally positive about the programme but said they could not have afforded the time or money to participate, or for whom the programme was created too late in their career for them to be considered in the selection process. This group included men and women, which suggests that Clore was attractive to both men and women, with both genders experiencing practical barriers to attending.

The second group described a negative perception of the exclusivity of the Clore network, in terms of race and class in particular, but not in terms of gender. One executive woman (EW28) described the Clore as providing a 'badge' to alumni that made them feel entitled and behave in ways that excluded non-Clore alumni. One man ascribed some of the progress in female leadership to Clore's alumni body being largely female, but his main point about the programme was a criticism that it was detrimental to wider leadership diversity in the sector:

"what Clore really is about, I mean, this is a huge generalization […] it's about creating those peer networks that support one another to get through it and actually becoming powerful and believing that you're powerful. And I have a lot of problems with that, and I have a lot of problems with the diversity on Clore […] those people, once you're part of that cabal you're part of it for life and it's problematic, I think. It's elitist." (EMCM01).

An insider's view of the 'cabal' was described vividly by one Executive woman:

"I feel like the Clore fellowship is a form of social engineering because it just does strip you down, lay you bare, puts you back together. It really interrogates, there's a self-interrogation that happens about your own values and leading in a way that is true to who you are. Everybody cries, you know, so I feel like because of that experience there is something really special about that network." (EW30).

That same Executive described the practical help she still gets from the close network formed with other Fellows in her cohort – men and women – and from one of the speakers. She described her cohort being encouraged to share their CVs with this speaker, and the speaker going on to be a source of information about executive opportunities in the years since:

"Clore has this badge, it has this reputation that people who do Clore go on to do amazing things and it certainly was that for me. I mean, it was transformative. And [the speaker] was in touch with me over the years for other roles, which I wasn't interested in, and this is the one where I said, well, yeah." (EW30).

Despite the advantage that women interviewed in this project who had attended Clore ascribed to its network, there was no indication that the programme had set out to increase the number of women executives in the sector. Indeed, one interviewee with first-hand knowledge of the Clore Leadership programme surmised that addressing gender would definitely not have been part of the initial objectives. She did think that the early Directors, if not the funder, may have been interested in addressing the imbalance of men and women at the top of arts organisation hierarchies, but only as part of wider inequalities which remain. She added that she also thinks that the early Directors would have been discouraged from singling out women's under-representation as a particular focus for the programme:

"I think the main funder at the time, Vivien Duffield, was not remotely interested in women and bringing women on. And probably doesn't think that women deserve any special treatment or any kind of encouragement. I think Chris Smith, who was the Director at the time [the programme started] and Sue Hoyle, who was the Assistant Director at the time, were both interested in not only bringing women on, but bringing other underrepresented groups on. I think their network was better in terms of women than it was in terms of other groups of protected characteristics." (CW02).

While the Clore Leadership's current values are described as Excellence, Inclusivity and Learning (Clore Leadership, 2022a), the earliest versions of this leadership programme were focussed on developing leadership skills and a clearer career pathway for arts executives

but did not focus specifically on changing the demographics of the sector's leadership. That said, all but the earliest Clore participants interviewed in this study said that the majority of their cohort were women. Based on the pronouns used in individual descriptions or related social network sites, the Clore Leaders network as of May 2022 (Clore Leadership, 2022b) was made up of 320 people, a combination of Fellows and shorter course alumni, with 241 women, 77 men, and 2 non-binary members.

This large proportion of women Clore alumni may not have been a deliberate aim of the programme, but the proportions of women in this network, and the accounts shared above, suggest that more women than men are gaining whatever benefits the Clore alumni network can offer. It is also another example of inter-organisational, cross-sector networking opportunities, based on professional roles, and at the very least forms part of the ecology where forming and maintaining non-homophilous networks between men and women has become an accessible and normal practice.

Educational backgrounds

Another difference noted between the arts sector's network patterns and other sectors can be found in the interviewees' backgrounds, as symbolised in this instance by their educational backgrounds. Bushell et al (2020) found that some roots of homophilous professional networks may stretch back to university days, while others found that executive networks stretched back as far as private and therefore, because of the British private school system's traditions and history, usually single-sex schools (Linehan & Walsh, 2001; McDonald, Lin & Ao, 2009).

In this study, however, the majority of the executives interviewed went to state schools – 71% of the 34 women, and 85% of the 13 men. While there are single sex schools

in the UK state school system, the majority are mixed gender, or coeducational – about 90% in the 1990s (Spielhofer, O'Donnell, Benton, Schagen & Schagen, 2002). Just under half of each group (47% of the women, 46% of the men) went to single sex schools. Only one executive, however, included former school friends in her professional network. This suggests that private schooling and/or single sex schooling does not play a large part in subsequent professional networking. Nor, however, did university connections play as large a part as it did in Bushell et al's (2020) study, with only one Executive maintaining professional connections with university contacts that she credited with playing any part in her career progression.

Networking summary

The question this chapter set out to address was: Do men's and women's networks within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector follow the homophilous patterns that the literature leads us to expect, and if not, how has this happened? The findings outlined above all indicate that the UK publicly subsidised arts sector does not follow the homophilous patterns described elsewhere in the literature. Such non-homophilous networking is not only commonplace within the arts sector, but access to the networking activities within the sector are often based on professional roles rather than personal contacts, meaning that as many women as men are invited, and often free to attend, meaning that workers on all salary levels can often join. The examples of men mentoring women, and senior women sponsoring other women in ways that lead to career advancement were shared frequently enough to indicate that this non-homophilous mentorship is commonplace too. This also diverges from the patterns found elsewhere. The combination of non-gender exclusive networking events, inter-organisational collaboration opportunities and the acknowledgement and acceptance

of homosexuality as an openly shared identity within the workforce, all play a part in explaining how this different way of networking has happened. Add to this the consideration that the majority of those interviewed did not come from a private school, single-sex schooling background, and a potential route for other sectors to follow starts to be revealed. Opportunities to form trusted and ongoing professional relationships with peers across the sector seem to arise out of inter-organisational collaboration and development, and informal, free to enter industry events. Added to this is a sector-wide working culture that seems to recognise that men and women can interact professionally without an assumption of sexual attraction. This combination seems to play a large part in avoiding the homophilous network trap faced by women in the other sectors studied to date. Furthermore, a workforce that is not dominated by networks already fixed from private schooldays onwards may point to another of the multiple reasons why such non-homophilous networks can exist in this sector but are not found elsewhere.

Since the examples of supportive male managers date back decades, this may not alone explain why the sector only achieved gender parity at executive level relatively recently. Opening nights and launch events have been part of the sector's ecology even when it was predominantly led by men, and there are examples of openly gay men in the sector pre-dating the shift to 50/50 men and women. This suggests that non-homophilous networks cannot be the sole key to achieving gender parity at executive level by 2018. While the launch of the Clore Leadership programme in 2003 could have been a point in time that marked a change for the sector, the low proportion of executives interviewed in this study who had completed any sort of Clore course casts doubt on the sector-wide influence that Clore may have had on executive gender parity at executive level by 2018.

The significance of the unexpected non-homophilous network patterns, and the reasons leading to these patterns, in achieving gender parity can only be assessed alongside an understanding of the role that these networks play in executive appointment processes. The following chapter therefore considers the sector's executive appointment processes in detail, addressing the questions of whether networks are relied on within UK arts executive appointment processes, and if so, why this has not held women in the network trap identified elsewhere, and whether gender parity has come about through UK publicly subsidised arts organisations relying on formal recruitment and selection methods in their executive appointment processes over and above any parallel informal processes.

Chapter Five: Appointment processes in the UK arts sector

Introduction

As elaborated in Chapter Four, the networks described in this study follow an unexpectedly non-homophilous pattern, with women sourcing strategic support from men as well as women to the extent that has not been observed elsewhere. While part of the definition of a strategic network is one which provides instrumental support in career progression (Ibarra, 1992), the link between networks and executive appointments cannot be established without also understanding the executive appointment processes within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. Bushell et al (2020) demonstrated that network information is central to shortlisting and selection decisions within executive appointment processes, and the homophily of men's instrumental networks that these appointment processes relied on, therefore held women back. Establishing that instrumental networks in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector are non-homophilous is therefore only part of the answer to how the sector may have reached gender parity at executive level. If these networks play no part in appointment processes in this sector, then whether they are homophilous or non-homophilous may be irrelevant.

This chapter therefore shares the findings that address the second and third research sub-questions outlined in Chapter Two, which move from the subject of network patterns to what processes are followed within the sector under study. These questions ask what specific role networks play within UK arts executive appointment processes, and whether gender parity has come about through UK PSAOs relying on formal selection methods in their executive appointment processes over and above any parallel informal processes. Finding that the sector uses i) open advertising, ii) structured, skills-based shortlisting methods and

iii) a head-hunting approach only very infrequently, the chapter argues that to the extent networks feed into the appointment decision-making process, this is for informational purposes only. In particular, this information-centred network process operates in parallel to formal application processes, and involves circulating publicly available job vacancy information, encouraging network peers to apply, and validating a candidate's industry reputation via references once a candidate is shortlisted. That said, the size of the sector, and the nature of the public-facing artistic output seems to lead to more externally visible profiles for executives within the UK arts sector as a whole, particularly Artistic Directors and gallery Directors, meaning that executive applicants and candidates may not always be personally known to members of shortlisting or appointment panels via their networks, but their body of work and/or organisational output will be well known. Thus, reputation within the sector is often commonly known to shortlisters and appointers without having to be a member of a particular network. This reputation is also seen as one of the factors being measured within a skills-based shortlisting exercise, where positive reputations are seen as a factor in gaining funding and producing high quality artistic output from within well run organisations. The concluding argument in this chapter therefore is that networks play a part, but are not solely relied on, within otherwise formal recruitment and selection processes. I also suggest that the reasons for this approach, as opposed to the discrete, headhunter-led approaches used for executive appointments found elsewhere, is an appetite within the sector to achieve equality and diversity in its workforce and oversight from arts council funders that expect regularly funded organisations to report regularly on their workforce diversity statistics.

What follows is an analysis of the combined perspectives of the interviewees, all of whom had past and present experience of appointing or applying to executive roles within the UK arts sector. The findings move through a description of the appointment processes,

noting the differences and similarities to each other's accounts and making connections to the literature to date.

Formal recruitment and selection methods

Open advertising

The recruitment and selection processes described by executives and Chairs were almost without exception formal, starting with open advertising (i.e. naming the recruiting organisation), then shortlisting against agreed criteria, and assessing candidates via interview, task-based tests and presentations. The exceptions are noted at the end of the chapter.

The most commonly cited platform for seeing executive vacancies advertised, from as far back as people could remember up until the present day, was the Guardian newspaper. This was closely followed by the arts-focussed trade publication, Arts Professional, which is a paid-for online publication, and ArtsJobs.org, which is Arts Council England's job posting platform. The first two publications - Guardian and Arts Professional – charge recruiters to post adverts, but ArtsJobs.org is free. These titles all list adverts on their websites, and all run free email subscriptions and job alerts for job-hunters and anyone else interested in tracking vacancies within the sector.

More recently, posts on social media platforms LinkedIn and twitter were named by some executives as the route by which they first heard about a position. These posts were either recruitment posts from the recruiting organisation, from individuals who worked within the organisation, or reposts from related organisations or individuals.

The issue of reputation, or perception across organisational and personal peers, was also offered as an explanation for the wide use of open advertising. While some interviewees pointed to historical examples of new executives seeming to appear in organisations without

any vacancy having been advertised, they voiced strong disapproval of such appointments, saying that that would not happen anymore. Two executives in separate parts of the arts sector, who were about thirty years into their career when interviewed for this study, could remember examples of executive appointment processes near the beginning of their career where the outgoing executive had simply identified their successor and appointed them with no application or interview process. One of these executives, describing such a process as appointments being made "on a nod and wink" (CW02), said that there was no way this would happen anymore. Indeed, no-one offered any recent appointments where at least one open advert had not been used. As one executive woman put it,

"it is less acceptable just to appoint people into jobs without advertising them, certainly not in the not for profit bit of our sector […] Because the money has got scarcer, the processes have got tighter, so it can't just be done in this slightly old boys' network-y kind of way anymore, it doesn't work." (EW02)

Restricted budgets may partly explain the majority of PSAOs using open advertising instead of headhunters' executive search services which are widespread for executive appointment processes in sectors with larger available budgets, such as the FTSE corporations in Bushell et al's 2020 study. This study identified the use of some apparently formal processes, such as designing person specifications and running interviews and presentation tests with candidates, but found that the person specifications were often put aside when it came to the final decisions. There was instead a strong reliance on network recommendations and sponsorship in FTSE 350 companies when it came to identifying candidates and making selection decisions, with women missing out on appointments because of their exclusion from men's homophilous instrumental networks. This supports

Jewson & Mason's (1986) argument that open, formal processes can be a cover for informal processes happening behind the scenes, protecting the power of the dominant group (Jewson & Mason, 1986). The examples shared by the PSAO Chairs, headhunters and HR manager, however, consistently indicated that the open, formal processes apparent in this sector genuinely inform final appointment decisions.

The use of open advertising in every executive appointment may lead to more working hours needed to handle and screen applications in-house, but the cash outlay is much lower than using executive search services; the prohibitive cost of using headhunters was explicitly spelled out by interviewees, and is explored in more detail below. For PSAOs who have volunteer Trustees willing to provide their time for free during the appointment process, and organisations without large enough budgets to pay a fee to a headhunter, open advertising seems to make financial sense. The appearance of openness and transparency in using such adverts, in terms of vacancies becoming available, describing appointment processes, identifying starting salaries, and sharing application packs with role descriptions and person specifications to any interested party, may therefore be led by financial restrictions as much as a desire to make the process accessible to as many candidates as possible. The open advertising of starting salaries was not always the case – while executive level vacancies advertised publicly between 2015 – 2018 all included salary details, between a half to a third of such advertised vacancies between 2008 – 2014 either described salary as 'competitive', 'subject to experience' or did not specify them at all.

While most interviewees described open advertising as 'public' advertising, and a way to spread the word to unknown potential applicants, one interviewee made the point that even using apparently public platforms, such as the Guardian, Arts Professional or Arts Council

jobs boards, still excluded those who were not aware that these were the industry platforms for such openings. He argued that arts organisations should not fool themselves that using these platforms meant that they would attract any applicants other than those already embedded in the arts sector. As a result, the arts sector was still missing out on executives with transferrable skills who could learn about the arts sector relatively quickly if only they knew of the career options within it:

"When we say publicly advertised role, who are the people who know that roles like this exist, that the organisations exist, who knows that?" (CM03).

Despite this, interviewees saw the use of open advertising as the best way to find the best person for a job, particularly when it came to diversifying the workforce – an issue at the top of many people's minds since this research data was collected in 2021/22, with most interviews taking place within one year of the Black Lives Matter movement gaining global visibility. Since the sector reached gender parity at executive level around 2018, Black Lives Matter seems to have informed the way that interviewees framed their answers and reflections around diversity, rather than influenced original motivations to address the issue of inequalities at executive level.   The earlier intent may well be rooted in the sector-wide liberal attitudes towards social justice identified by Conor et al (2015) and Tutchell & Edmonds (2015), indicating that a genuine desire to achieve equality is as much of a driver to move away from reliance on personal connections, and to use open advertising instead.

Applications and short-listing based on structured person specifications

Apart from open advertising, other formal recruitment processes were described by most interviewees, including headhunters.   These involved carefully constructed job descriptions with person specifications, increasingly produced as part of an application pack

that emphasised an organisation's vision, mission and working culture. In response, executives described sending a CV with cover letter, responding to the job description and person specification, although one process that was live at the time of interviews invited applicants to submit a letter or a video recording of themselves instead. That recruitment was for an Artistic Director/Chief Executive of a dance company, and the intention was to make the process more accessible to neuro-diverse applicants, based on that recruiter's understanding that creative professionals are more likely to be neuro-diverse than the rest of the population. While there is some indication that neurodiversity, specifically dyslexia, is reported across students of art and design subjects in higher education at a higher level than the rest of the population (Wolff & Lundberg, 2002; Bacon & Bennett, 2013), no studies were found replicating this among creative professionals such as performing arts directors. However, this dance company's approach to recruiting a new executive level position incorporated, in at least part, this "common belief that dyslexia is often connected with creativity or artistic talents" (Wolff & Lundberg, 2002, p.34). While this was not related particularly to gender, it is taken nonetheless as an indication that appointers within PSAOs are actively seeking practical ways to make their recruitment processes more accessible.

Once applications were received, the short-listing processes described by interviewees included a panel, comprised of a sub-section of the appointing organisation's board of Trustees, scoring against an agreed set of criteria included in the publicly available application pack. These criteria, in the form of a person specification within a job description, was described by the Chairs, Trustees and Headhunters interviewed as coming out of multiple considered conversations within the Board before any vacancy was advertised. The members of the shortlisting panel then scored applications separately against the agreed criteria, and then met together (in person or virtually) to agree the shortlist to interviews:

"We followed that […] process when we recruited at [a theatre] in terms of having particular areas each of us would ask about which fitted in with the job description and the person specification and were designed to test areas which the trustees specifically might be able to judge, and then marking them and then quietly each of us reaching a view on those marks and then sharing the view." (CM01).

When prompted to reflect on when and why such formalised processed started to appear, the most common explanation offered was implied funder expectations that executive candidates would be measured and tested against a publicised set of leadership skills. It was also apparent that funders themselves – notably Arts Council England (ACE) – reserved the right to sit on interview panels, albeit as observers rather than decision-makers, though that seemed to rarely happen in practice. One Chair noted that her organisation's ACE point of contact could have observed the interviews but chose not to. Few executive candidates recalled any arts council representatives on their interview panels. One interviewee who had worked for ACE for a large part of her career said that in that time she had sat on executive interviews panels only "a couple of odd times" (EWCW02). In her experience, she did not have a vote on the appointment decision. While she joined decision-making conversations that sometimes got heated over panellists' preferred candidates, "usually process [won] out" (ibid) and the panel went back to the person specification and scoring. Another interviewee who observed a few interview panels in her time at ACE recalled similarly formal processes but did describe making what she called a very persuasive argument towards one candidate over another, based on her judgement of a preferred candidate's ability to do the job well, such that the interview panel changed their decision to match, even though she was officially there only as an observer. One Headhunter's description of providing support during interviews was specific about her role in the post-

interview deliberations, which was to keep the panellists focussed on the agreed person specification.

One Chair cited an Arts Council England requirement to use scoring against a person specification when short-listing, but no-one could offer an explicit requirement or proscribed interview format to follow from funders. Certainly all the Chairs interviewed described, one way or another, an understanding that their primary funder could ask to examine the recruitment and selection processes. This was noted as one of the reasons for them to start using more formal scoring systems and structured interview frameworks. There was some acknowledgement of anonymous, or 'blind', short-listing practices. These practices were described by those who mentioned them as attempts to remove unconscious bias concerning gender, age and potentially nationality or race by removing applicant names and education history from applications before a shortlisting panel reviewed them so that such categories did not play a part, consciously or unconsciously, in the shortlisting decision. None of the interviewees who acknowledged these practices pointed towards the origin of this approach.

Based on their descriptions of blind shortlisting, the processes seem close to those identified by Foley & Williamson (2018) as useful for externally signalling a commitment to fair recruitment practices, but ineffective when it comes to increasing the number of women appointed. This is because of the tendency for recruiting managers to still infer applicant gender using "implicit signals" (ibid, p. 628) such as career breaks that could be maternity leave, or applicant language that they interpret as one gender or another. There were not enough examples of this approach in practice within the interviewees to indicate if using anonymous shortlisting would lead to the same disadvantage to women found in Foley & Williamson's 2018 study. Only one Chief Executive interviewed had used this method to

recruit a new Executive Director, on the suggestion of her Chair. All three (Chief Executive, Chair, and Executive Director) were women of colour.

Education and training qualifications

None of the interviewees, Chairs included, suggested that educational qualifications or formal training were formal requirements for executive candidates. Women and men reported similar levels of education, and very few have any management qualifications or indeed training. Indeed, a few of the women had left school at 16 or 18, and not all had university degrees at the time of their first executive appointment, although some went on to gain a degree once in post. One man reported having no post-16 qualifications.

Nonetheless, all but one of the executives held at least a Bachelor's level degree, although three of those degrees were gained once the interviewees were already well-established in their careers. Two executives – one woman and one man - reported leaving school without A-levels, with only the woman going on later in life to earn a Bachelor's degree.

A third of the executives interviewed went on to gain a Master's level degree - 29% of the women and 31% of the men – with the majority gaining a MA, and one man and one woman holding more than one MA. One executive man had undertaken an MBA, but with the exception of one accounting & law undergraduate degree, no-one else had taken any business-related subjects at Bachelor's or Master's level. None of those interviewed who had played a part in appointment decisions included a degree subject, or even a degree in and of itself, as a requirement for executive candidates. Despite this, the expectation that executives hold a degree seems common enough for two of the women without degrees at the start of their careers to have encountered surprise and disapproval when others learned they had not attended university. One of those women went on to gain a degree relatively late in her

career, not as a way of studying leadership or management skills in an academic setting since she chose a humanities subject, but as a response to this surprise and disapproval.

Based on the surprise encountered by those executives without degrees, and the 98% of executives interviewed who had a Bachelor's degree, it is argued that it is not the knowledge gained within a university education that seems to inform shortlisting decisions. Instead, the mere expectation of attendance could be one way of an organisation assessing acceptability or 'fit' (Jewson & Mason, 1986). However, since the same proportion of women and men in this study had degrees, this assessment does not seem to have disadvantaged women in particular. Nor does the university attended seem to have presented a barrier to women in this study, even when it comes to the normally over-represented graduates from Oxford or Cambridge (i.e. 'Oxbridge') found in leadership positions elsewhere, for examples in politics, senior civil service, journalism, law and the FTSE 100 (Kirby, 2016; Montacute & Cullinane, 2018). Of the 98% of the executives interviewed who had gained a Bachelor's degree, an average of 19% graduated from Oxbridge - 18% of the women and 23% of the men. Which university a candidate attended was not mentioned by any Chair or headhunter as a factor in any appointment decision, although two Executive Women thought that their Oxbridge degrees had put some of their interview panel members at ease in ways that they suspected may not have been the case if they had gained their degree from elsewhere. They could not recall any overt conversations about this, except for one informal discussion with a Trustee over coffee, after an offer of employment had been made, where the Trustee seemed interested, but not surprised, that the candidate had attended the same Oxbridge college as one of his family members. This suggests that the Trustee had already known which college the successful candidate had attended. Whether or not Oxbridge was a factor at any stage in this particular PSAO's appointment process cannot be known, but with less than 1% of the UK

population holding an Oxbridge degree (Kirby, 2016) the over-representation of graduates from two of the UK's Oxbridge graduates within the group of Executives interviewed, compared the wider population, suggests some advantage within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. It does indicate, however, that Oxbridge is less of an advantage than in other sectors such as journalism, the senior civil service and FTSE 100 where 54%, 51% and 31% of chief executives are Oxbridge graduates (ibid).

Accepting that there may still be some potential advantage to Oxbridge graduates in gaining executive positions in a PSAO, this study did not find that this privilege was a particular barrier to women compared to men. The other potential advantage of having a Master's level degree – with a third of executives interviewed holding that level – again did not seem to disadvantage women compared to men.

That is not to say, however, that the clear expectation of holding a Bachelor's level degree, and the potential advantage of holding a Masters level degree or having attended Oxbridge, does not present a barrier beyond gender. The implications of the expectations around education in maintaining other inequalities at executive level are discussed further in the next chapter, in the section on intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class.

Interview processes

Some executives described meeting the wider team members during the various interview stages, or having coffees or meals with key Trustees or executives which felt like another interview despite the social setting. Before these informal coffees or dinners took place, however, in the examples shared there were usually two to three formal panel interviews, requiring a presentation from the candidate. Executives all mentioned that recent interview panels had included men and women. In contrast, two women with at least twenty

years' experience at executive level noted that their earliest executive appointments had included either an interview with just one man, or with an all-male interview panel. As these Executive Women explained:

"I've been around a very long time, so it was very different when I first started out. And you maybe have one person interviewing you and in my case it was often a male." (EW11)

"In the early 2000s […] I was interviewed by about seven people, and I recall them, they were all men [...] It was one interview." (EW01).

Their interpretation of the change towards mixed gender interview panels was that the sector had become more vocally critical of all-male panels, both in industry conferences and in appointment processes, within the last decade. None of the Chairs or headhunters mentioned a specifically articulated policy stipulating mixed gender panels, but they acknowledged increasing interest from arts councils around the diversity of PSAO boards. This funder oversight as a driver towards such shifts is explored in the funder oversight section below.

Further short-listing after early interviews also included some scoring, based on interview answers or presentation delivery, but the conversations within interview panels then start to include the more subjective topic of 'fit'. In some of the examples shared by executives, some of their presentations during the selection process were to staff beyond the selection panel. Some executives thought this practice odd, while others found it useful in gaining insight into the organisation by using this as an opportunity to have a two-way conversation with staff. While this seemed to give a chance to the few executives who described such a process to consider how well the organisation would fit their career goals, there was nothing to suggest that feedback from staff beyond the selection panel was part of

the organisation's assessment of the candidate. None of the Chairs in this study described considering employee feedback, but only mentioned that first or second interviews included a structured presentation from the candidate to a selection panel.

Another common example shared by executives and Chairs which suggests an assessment of 'fit', with others within an organisation was using a more informal discussion, after the first or final interviews, while sharing coffees or dinner with a Chair, Treasurer, or co-Chief Executive. One Chair woman, also an Executive herself, described a process echoed by others where 'fit' was not always defined as similarity to executive being replaced. Instead, these decisions can sometimes be as much about recruiting an executive that is deliberately dissimilar to the previous incumbent as it can be about replacing like for like. Other Chairs described using these informal interactions just as a way of getting to know how a candidate behaves outside formal situations, since they saw creating instant rapport in informal interactions as part of an executive's job. The executives who described going through such a process, however, were not told what role the coffee or dinner would play in the final decision, but approached it as an interview in all but name. One woman executive also described being invited to coffee with a Trustee who had not been part of the original interview panels, after a written offer had been sent to her – she was never sure what would have happened to that formal offer if the coffee meeting had gone badly. Overall, executives who had had these semi-social interactions at any stage in the appointment process interpreted them as a test of interpersonal rapport that had to be passed before any appointment was confirmed.

Thus, the decision around 'fit' before making or confirming an offer of employment seems to rest predominantly with a selection panel, led by a Chair. However, there is also

some assessment from the candidates themselves on 'fit' in the other direction - whether they thought the recruiting organisation was a good fit for them as an employer. One executive, a woman, described a process of reaching the second round of interviews, by which point it became clear to her that the Chair she would be reporting to was not the kind of person she wanted to work with or for, and she withdrew her application.

Headhunter as administrative support rather than search and selection

Bushell et al (2020) found that the widespread use of headhunters, who researched and put forward executive candidates for roles that were not openly advertised based on their own and their clients' networks, played a large part in disadvantaging women reaching executive positions. In contrast, headhunters seem to be seldom used across the examples shared in this research, with high costs being the main barrier, with fees ranging from £10,000 (EW11) to £30,000 (CM01). Where headhunters were used, it was always alongside open advertising so their services were described more as administrative support for an organisation with very limited internal human resource capacity or experience, rather than 'search' services. Recruitment consultants or recruitment agencies are used to answer early enquiries, send out application packs (where they are not freely available via the recruiter's website), make interview arrangements and occasionally sit in on the interviews.

For example, one Executive woman pointed out that using external support – which she referred to variously as a headhunter and a recruitment consultant – in an Artistic Director recruitment would be used not to extend the organisation's network. Instead, it was for administrative support, but also to encourage people to apply who had been nominated by the Board so that the Board member would not have to make the direct contact themselves.

In this case, the recruiting organisation also used an additional external advisor to help design the role description and interview process:

"[we are using a formal headhunter] partly because it would just help the administration of it so that it doesn't all fall to me […] the idea is that if someone is recommending somebody we will say, can you ask them if they'll take a call from the recruitment consultant? So it'll be all done through them to try and create that bit of a buffer […] They may well have people that they want to encourage as well, but I'm fairly confident that between the Artistic Director, the board and the external advisor's networks probably we'll be able to reach a fairly wide pool of potential candidates without the headhunter." (EW06).

The Chair who used headhunters most frequently described using their administrative support more than their networks, with the fees for a full search being prohibitive and the arts sector frowning upon using channels other than public advertising. He summed up the difference between corporate headhunter services and arts sector recruitment support thus:

"the whole essence [in corporate executive recruitment] is that this isn't in the public domain, it's being done very privately, whereas the arts world it's on the other foot. You're generally doing this very publicly because someone has left, you're not doing it in the expectation you're going to fire them. And that means you do it publicly and proactively, and the role of the headhunter is a service function rather than a creative function." (CM01).

One Headhunter interviewed for this project gave examples that support this description. This involved doing extensive work on preparing and Artistic Director job description, person specification and application pack with the recruiting Board and Executive Director, processing applications that came from open advertising, and reminding the

shortlisting panel of the scoring criteria during its decision-making. She described her role as a mixture of designing an accessible process, and keeping the selection panel to that process:

"So you say what you're looking for and then you say how you apply and you say how you're going to assess it, and then you do that." (HW01).

She also described guiding the selection panel towards its final selection decision by reminding them vigorously of the pre-agreed selection criteria and salary budget and urging them not to be distracted by the public profile of the final candidates. This same headhunter, however, was also asked by the Board to solicit only one application alongside the open advertising, and it was this applicant who ended up being appointed. It is, however, impossible to tell if that candidate would have seen the advert and applied anyway. Based on his career history and the people he had worked with up until the role was advertised, it seems extremely unlikely he would not have heard about the vacancy and put his hat into the ring.

All four of the headhunters interviewed described providing administrative style services to clients. This involved having conversations with potential applicants early on in the process to explain more about the role and the organisation, but not to discourage or encourage these callers to apply. This type of approach to recruitment support – as opposed to the more search-based headhunting in sectors that do not openly advertise their vacancies – was one reason why one Headhunter said that she did not call herself a 'headhunter' at all, although that is how clients in the arts sector would refer to her. The fourth headhunter also did not describe himself as a headhunter, but as an arts consultant who works with arts organisations to design or change roles, and then sometimes to support the recruitment processes used to fill those roles.

Use of networks within appointment processes

That said, the infrequent use of headhunters for executive search and selection in the sector should not be taken to mean that networks are not relied on at all. Nor are the formal processes outlined a basis from which to argue that network connections are irrelevant. Rather, it seems that networks play a part in two ways. The first is in sharing details of advertised vacancies between network connections to make members aware of a vacancy and as a way of potential applicants finding out more about the recruiting organisation. The second is for appointers to gather industry opinions of candidates alongside formal reference requests, not as part of any early shortlisting processes but usually after a final appointment decision had been made.

For example, some executives described having emails from contacts with links to online adverts – whether press or social media adverts – asking if they had seen the opportunity. Most of these contacts were not from headhunters or from within the appointing organisation; the few exceptions were where executives described being approached by headhunters or HR consultants working on behalf of the recruiter only to alert them to an advertised vacancy and encourage them to apply through the same formal channels as other applicants. Some Chairs described they and their fellow Trustees emailing details of an executive vacancy out to their contacts, but more to help spread the word rather than to target a specific potential applicant.

As a result, while this network-based approach used elsewhere can result in a selection pool formed of candidates already known to the selection panel, executives, Chairs and Trustees in this study more often described appointments where the successful candidate was unknown to the selection panel.

That said, it does seem from these interviewees' accounts that the UK arts sector is such that most people by the time they are applying for executive positions are known, or their work is known, by their peers. One executive man described being alerted to an upcoming executive vacancy via two routes – his own professional network contacts knowing that the previous executive would be leaving before the role was advertised, and the Chair of the organisation – a previous colleague of his - letting him know directly that the advert was about to go live. Even in this example, though, the executive man had to go through the same application and multiple interview process as other candidates. It was more common, however, for the executives in this study to say that they did not know anyone in the organisation where they were first appointed to an executive position, and for Chairs to say that they may have heard of the person they appointed but not met them before the recruitment process started.

The role of references in the selection process

While all the Chairs themselves described taking up references after an appointment decision had already been made in principle, others described examples of appointments where formal references were taken, but Chairs also took informal soundings about applicants before shortlisting, or about candidates before appointing. One Chair framed her examples as an admission: "I have to put my hand up - I have made phone calls and said, I'm thinking of offering this person the job, and I know you know them. But I've done that after I've asked for a [formal] reference" (EWCW02). One Executive woman, who was also a Trustee involved in appointing an Executive in another arts organisation, said the Chair of one selection panel she was part of had taken informal and formal references, but also only after an appointment decision had been made:

"[he] had quite a lot of quiet words with various people, about various people, just kind of testing things out [...] but it was still the appointment panel that made the decision and then the other people's opinions were there to confirm" (EW08).

That said, in that example, the final two candidates were women, so this process of taking formal and informal references would have led to a woman being appointed either way - notably for the first time in the organisation's history. Looking across all the examples shared, the various ways that references were taken up – formally and informally – does not seem to have made it any more or less likely for a man or a woman to have been appointed.

This process of taking up references using formal methods was not seen as the whole picture by one Executive woman: "I think there's a lot more informal brackets, unauthorized contacting other people to make assessments about applicants than on the face that anybody will ever say there is" (EW31). This means that the accounts that most shared of how seldom informal references are taken up may not be entirely reliable. At the same time, the same Executive woman who sounded that note of caution also shared an example from her own experience of having one of her referees contacted mid-selection process by a Trustee who wanted to the referee to help him better understand why the Executive was not performing well in interviews so far. This referee provided guidance to the Trustee on how to get more out of the Executive, who was eventually successfully appointed. So, while there may well be more informal reference-style conversations taking place than were shared in this study, with the equal numbers of men and women now in executive positions, this partial reliance on appointers' networks does not seem to have disadvantaged women.

The few exceptions to this approach of using a headhunter's administrative support but not their additional network, involved search services to widen international reach or to bring in a more racially diverse applicant group, rather than more women. This was mentioned most frequently in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. For instance, one Executive woman who also chairs a producing theatre's Board described the increased likelihood of using headhunter services to expand an organisation's reach beyond its usual predominantly white recruitment pool:

"I think people are much more prone to using proper search agencies […] the case for diversity has changed dramatically, and so finding the networks, 'cause the people who don't know you are there or don't know that you want them is really important" (EW04).

All four headhunters emphasised their focus on diversity and inclusion, in various terms. One described the best headhunters as those who were supportive of the sector as a whole diversifying its workforce, not just helping boards recruit more "rich, white men" (HW01). The examples she gave of the latter related to Trustee appointments rather than executive positions, while the examples of more diverse appointments related to executive positions. Another stated that that he was not interested in helping organisations find the kinds of "white, Oxbridge educated men" (HM01) that tended to be appointed in the past:

"Quite often I will get informally asked for any names I can think of to occupy an executive director role. And I'll struggle to find a single man to put on the list." (HM01)

This same headhunter was the only one who gave examples – corroborated by others interviewed in the study who had used his services – of using his own network of professional contacts to suggest good potential applicants. They would nevertheless go through an openly

advertised application process. Discussing his network in more detail, he said that the proportion of women to men in his network was around 50/50, and that he was personally mentored and supported in his career progression – having formerly been an executive himself in an arts organisation – by a woman.

The interviews with headhunters indicated that their networks followed similar patterns to the executives, in that they were non-homophilous, with a mix of women and men. While it can be argued that headhunters are not relied on extensively across the UK subsidised arts sector, it is noted that on occasion a headhunter's own non-homophilous network will play a part when they are called on to alert potential applicants to a publicly advertised executive vacancy. Because headhunter networks were also non-homophilous, the part these networks played in spreading the word about vacancies did not prevent women progressing to executive level as frequently as men, by feeding applicants sourced from a mixture of men and women, into the formal recruitment and selection methods that still form the backbone of PSAOs' appointment processes.

Based on the findings set out thus far, it is argued that gender parity at executive level in the UK arts sector is explained by the use of formal, open recruitment and selection methods, with only a partial reliance on networks that are non-homophilous. That this has not always been the case is explored below, and the move away from informal recruitment and selection methods alongside the increase in women being appointed at executive level suggests that formalising the methods may have played a part in changing gender outcomes.

Examples from the past

Enough examples from past appointments were gathered in this study that form a picture of a sector that has not always appointed in this way. These include executives first

being appointed as an interim cover and then offered the permanent position, some being promoted internally without external advertising, some organisation founders who stayed in post as Chief Executive, and some appointments of network contacts to senior positions with those original role holders still in post decades later.

The interim to permanent appointments all dated between c.2010-2015, and seem to have been based entirely on network connections. In these examples, the interim executive was recruited via their network at short notice and without open advertising. Open advertising was then used when offering the permanent position, but the interim in situ candidates was the one appointed, suggesting that being known to the organisation was a strong factor in that appointment.

For internal promotions, one Executive woman described a recent organic, internal process: "I kind of grew into the role rather than applying for it" (EW06), while another experienced a very direct offer of a newly vacant role in the late 1990s: "The Artistic Director said there's a job if you want it, and if you don't want it we'll advertise it" (EW04).

There were a few examples of executives creating their own role by coming up with an idea for an organisation, finding funding for it, and staying on in a Chief Executive (or equivalent) position. In total, there were an equal number of men and women founder/Chief Executives, but the women were all from the mid-2000s onwards, while some of the men dated back to the 1980s and 1990s.

There were also examples shared of past appointment practices – also from the 1980s and 1990s - that were much closer to the 'old boys' network way of appointing, with university friends appointing university friends, noting that some of those appointees are still in post. These latter examples were all based, however, on appointment practices that are now

decades old, with no recent examples given of purely network-based appointments. This adds to the argument that a shift away from sole reliance on networks, towards formal recruitment and selection methods has resulted in the increase of women in executive positions.

Parallel DCMS arts sector appointments

Several interviewees pointed out that the arts organisations that receive funding not via an arts council but directly from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport have very different executive appointment practices, with government ministers playing a part in appointment decisions either through veto or informal, implied recommendations. DCMS funds Arts Council England, but it also directly funds fifteen museums and galleries, seven of which are wholly, or include, art collections: the National Gallery, National Museums Liverpool (Walker Art Gallery and Lady Lever Art Gallery), National Portrait Gallery, Sir John Soane's Museum, Tate Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, and Wallace Collection (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021). These roles are publicly advertised, but application packs and details around salary and person specifications are available only by request.

One interviewee hinted at an opaque process followed by another Chair who is involved in one of these DCMS-sponsored organisations, but would not elaborate further. Of those interviewees who were or are involved in appointments to DCMS-funded organisations, including one interviewee who worked within DCMS and another who was appointed by a Secretary of State as part of the DCMS process, none would go on record to describe the appointment processes in any detail. Newspaper coverage of one such appointment in 2017, when Tristram Hunt became Director of the V&A museum with no museum experience,

painted a vivid picture of "the art world gossip which generally precedes big appointments in the sector" (Stewart, Brown & Walker, 2017) and the responses thereafter. It described nothing however about the process other than the appointment had to be approved by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for culture, media and sport (as it was named at the time). It is public domain information that, as of March 2022, six out of the eight Chief Executives or Directors of DCMS's directly funded arts organisations were men. The two women – Maria Balshaw at Tate, appointed in 2017, and Laura Pye in National Museums Liverpool, appointed in 2018 – were both the first women to hold such posts in these organisations.

The examples of internal promotions, and interims becoming substantive executive appointments without advertising, while they stray from open and formal appointment processes, led to as many women as men ending up in executive positions. The unsubstantiated but implied different processes followed by DCMS arts organisations were offered against the public knowledge that these organisations are more likely to have men than women in their executive positions.

Funder oversight as a driver for formal appointment processes

When it comes to understanding what may be driving this use of formal methods over and above informal, network-based recruitment and selection practices, interviewees in this study pointed towards funder oversight as a factor, alongside their individual support for equality and diversity.

The Chairs, for example, often referenced the need for open advertising because of core funder expectations, and the possibility of negative consequences if a role were filled using a discrete, informal process. When pressed for examples of where these expectations

were spelled out, or what negative consequences they had experienced or heard of, none could recall any explicit instructions or penalties from their funders. Those interviewed who worked or had worked within the Arts Council England (the largest of the UK arts councils) agreed that funders expect their funded organisations to use open advertising as part of a fair and open recruitment process, but they also could not recall any examples of a funder auditing such processes or having any particular penalties if an appointment were made without following such a process.

The possibility of an Arts Council England representative sitting in and observing senior selection interviews and conversations was described as an influence on recruitment and selection processes, even if an observer did not attend in practice:

"we were very conscious we had to follow, not closely prescribed, but guidelines as to how to interview which were Arts Council guidelines […] we have to score candidates […] actually do it properly, have criteria, score them against it, consult each other on those scores at the end." (CM01)

"in other arts organisations where I'd worked you sometimes had somebody from the Arts Council sitting in on an interview so I was conscious that they had an interest in this [Chief Executive appointment] being done properly and that if we were asked we would want to be able to demonstrate that we'd been through a process […] it wasn't that Arts Council said anything, it was just that I felt that they could be involved" (CW01).

One clearly articulated funder expectation, however, is the requirement for UK arts council-funded organisations to submit workforce demographic, or equal opportunities monitoring, data to their respective arts councils each year. These returns include the numbers of total workforce, executive level positions, and job applicants grouped by gender,

race, age and disability, and increasingly sexuality and religious beliefs. Gender pay gap reporting is not required. In 2020/21, Arts Council England introduced a socio-economic background section as well. According to one executive interviewed in this study who worked at a senior level within Arts Council England in the 2000s, the funder was certainly gathering equal opportunity monitoring numbers from its funded organisations well before the 2000s, but did not really do anything with them until around 2006/07. She described funded organisations being asked at that stage time to share with Arts Council England for the first time what they were planning to do to become equal opportunities employers. She did not however, recall Arts Council England taking any follow up action in those early years for any lack of progress nor did she recall any particular emphasis on women's under-representation being addressed beyond individual conversations within the funding body that, in her experience, were often pushed back on or ignored by senior managers. More explicit attention was paid to the very clear lack of diversity around race, with Arts Council England launching its first Race Equality Scheme in 2004 (Arts Council England, 2011b). One step that Arts Council England took to address this lack of racial adversity was a one-off programme, decibel, which ran from May 2003 – March 2004. While this prioritised supporting "culturally diverse" (Arts Council England, 2005) artists and artistic output, there was a strand that resulted in recruiting 27 more Black and minority ethnic employees to the workforce – albeit within Arts Council England itself. This evaluation report gave no indication of how many of those new employees were women.

By the time Arts Council England published its ten-year plan for 2010-2020, the funding body more clearly set out its goals for diversity and equal opportunities within the arts workforce publicly. The fourth long-term goal out of five in this strategic plan, Achieving Great Art for Everyone, was that "The arts leadership and workforce are diverse and highly

skilled." (Arts Council England, 2010, p.12). The two stated priorities relating to this goal were:

> "building a network of arts leaders who value sharing their knowledge and skills, for the benefit of the arts and civil society; creating equal opportunities to enter the arts workforce." (ibid, p.44).

While these priorities would appear to give a firm steer to funded organisations to start appointing people from more under-represented groups, women were again not singled out as any more important than any other under-represented group. It could, however, be seen as a signal that this significant funder within the sector was starting to look at the diversity and equal opportunities statistics with practical goals in mind. This was echoed the year after the 2010-2020 strategy was published, when Arts Council England published its Creative Case for Diversity paper, which signalled "a new and different approach to diversity and equality in the arts, which we are calling the Creative Case" (Arts Council England, 2011b). The main focus in this paper was on making programming and participation in the arts reflective of the UK population's diversity, outlining a requirement by 2013 for NPOs to produce an action plan that provides "an arts-led approach to diversity and equality" (ibid, p. 18); addressing diversity within the workforce and executive positions is not mentioned. Women were, again, not foregrounded as a group that needed additional attention.

By 2017, as it announced its 2018-22 funding round, Arts Council England had become more explicit about its goals of having a diverse, or at least representative workforce. In its short paper on diversity across its 2018-22 portfolio, it acknowledged that:

"We also recognise that the workforce and leadership of the arts and cultural organisations that we invest in does not reflect the make-up of 21st century England." (Arts Council England, 2017, p.2).

In the same document, the funder is not specific about consequences for not reflecting wider demographics in its workforce and leadership, but it states that it will hold organisations "to account for their implementation" (ibid, p.3) of its related strategy, the Creative Case for Diversity (Arts Council England, 2011b).

From April 2018, Arts Council England started rating its NPOs on their diversity in programming, publishing its judgement of where each organisation was on the scale of: not met, met, strong, and outstanding (Arts Council England, 2021). While this still applies only to programmed output, and not to an organisation's workforce or leadership demographics, many interviewees in this study indicated that simply knowing that the funder was starting to look at the diversity figures with more interest was enough to prompt them to move towards trying to appoint more diverse candidates to executive positions, even without an explicit negative consequence of not doing so. This interpretation of Arts Council England's direction of travel would seem justified, based on comments from the Council's Chair, Nick Serota, reported in the press from 2019 onwards. In response to the 2017/18 NPO diversity returns, which showed no significant improvement around race and disability in terms of representation but increases in female Chief Executives, Artistic Directors and Chairs, Serota is quoted as saying "In some respects there are improvements, in others we are still treading water. In all areas, we intend to do more" (Snow, 2019).

By 2020, the language Serota is quoted as using becomes much clearer about negative consequences for not meeting diversity targets not just in programming but in workforce and

leadership too: "organisations that receive regular investment from the Arts Council will need to set themselves stretching targets for representation in governance, leadership, workforce, participants and audiences. Failure to meet these targets will have an impact on future funding" (Plaskett, 2020). It is notable, however, that this distinct articulation of the link between diversity and funding from the largest arts council, ACE, was made after all of the appointment processes discussed by interviewees in this study. It seems, therefore, that interviewees in this study had received the message even before it was publicly articulated.

Meanwhile, Creative Scotland (2017) made it a condition of funding for all their Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) to create EDI plans in response to the Equality Act 2010, which were then reviewed by Creative Scotland's 'Lead Officers' (those responsible for managing the relationships between the funder and its RFOs), and which formed part of each organisation's application for 2018-21 RFO funding. Here, women are highlighted as one group facing inequality within the arts workforce, and identifying and removing barriers to women's progression and closing the gender pay gap are both highlighted as goals within the stated expectation that: "RFOs are expected to be leaders and change agents to bring about fair, inclusive and more diverse sectors" (Creative Scotland, 2017, p.16). This clear message landed with at least one interviewee. She described arguing for women to be appointed as executives and Trustees in her organisation, and being very clear with her fellow Trustees that appointing a woman rather than a man would increase their funder's confidence: "it's, you know, Creative Scotland's number on priority, so we can get a big win here by just making an implicit statement by who we appoint" (TW02).

Any articulated distinction of gender inequality was still absent, however, in Arts Council England's most recent ten-year strategy, Let's Create, which covers 2020 – 2030. This

strategy was criticised publicly by a women's theatre company, Sphinx Theatre, and University Women in the Arts as having "no specific strategies to support women" (Redmond, 2020a). Respondents to research commissioned by Sphinx Theatre echoed this, saying that Arts Council England's focus on diversity foregrounded race, disability and socio-economic status rather than sex or gender (Tuckett, 2019b). This suggests that, despite the shared view that formal recruitment and selection processes were used across the sector partly in response to funder oversight – and the perception of negative consequences for recruiting any differently – the move towards gender parity was not at the specific direction of the funders.

With this mixture of published goals around diversity from major funders and the acknowledgement of a funder's interest in executive appointment outcomes that align with its diversity goals, it can be argued that funder scrutiny is influential in arts organisations using formal and transparent appointment practices. However, with the lack of emphasis on women as a distinct group in the funders' drive towards equality and diversity, if funder scrutiny were an over-riding influence on appointment decisions, then one might expect that more executive appointments would be made from other under-represented groups, such as those from the global majority, with disabilities, or from working class backgrounds, and not just women. So far only women who have reached equity at executive level with other groups not making equivalent progress.

Several interviewees in this study suggested that the explanation for organisations appointing more women in response to funder scrutiny around diversity and equality, was that the relatively recent gender parity was based only on more white, middle-class, non-disabled women being appointed. One Trustee interpreted this as an indication that gender

was the easiest area of under-representation to address: "I think in a way, of all the changes that the Creative Case [Arts Council England, 2011b] is pushing for, the gender one was the easiest." (TW01). Another Executive was more specific in assigning reasons for arts organisations going down this 'easy' route, sharing her interpretation that this was down to organisations essentially appointing women who were similar enough to the men who had gone before them, so that nothing else much had to change:

"I do think there are some really interesting contradictions within some of the on-paper progress that has been made within the arts agenda […] I mean, on the scale of equality we [white, able-bodied, middle-class women] are the closest you can get to a male appointment that you can make" (EW16).

While many interviewees in this study gave examples of funder scrutiny making the arts sector's recruitment processes more formal and transparent, one notable example suggests that at least one funder did not always comply with such transparency. One Chair used the relationship between his organisation and its allocated arts council officer as a way of getting an informal reference before making an executive appointment, asking the officer to tell him the worst about the candidate. A positive opinion of that candidate from the officer confirmed the appointment panel's opinion, and an offer was made to the candidate. The candidate in question was a woman, as was the second choice candidate to whom the offer would have gone if the officer had given a negative opinion. All of which suggests that this arts council's non-compliance with its own implied goals of formal and open recruitment processes would not have led to anyone other than a woman being appointed in this case.

While oversight from an arts council does not form part of an employer's statutory obligations, it was striking that the perception of this level of oversight seems to have

contributed to the move across PSAOs to create and adopt a standard best practice of open advertising and formal selection processes, without anyone citing a specifically articulated directive. This seems to parallel Dickens' (2004, 2006) argument that anti-discrimination legislation is influential in how employers shape their practices even though the legislation sets out principles rather than practices.

Appointment processes summary

In conclusion, it appears that the UK publicly subsidised arts sector is generally making more formal and transparent appointments than the literature from other sectors would lead us to expect. Organisations are using open advertising, and any approaches from headhunters, Chairs or others are to suggest that individuals apply alongside other applicants, not to side-step the formal process. Applicants are then measured against well-considered person specifications, often using scoring, and offers made to candidates before formal references are taken. The exceptions to this are when an executive has been brought in on an emergency interim basis, or when someone is promoted internally to their first executive position. Even in these cases, an open advertising and formal shortlisting process seems to be followed in the substantive appointment, but there was no indication that formal recruitment and selection processes in these cases would have changed what may well have been a foregone conclusion. Such cases are, however, rare among the examples shared in this study. The majority describe appointments of people previously personally unknown to an organisation, selected based on their ability to most closely meet the requirements of the role as outlined in a publicly available job description and person specification.

The questions this chapter set out to address were: Are networks relied on within UK arts executive appointment processes, and if so, why has this not held women in the network

trap as identified elsewhere, and; How far do UK publicly subsidised arts organisations rely on formal recruitment and selection methods in their appointment processes over and above any parallel informal methods?

In answer to the question of whether networks are relied on within UK arts executive appointment processes, the findings from this study indicate that they are to an extent, but in parallel to formal recruitment and selection methods, including open advertising and assessing candidates against agreed person specifications that lead to appointments often being made from outside an appointing panel's network. Furthermore, this study finds that the non-homophilous nature of the UK publicly subsidised sector's networks, as identified in Chapter Four, means that any reliance on networks does not seem to have disadvantaged women to the same extent as it does elsewhere.

A combination of implicit funder expectations, the lower costs of public advertising rather than engaging executive search services, peer perception, and instrumental advantages of advertising an executive vacancy on public platforms seems to have resulted in sector-wide practices where open advertising, followed by selection against a carefully designed person specification with minimal reliance on personal network connections, is the norm.

As the literature review in Chapter Two has shown, however, gender inequality at executive level may not entirely come down to appointment processes alone. Structural barriers within organisations, such as inflexible working practices, disadvantage women as they approach executive level positions, while financial precarity may lead to glass cliff appointments which favour women over men. Chapter Two also shows that gender parity alone, however, cannot be taken as an indicator that inequalities are diminishing within work

organisations – gender is just one part of the intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class. The following chapter therefore sets out the findings that address the remaining research questions: Can the gender parity at executive level in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector be explained by women being more likely than men to be appointed as executives in organisations facing financial precarity, as suggested by the 'glass cliff' phenomenon; Can gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by the widespread adoption of flexible working practices; and, Has this sector achieved gender parity at executive level while preserving other intersectional inequalities of gender, race, and class?

Chapter Six: Flexible working practices, financial precarity, and remaining inequalities in the UK arts sector

Introduction

The findings presented in the last two chapters indicate that there are predominantly non-homophilous strategic networks around executives and chairs in the UK subsidised arts sector, and that these networks feed into, but are not solely relied on within, otherwise formal recruitment and selection methods. My argument so far is that non-homophilous networks alongside formal recruitment and selection methods therefore seem to play a large part in gender parity at executive level within this sector. This would support findings elsewhere that point towards homophilous strategic networks and informal executive appointment processes disadvantaging women who are caught in a network trap (Bushell et al, 2020).

However, with the unencumbered male ideal worker (Acker, 1990) not necessarily seen as the primary model for leadership any more (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Billing, 2011; Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008), factors beyond homophilous networks and appointment processes themselves may also have had an impact on the gender parity found within the UK subsidised arts sector. The additional factors I identified in the literature to explore further in this study were the possibility of coincidental glass cliff appointments, the presence of flexible working practices not found at executive level elsewhere, and the mask of white women's gender parity hiding remaining intersectional inequalities at executive level.

This chapter therefore presents the findings in response to my last three research sub-questions: Can the gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by women being more likely than men to be appointed as executives in organisations facing financial precarity, as suggested by the 'glass cliff' phenomenon; Can gender parity at executive level in this sector be explained by the widespread adoption of flexible working practices; and, Has this sector achieved gender parity at executive level while preserving other intersectional inequalities of gender, race, and class?

I argue in this chapter that, since as many men as women interviewed in this study were appointed to organisations that they described as financially precarious, the glass cliff phenomenon does not appear to explain the increase in women's executive appointments in this sector. While glass cliff appointments do not seem to account for this sector's gender parity, another issue arising from increasingly restricted budgets was uncovered. Multiple interviewees pointed to decreasing salaries at executive level as the explanation for fewer men applying for executive positions and by default more women being appointed. Using data captured outside this study's interviews, I find that the highest advertised executive level salaries in the UK subsidised arts sector have risen over the ten years leading up to 2018, but that the lowest salaries have decreased, and the average has stayed stagnant. This all suggests that low salaries may be a factor in the move towards gender parity, rather than glass cliff appointments themselves.

The issue of low salaries comes up again when looking at flexible working practices in the sector, based on the interviewees' experiences. Given that the salaries and employee benefit packages in this sector are not anywhere near the levels found in Bushell et al's (2020) study where women could access concierge services and pay for nannies, flexible working

practices or alternatives to paid childcare would be the only way that executives with primary childcare responsibilities could undertake their roles.   I found that there was a range of experiences of flexibility at executive level in practice. Noting that some executive women and men could not imagine carrying out their roles alongside childcare responsibilities, the dominant experience however seems to be one where working parents had found ways to do so, not only recently but reaching back as far as the 1990s. While the older examples included women whose male partners had stepped back from paid work to care for their children, the more recent ways of balancing the caring responsibilities centre around flexible working practices, often of the executive's own design but with approval from their board, and also increasingly frequently in the form of shared, co-executive shared models offered by boards as an option during the appointment process.

Finally, I argue in this chapter that the experiences and interpretations shared by all of the interviewees in this study point towards a continued under-representation of executives in the sector who are not white and/or middle class. While the number of interviewees describing themselves as working class in this study (11 out of 63) suggest that there are more working class executives than might be expected, the experience of needing to work within white, middle class norms across the sector was part of each of the Black or Asian interviewees' experience in navigating networks and appointment processes at various points in their careers. They did not seem to experience a sector that was challenging its own cultural assumptions or structures to become more inclusive, but rather a sector that was still holding on to white, middle class assumptions about its executives' collective backgrounds that needs to be challenged and reconstructed before its gender parity includes parity for executives who are women of colour and/or working class.

Financial precarity

Starting with the issue of financial precarity, only one executive man described being appointed into an executive position while an organisation was in extreme financial precarity. When asked 'how financially healthy was the organisation you were stepping into?', his eloquent, if colourful answer, referred to his industry reputation for turning failing organisations around: "[the finances were] disastrous. I mean, the only reason they give me jobs is because the place is in a fucking mess" (EM03). Most other interviewees, men and women, described their organisations as either financially healthy or relatively steady, given the sector's norms of running PSAOs on tight finances. There were some examples from men and women which included uncovering precarity once they were in post that the recruiting organisation did not seem to have realised at the time of appointment, which suggests that financial precarity would not have been a factor in their appointment.

Since there are no share prices or profits to report for PSAOs, it was difficult to quantify financial precarity across the sector to corroborate the accounts of the interviewees that led to my conclusion that glass cliff appointments were not in play in achieving gender parity. After some preliminary reading of filed accounts for ACE NPOs, it became apparent that turnover and reserves could not be seen as a reasonable indication of particular financial precarity. There were, however, notable examples in the public domain of PSAOs which had either had their arts council funding withdrawn because of their arts council's concerns around mismanagement, or which had declared bankruptcy and dissolved around 2018. The cases I looked at were: English National Opera in London, the Arnolfini art gallery in Bristol, and the Square Chapel arts centre in Halifax.

English National Opera had its ACE NPO funding paused between 2015 – 2017 and moved by ACE to conditional emergency funding because of "serious concerns about their governance and business model" (Brown, 2015). One of the conditions of funding was to appoint a new Chief Executive Officer, above the roles of Artistic Director (held by a man) and Executive Director (held by a woman, but who had resigned shortly before the change in funding). A new Chief Executive Officer was appointed in 2015, who was a woman. In the case of the Arnolfini, whose NPO funding was not renewed in 2018 following "a period of instability" (Arnolfini Gallery, 2022) – rumoured within the sector to be based on financial mismanagement – but which gained project funding again by 2020, the female Director in post up to and during the funding hiatus (who had herself taken over from another female Director) was replaced by a male Director in 2019. Around the same time, Square Chapel Trust was an ACE NPO which finally went into administration in 2020 with a male Director at the helm (Bakare, 2020), but revived in 2021 without ACE NPO funding and with a new male Managing Director and male Artistic Director in post (Square Chapel Trust, 2021). In these three examples, then, in times of publicly known financial precarity, a male Artistic Director and female Executive Director were replaced by a female Chief Executive (English National Opera), a female Director by a male Director (Arnolfini), and a male Director by two male Directors (Square Chapel). While these are a small number of organisations compared to the 1,118 PSAOs as of 2018, and noting that I did not find a way of pinpointing at what point in time each organisation would have become aware of its own financial precarity, they nevertheless echo the findings based on this study's interviews that it seems as likely that a man as a woman will be appointed into a senior leadership position during times of financial precarity.

In contrast to these publicly financially precarious organisations, another example in the public domain which was mentioned by some in this study, is the case of Wise Children. This theatre company was founded in 2017 and led by Emma Rice, previously Artistic Director at two other high profile theatre organisations (Kneehigh Theatre and Shakespeare's Globe), with two women initially job-sharing the Executive Producer role. The company broke Arts Council England precedent by joining the National Portfolio with no organisational track record at all, financial or otherwise, with a £1.9m grant announced in 2018 over four years. While some may see any new organisation as financially precarious until proved otherwise, the initial NPO funding shortly after incorporation suggests that this particular PSAO was financially robust, and was made so on the basis of the track record of the women-led team's track records elsewhere.

Considering the findings above against the research question of whether women's parity at executive level in the UK subsidised arts sector can be explained by women being more likely than men to be appointed as executives in organisations facing financial precarity, it seems reasonable to conclude that financial precarity within the sector does not seem to have led to the unusual level of representation of women executives in the arts. Looking at publicly available coverage of financial precarity in the sector, there does not seem to have been a flurry of glass cliff appointments leading up to the gender parity seen by 2018. This suggests that Ryan and Haslam's glass cliff theory, which was never posited as a sector-wide phenomenon, cannot explain this sector-wide increase in women being appointed to executive positions.

Low salaries

One factor arising out of financial restrictions, however, was that of low salaries across the sector. "I mean, one of the issues around the top job is, it's got to be about money isn't it, and are men prepared to have a 'top job' in a world where the salary might be £40k?" (EW01). This Executive woman succinctly summarised the view of 17 of those interviewed in this study, that one reason for the sector achieving 50/50 men and women at executive level is that executive salaries are low. Men as well as women, Chairs as well as Headhunters, Trustees and Executives all raised the issue of low pay. Many of them linked the issue to problem around diversifying entry level positions, and/or the reason behind more women than men wanting to work in the arts at all:

"I think there've always been more women [in the sector], because of the low salaries" (TW02);

"salaries are going down; it's all in the public domain, but [a recently appointed Chief Executive Woman replacing a man at a national level arts organisation] was paid significantly less than her predecessor, and we all know that we have to cut our cloth and funding is tight and all the rest of it, but it didn't sit very comfortably for me at all." (HW02).

They also perceived a link between men either not entering the sector at all, or exiting before reaching executive level because they either had to be the main breadwinner in their household or they expected higher salaries than most arts organisations pay:

"there's something to do with pay levels that men have an expectation of pay relative to education that's hard to see fulfilled within the arts sector outside the nationals" (EM03).

One Chair Woman made a specific link between women's expectations and acceptance of lower pay, compared to men's, where they accept the lowest possible salary offer on appointment, which then means they remain at the lowest available salary for the rest of their careers. This particular Chair Woman had at various points in her career been the appointing Chair, the Arts Council England observer, and the Trustee and the successful candidate in executive appointments over many decades:

"frequently you see it enacted in front of you in recruitment processes. You say we recruit at the bottom of the pay band. The men will come in and go, I want more money. The women very rarely do. […] So even within the arts as they're progressing, they're still progressing at the bottoms rather than at the top of things" (CW02).

While there is no public domain salary data showing historical changes in executive salaries within the arts sector, enough interviewees in this study were of the view that salaries were decreasing as arts budgets became tighter, that decreasing salaries should be considered as one factor in the increase in women reaching executive level. Using my own company's proprietary database of advertised starting salaries in the UK arts sector, I was able to calculate ranges and mean average starting salaries for executive level positions advertised between 2008 and 2018, and further online research indicated the gender of each successful applicant to the lowest and highest paid roles advertised each year (see Table 3 below). The average starting salaries in the ten years leading up to 2018, when gender parity was reached, have risen overall but held largely stagnant from 2013 onwards. The bottom of the range has held steady at around £30,000 annual salary for the whole time period, with one particularly poorly paid role at the bottom of the 2018 range showing a decrease towards

the lower paid end of the sector over eleven years. In the same period, the top of the range

has more than doubled although with peaks and troughs in between.

Year	Mean average	Lowest paid position	Highest paid position
2008	£36,537	Theatre Director, Rosehill Theatre: £30,000 (not filled)	Chief Executive, Orchestras Live: £60,000 (M)
2009	£43,045	Theatre Director, Rosehill Theatre: £25,000 (M)	Director, Tate Britain: £85,000 (W)
2010	£44,855	Artistic Director, Citymoves Dance Agency: £33-38,200 (W)	Director, Hall for Cornwall: £70,000 (M)
2011	£45,311	Artistic Director, Pentabus Theatre: £27,052 - £34,549 (W)	Executive Director, Plymouth Culture Board: £65,000 (M)
2012	£41,276	Executive Director, Pentabus Theatre: £28,636 - £34,549 (W)	Chief Executive, HorseCross Arts: £63,000 (M)
2013	£44,824	Executive Director, Hijinx Theatre: £32-36,000 (W)	Chief Executive, Llangollen International Music Festival Eisteddfod: £50-70,000 (M)
2014	£43,304	Executive Director, Coney: £30-33,000 (W)	Deputy Director, The Hepworth Wakefield: £55-60,000 (W)
2015	£46,015	Executive Director, Artsreach: £30,000 (W)	Director, The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art: £90,000 (W)
2016	£42,819	Artistic Director, Pentabus Theatre: £30,000 (W)	Chief Executive Officer, The Arts Marketing Association: £50-60,000 (W)
2017	£45,506	Artistic Director, Theatre in the Mill: £29,301 - £32,004 (M)	Chief Executive, The Anvil Trust Ltd: £85,000 (M)
2018	£46,615	Director, The NewBridge Project: £26,000 (W)	Creative Director, Coventry City of Culture Trust: £100-125,000 (M)

Table 3: Executive level advertised annual starting salaries, 2008-2018 (gender of appointed candidates shown as W = Woman, M = Man)

While the only numerical decrease over the time period 2008-2018 was at the bottom

of the range, the stagnant average indicates that while salaries may not have fallen in cash

terms the perception of those interviewed in this study seems reasonable given that inflation

would have decreased the buying power of stagnant salaries over the years; the £85,000 top

salary in 2009 would have had more spending power than when it topped the range in 2017, for example. It is also notable that of the highest paid vacancies advertised each year 7 out of 11 were filled by men, and of the lowest paid, 8 out of 11 were filled by women.

These advertised salaries provide useful context to the concerns raised by many interviewees about lowering salaries leading to more women being appointed. Many interviewees also expressed concern that only middle-class people could join the arts sector workforce, or stay in it for long enough to reach executive level, because they tended to have had financial support in some form early on in their careers that helped them survive on salaries even lower than these executive salary ranges. Some interviewees also interpreted the increase of women in senior roles as partly down to women in a heterosexual partnership being less likely than men to be the main breadwinner and therefore did not need to seek out higher salaries than the arts can offer. Some exceptions were found that went against this prevailing view, however. Two Executive women said that, in their case, they kept working full-time when they became parents while their husbands gave up their jobs to stay at home to look after the children because the women earned more in these couples than the men. Another Executive woman described her entry into the sector via an unpaid voluntary job "not because I came from a nice middle class family that gave me money to live, but because I could sign on [to state benefits] at the time" (EW19). There were also multiple examples in this study of women working at executive level who were single and the sole earners in their household.

Therefore, while glass cliff appointments may not be a factor in this sector's gender parity, lowering salaries arising out of restricted finances may well be. Interviewees' perception and experience of low salaries in the sector is certainly supported by the

advertised salaries and the gender of those appointed at the top and bottom of the ranges shown above. However, looking at the advertised executive salaries, where available, of the organisations employing the men interviewed in this study, they do not seem to be offered at consistently higher levels than those offered by organisations employing the women interviewed in this study. Despite this mixed statistical picture, the strength of feeling about salaries expressed by interviewees leads me to argue that stagnant salaries, with a very low bottom of the range, may well be part of the explanation for the move towards gender parity in this sector.

Flexible working practices

The interviewees in this study gave mixed accounts on the compatibility of motherhood with executive responsibilities. Some thought that it was impossible, while others offered examples of being appointed even when visibly pregnant, and some started their families once they reached executive level. Some recent and historical examples were shared of fathers of their children taking on the primary childcare responsibilities, with only one woman reporting using a nanny. Of the 47 Executives interviewed, 23 had children, 2 had children and other caring responsibilities, and 3 had no children but other caring responsibilities. More women than men Executives had children or other caring responsibilities: 18 of the women Executives had children compared to 5 of the men, and 5 of the women had other caring responsibilities while the men had none.

The experiences and attitudes towards being a working parent varied across the group of interviewees, but there seemed to be a pattern towards more flexible working patterns more recently that seem to have supported working mothers undertake their paid and unpaid responsibilities more easily than in the past.

Past experiences were not, however, uniformly described as inflexible with current practices described as flexible. While one Executive woman coming to the end of her career thought that most of the women around her did not have children and that being a working mother would be incompatible with working at Executive level, another who had recently retired described negotiating condensed hours early on in her career so that she could spend every other Friday joining her children's activities. This is not say that arrangements like this were common practice across the sector, however. Another Executive woman who had made a similar request around ten years after the above example of condensed hours, described the discussion she had in the final stages of one executive appointment process:

"I just want[ed] one day a week where I can do things with my children. And I don't mind working all the hours there are, you know the other time, but to have one day a week where if they get invited to a party, I could go or I can have their friends round, then that's what I'd like to do. And [the appointing Chair man] sneered at me and said, well, that's a first. I've never heard of a Director wanting to have a day off to have tea parties." (EW29)

That same woman has now been working at executive level for almost 20 years, and arranges her own working pattern to accommodate her parenting responsibilities alongside her paid role's. She acknowledged periods of guilt around working at executive level alongside parenting, but was satisfied with her choice: "I'm better at going to work than I am at being at home and you know, really, really it wasn't for me, sitting at home." (EW29).

Meanwhile, another executive woman of a similar age, now approaching retirement, had her children in the first few years of her first executive position, but described herself as putting her career before them, a choice which she now thinks was imbalanced.

One executive woman who is in the middle of her working life, got her first executive position in the 2000s while she was visibly pregnant. She described, however, the pressure she was under to end her maternity leave before the (then) three months paid period and did do some work in those three months. While that same woman remained at executive level for some years, she did choose not to apply for executive roles that involved long commutes – which, for her, meant into London – since she would not have been able to afford the childcare costs of covering commuting hours as well as working hours. This decision was echoed by two other women, of a similar age, who had children before or while moving into executive positions, but credited their geographical location and minimal commute times in their choices of roles to apply for and their ability to have family-friendly working patterns:

"if I needed to dash home because I was going to be at an evening event at the gallery, I could get home in 15 minutes and do a bedtime story and get back to the gallery." (EW04).

Looking at more recent patterns, three of the Executive women interviewed who are in their first or second executive level position, all had young children, and all of the younger women thought that being a parent and being an executive was compatible. One executive compared herself to friends in other sectors, suggesting that the arts sector is much more accommodating to family responsibilities:

"I'm quite aware of how tough [friends outside the arts sector] had it particularly when they've had small children and so there was never people expecting you to pretend you didn't have kids and there were certainly other women in the sector, so other models of women with children" (EW11).

That said, there were plenty of examples shared by women of all ages that made it clear that the sector is not always entirely supportive of working parents' needs. One

executive woman had taken part in a three-day trip as part of a one-off performing arts leadership programme, which included a specific networking event. On this occasion, she experienced a hostile environment that did not accommodate her need to balance her responsibilities as a working parent with her desire to progress in her career; she had chosen to use part of her trip to rest and recuperate from the demands of a young family rather than attend all the scheduled events, and after being criticised by a female programme facilitator for not making time to network more actively on the trip she experienced a combination of shame, anger and failure: "oh God, I'm not going to be a good leader 'cause I can't stay up till 3:00 o'clock getting drunk with people I don't know" (EW24). These feelings were, however, soon resolved by talking to a female mentor who provided advice that has stayed with her ever since, and which she has shared with others:

"you did what you needed to do in that moment. And what you needed to do as a working mother was to take time out for yourself and go, I need feeding, I need time, I need space, I need head space. I need to be able to wake up in the morning and say, I don't want to go into that show or that networking event, I actually want to go to Kelvingrove and look at the art. I want to go and walk in the rain." (EW24).

Views among the executive men were similarly mixed around the compatibility of parenting and working at executive level. Some said it would be impossible for them to work in the way that they work, which includes many work evenings, overnight trips, and even in one case holidaying with stakeholders who had become social contacts as well – if they had children. Others, with children, gave examples of limiting their work evenings, or bringing their children to opening nights, as a way of balancing the demands of parenting and leading an organisation.

Most of the executives, women and men, without caring responsibilities noted that their lack of caring responsibilities meant that they could change geographical location more frequently than counterparts with caring responsibilities. While such geographical choices may have been limited to those with caring responsibilities, progressing to executive level was not seen as an impossibility by the working parents in this study.

Where a working mother did have to source paid childcare, however, then geography and flexible working practices became even more important: "your childcare costs end up sort of eating a lot of you know, even if you're at a kind of senior executive level, you know between a mortgage and childcare. I mean, it's really, it kind of leaves you with little at the end of the month" (EW11). In this case, a shorter commute and flexibility from her children's father around caring responsibilities were a factor in her working as a CEO with young children, but the most important factor to her was the ability to be open about when she could work and when she would not be available because of her family commitments.

That said, two Executive women used either a nanny or an au pair to supplement their childcare cover while continuing with their career. They were in the minority, however, with most of the working mothers, including one single mother who had worked her way up to executive level with two young children, relied on a combination of family networks, lower cost childminders combined with schooling and, in the case of one executive in a university arts centre, on-campus nursery places.

There were two notable examples of Executive women who had their children with a male partner who then gave up his paid job to look after the children while the mother continued to progress in her career:

"I'm incredibly lucky because my husband gave up his job to look after our daughter and that was a very clear compact between us that if we had baby I would be the one working because I had the bigger salary, and I wanted to work." (EW04);

These findings all suggest that childcare arrangements, paid for or otherwise, are available to the extent that the mothers in this study did not feel forced into stopping their executive level career because they became mothers. The early examples of flexible working practices and co-parents stepping back from paid work to provide childcare, seem to have evolved into increasingly accommodating work patterns and attitudes in the sector. One Executive man, who had stepped into his first executive position within the past ten years, also noted how much he valued flexible working patterns in balancing his childcare responsibilities with his executive responsibilities.

While condensed hours and flexible working patterns to accommodate daytime childcare activities around full-time work were the most frequently offered descriptions of flexible patterns that supported working parents, another form of flexible working was found within the interviewees' collective experience – that of co-Chief Executive positions. Six of the interviewees were currently in, or had been within the last ten years, co-executive positions – with five of them sharing the executive responsibilities on an equal footing with other women, and one sharing with a man. None of the men interviewed had held co-executive positions, but at least two of the women interviewed had also reported to two men in co-executive positions at some point in their career. Almost all of these examples, however, were in the performing arts sector – either theatres or theatre production companies. In these cases, the most common co-executive arrangement was joint CEO positions being shared between an Artistic Director and Executive Director. Interviewees

questioned whether a shared executive position between these two roles, given the higher value placed on artistic quality and public perception (the traditional domain of an Artistic Director) as an organisational driving force over managerial effectiveness and behind-the-scenes efficiencies (the traditional domain of an Executive Director), could really be equal. As two Executive women, both EDs themselves, put it:

"to get to that [AD] position in the first place, they've usually got quite a large ego. And he would probably surround himself by women who have a less of a large ego and who do all the work that they don't want to do, you know?" (EW27); and,

"I don't think that women are encouraged to be as creative, and I don't think men are encouraged to be organised" (EW17).

Many other interviewees with theatre experience also highlighted this gendered nature of the split in their experience between Artistic Directors – mostly men – and Executive Directors – mostly women – and saw that as a barrier sometimes to equal power sharing between these roles. While there were certainly plenty of examples of male Artistic Director and female Executive Director found when identifying executive role holders in each PSAO during this study, it actually was not the dominant model across the sector as a whole. There were also multiple examples within the sector where two men shared the co-Chief Executive position, but often sharing the Artistic Director position with a subordinate female Executive Director. While some of these shared executive positions date back to co-founded companies with the co-founders still in post decades later, there were increasingly recent appointments of shared executive roles. Looking at the numbers of sole Chief Executives it is clear that this shared model is not widespread. Indeed, within the past five years at least two of the women interviewed had had executive applications rejected for being shared applications, while

another had recently stepped back from her executive role when her request to the board to create a shared leadership model so that she could combine her role with childcare and caring for elderly relatives was turned down by her organisation's board. While shared leadership roles may not be fully embraced in all arts organisations, shared leadership roles seem to be here to stay in the sector, then, with more high-profile appointments being made – most recently in September 2022, with the Royal Shakespeare Company announcing the appointing of its first Co-Artistic Directors – a woman and a man – who will replace the current female interim Artistic Director in summer 2023.

With men in shared executive positions, this form of flexible working clearly does not attract and benefit only women. However, given the increase in the number of co-Executive appointments in the same time period that the sector reached gender parity, it does seem that flexible working patterns have contributed to the increase of women with caring responsibilities being appointed to, and for the most part, remaining in, executive level positions.

Intersections of gender, race and class

Before moving to discussions that may make the mistake of drawing generalised conclusions about women's parity at executive level based on gender alone, the final research question of whether gender parity has been reached while intersectional inequalities of gender, race and class is now explored. Acknowledging that there will be different experiences for individuals and groups depending on their intersectional identities of gender, race and class, each interviewee was invited to share their experience and interpretation of their own intersectional identity and the impact they thought it had had on their progression to, or appointment of, executive level positions. Everyone interviewed was ready and able to

talk thoughtfully and articulately on this subject, suggesting a widespread familiarity with the concept and the language of intersectional inequalities in the sector; nobody seemed surprised or unwilling to discuss the subject.

In their responses, clear distinctions can be seen between the experiences of white executives and executives of colour, and middle-class executives and working class executives.

One Black executive woman thought that the knowledge and experience that had clearly played a part in her progression to executive level in one area of the arts sector was not enough to be considered for roles and opportunities across the sector: "I would have been in certain places or positions, but because I'm Black, African and a woman, that's not where I was" (EW14). She described unspoken, sometimes subtle, signals being sent by appointers in the sector, either to indicate her race and gender would make her unacceptable or to signal that she was only being invited into certain projects or onto certain boards so that an organisation can show they have hired a Black person, but not because of her distinct professional contribution: "you can see people from about a mile away in terms of you can spot what the intention is from a mile away [...] and you just go with it sometimes, or sometimes you know you're brave enough to say no, I'm not gonna do that". She also highlighted the clumsy attempts to look diverse that were enough to put her off applying for some roles:

"if you put like, you know, kind of like a Black image, an Asian image, and disabled images, like oh my God, this is so staged. We have one of each. And unfortunately, this is what most people do because they don't know any better." (EW14).

Three of the Executive women shared experiences of similarly clumsy recruitment processes, where their race was seen before or instead of their individual abilities, and their applications potentially being used to make an organisation look more diverse or anti-racist than it really was. One described being approached multiple times to apply for roles because she was the "go-to token brown representative candidate that we can just call up on and have a conversation with and encourage them to apply" (EW30). This was echoed in the experiences of another Executive being frequently approached to join boards or panels as a tokenistic member, rather than being seen as a qualified, experienced arts leader. One of these women is so exhausted by these approaches – which increased as she progressed to higher profile positions – that she has now withdrawn from the arts sector, while another referred to it as a factor in her decision to also step away from employment and to consider other ways of working.

Some of the barriers faced by women of colour in the sector were not signalled subtly at all: "they'd be pissed off that I was female, but they were doubly pissed off that I was Black and female" (EWCW02). Examples of a Black woman having her hair touched, a woman of Asian heritage being looked up and down by her all-male, all-white interview panel, the surprise of an all-white board when the woman with what could be perceived as a typically white, middle-class name turned out to be the Black woman in front of them, were shared in this study. The experience of one Black executive regularly being mistaken for another was shared with laughter followed by a long sigh:

"We laugh 'cause we're like, so there's like that many [holds up ten fingers] Black and brown women in the arts sector, right? [A peer] looks nothing like me, but I consistently get mistaken for [her]. Literally, literally nothing like each other, not even the same height or

weight or anything. So we used to make jokes and say, There is more than one, you know?" (EWCW02).

Two Executives described the racist tropes around Asian and Black women that played a part in creating barriers to Black women progressing, and to Asian women being seen as anything other than their stereotype: "There is a pecking order in race which no one talks about, but I will […] yes, you're Asian but you're smart […] what we're told about Asian people and East Asian people is that they're hard workers, and the perception of female Asian, East Asian women is very nerdy, studious, get on with their studies […] Black women are perceived as lazy, layabouts, don't wanna do any work, full of chat, full of attitude" (EWCW03).

Even when executive level positions had been achieved in spite of the barriers faced by women of colour, the stereotypes and structural racism then extended into barriers to full participation in the sector. Three Executives described being invited to lead on diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives despite D&I not being their area of specialism, with one reporting a particular conversation she had had with a contact within Arts Council England when she was asking about possible opportunities coming up across the sector, and being told only of the one that involved diversifying audiences. Such assumptions were also experienced as a barrier to building up the same level profile as white peers, either through speaking engagements or industry press coverage, with one Executive pointing out that she was only ever asked to speak at industry events about race and diversity. She was never invited to speak on the wider range of topics that white peers regularly speak on, particularly at the behest of Arts Council England:

"You find that when Arts Council are asking people to talk about things, it's the same people time and time again […] And they get stuck with the same people and what you find

is if you're asked to speak and you've got a brown skin, I'm asked to speak about diversity. I'm not a D&I expert. It's not what I do. I'm not asked to speak about finance. I'm not asked to speak about strategic management. I'm not asked to speak about blue sky visioning, I'm asked to speak about diversity." (EWCW03).

Alongside these experiences is the frustration that parts of the sector think that significant progress is being made, that some recent appointments of Black Artistic Directors into historically white-led theatres is something to be celebrated:

"We often have this conversation about, we've come so far with race in the sector, and you've got the Chief Exec of the Arts Council – and I don't care if this is quoted – he said, we've done so well in our diversity in the last ten years and we've got Kwame [Kwei-Armah, appointed 2018] at the Young Vic and we've got So and So, and this was at an international theatre meeting […] I'm sorry, but if you can name all four of the Black Artistic Directors that you have in this country then that is not progress, 'cause I can't name all the white men" (EWCW02).

This sense of frustration was echoed to some extent in the discussions with white participants in this study, with all of them voluntarily acknowledging that being white had given them, and continues to give them, easier access to and acceptance within most arts environments. One Executive, who described herself as mixed Asian-white who presents as white, described herself as having had no lived experience of racism but being fully aware that her appearance gave her a privilege that people of colour would not have, when being assessed in appointment processes on the basis of her experience and skills and an assumption that she would 'fit' into the organisation. Another Executive, who described herself as Chinese, described the barriers that executives who are not white face in trying to

join arts boards which are "very monied and white and city". She also, however, shared that she personally had not encountered any 'issue' with race within the arts sector because she contrasted it with her experiences outside the sector where she had experienced overt racism and barriers to inclusion and progression. The stereotype she described battling against in the arts sector was an assumption that because she was not white she would have a particular view on racism in the arts, when in fact her views were more complex and contradictory than the ones white colleagues were expecting from her.

Alongside these experiences of the inequalities faced at the intersection of gender and race, this study found multiple examples of how the intersection of gender and class was experienced by some participants as more of a barrier than that of gender and race, and that the intersection of all three was experienced in different ways. As one Executive – a Black working-class woman - put it: "I would say the biggest issue the arts has is about class" (EW28) with another Black working class woman noting the shift between the two: "I think in the early days [the barrier] was more about class than race […] then that became less about class and the advancement became more about race." (EWCW02). For another Executive – a middle-class woman of Indian heritage – her view was that her class-based education gave her advantages that overcame some of the racist barriers that would have held back working-class peers:

"I think I have been successful in my career because I went to an all-girls private school. I think if I had gone to a state school I would not have fared as well because I think the colour of my skin and my Indian nationality would have played into that. And I think if I'd been a Black woman that would have played into that even more." (EWCW03).

This view was echoed by another Executive, a woman of Asian heritage who had grown up outside the UK in a country where her race did not minoritise her in the same way that it did in the UK, and whose parents were working class. Her interpretation of the role that her intersection of gender, race and class was that class was by far the biggest barrier for her in navigating the arts in the UK:

"people look at you and think if you're not white you must have an issue [...] I've had a couple of comments of people saying we're really surprised that you have two parents who were manual labourers and you've got to the [executive] role. And I find that really shocking" (EW20).

She went on to describe two incidents, not shared in detail here to avoid identification, where her lack of middle-class reference points in groups of middle-class arts executives and managers meant that it took her longer to get to executive level than middle-class peers who were able to connect with and impress the largely middle-class connections around them as they progressed through their career. In her case, it was the individual mentorship from a senior woman which she credits with unlocking a career pathway to executive level, without which she was unsure she would have remained in the sector. While this Executive had found a way to navigate to an executive position within one of the highest profile PSAOs, another described her route towards a Chief Executive position very differently. For this other Executive, a Black working class woman, she found that working within established PSAOs was enlightening, and she described learning a lot from mentors and colleagues – men and women, Black and white. However, she did not see a way of producing work that told the stories of working class and other marginalized performers from inside those organisations, so set up her own organisation and became a Chief Executive that way. This struck me as an

example of one woman who would be reported in an ACE annual diversity report as a Chief Executive who was a woman, and as Black, and as working class, which in turn would be counted towards the gender parity within the sector, but who had had to create her own organisation and create an executive position for herself since she found no space for herself and her community in the rest of the UK publicly subsidised arts sector.

Added to this, I also found that the accounts of white working class executives suggested that they had found the entry into the sector and navigation towards executive level more difficult than the white middle class executives. This seemed to be the case for both the working class men and women interviewed.

Even within the reflections shared by white middle class interviewees there were examples of having to navigate particular workplace cultures that assumed they had an even more privileged background than they had. For example, one Executive woman distinctly recalled the additional work she had to put in when she gained her first senior position in the visual arts, having come in from another part of the arts sector, to try to understand the world she had joined:

"[a senior curator] looked at me and he said I'm sorry, where did you read Art History and I said I didn't read Art History and he looked so offended […] it did shock me. I remember what I called gallery girls, lots of people with, you know velvet hair bands. […] Everybody used to be away on a Friday, you could get away with murder because there was nobody around 'cause they were all at their country estates staying with people ostensibly researching old pictures" (EW04)

In this case, she was mentored by a senior man who helped her make connections and convince her new colleagues that she was worth promoting in due course, and she recounted

how much harder it would have been if she had had no university education or arts background at all, both of which she had attributed to her middle-class upbringing.

Considered collectively, the interviewees in this study paint a picture of a sector that is easier to navigate if others perceive you as white and middle class.

While there were many examples of interviewees who had reached executive level who were not white and middle class, concerns shared collectively by the majority of other interviewees about the barriers faced by people with working class backgrounds being able to enter and navigate the arts world, all support studies such as O'Brien et al (2016) and Brook et al (2018, 2020) which highlight persistent inequalities in terms of class and race across the sector's workforce as a whole. Given that not all of this study's interviewees were white and middle class, I do not argue that these barriers are insurmountable, nor do I want to make the executives of colour, and/or from working class backgrounds, invisible. However, the accounts shared and considered in this study, alongside the fact that arts council diversity reporting is not intersectional but follows the statutory-based splits between separate characteristics, all point towards a gender equality that has done little to break down the remaining inequalities of race and class at executive level. As one Executive Woman summarised so succinctly: "I mean, we [white, middle-class, university-educated women] are only one tiny point further away from being the same old men. I mean, on the scale of equality we're the closest you can get to a male appointment that you can make, which is a bit depressing." (EW16).

Summary

While I still argue that non-homophilous networks and authentically formal appointment processes are the significant driver towards gender parity in the UK subsidised

arts sector, the organisational factors awaiting newly appointed executives seem to also have played a part in women aiming for, and staying in their executive positions. The finances across a sector that has always been used to working with restricted budgets do not appear to have led to coincidental glass cliff appointments, but they do seem to have led towards low average salaries for its executives, with stagnant average salaries in the ten years leading up to 2018. Where the top of the salary range has increased, the vacancies with the highest salaries seem to have been filled mostly by men, and where it has decreased those lowest paid vacancies seem to have been filled mostly by women.

Meanwhile, over the same period, flexibility in the form of variable hours and shared leadership roles seem to have made the balance between caring responsibilities and executive responsibilities manageable for more executive workers with primary caring responsibilities, which in turn benefits more women than men. This flexibility at executive level signals a structural shift, beyond appointment processes, that many interviewees themselves saw as crucial in achieving and maintaining gender parity at executive level.

This parity, however, should not be mistaken for parity for all women. With notable examples of women within this study's interviewee group, that can be seen elsewhere in the sector too, in executive positions who are Black, Asian, or mixed heritage, and/or working class, the predominant view was that the sector still favours women who are white, or pass as white, and/or middle class. Where a woman of colour identified as, and was perceived as, middle class, she seems to have found it easier to navigate the pathway to executive level than those who were also working class. Where a white woman identified as, and was perceived as, working class, she found this navigation trickier than those who were also middle class. This leads me to find that this is a sector that has clearly appointed more women

in executive positions in recent years, but still favours those women who represent one form

of diversity but without challenging the systems that protect the dominant white, middle class

group in the collective positions of power.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and conclusions

Introduction

A growing awareness of shifts around gender parity at executive level across the UK's publicly subsidised arts sector was my motivation for enrolling into a part-time PhD programme back in 2015, as a way to undertake this study. By 2018, gender parity seemed to have been achieved in this sector, whereas other sectors were still lagging behind. While the sector's largest single funder, Arts Council England, had long been publicly stating the importance of equality across all protected characteristics for the sector's audiences and workforce (Arts Council England, 2011), there was no distinct focus on women's equality. This broad approach to equality and diversity from funders, and indeed statutory regulations, meant that there was no immediately obvious driver towards gender parity at executive level being achieved by 2018. I was unable to identify any other work that had found similar proportions of women at executive level, partly because the arts were usually subsumed into studies on the wider CCIs where women are still under represented at senior level, and partly because the arts sector is seldom included in studies of executive gender inequality. This was my prompt to focus on the arts as a unique field in which to study gender parity at senior levels in practice.

Whereas the same legal protection against discrimination was in place for all UK sectors, and attitudes towards masculine leadership traits on the wane in other sectors too, there had to be something unique to the arts sector that meant it had reached gender parity within the same national context as sectors where women remain under-represented at executive level. By exploring other studies of barriers to women's progress to executive level, I was able to identify one area in particular where the arts sector may differ from others. The

area that seemed to present the most likely arena for different practices leading to different outcomes was the central role that men's homophilous professional networks play in executive appointment processes. If these were seen to exclude women, holding them in a network trap (Bushell et al, 2020), then perhaps networks and/or appointment processes were operating differently in the UK subsidised arts sector. Further review of the literature brought to light two other areas beyond appointment processes themselves that could be different in one sector but not in others, and therefore contribute to the different gender outcomes in executive appointment processes. The first of these areas was the effect of sector-wide financial precarity on executive appointments, whereby work organisations across a whole sector might potentially experience financial precarity at the same time and therefore appointing women into glass cliff appointments (Ran & Haslam, 2005). The second area beyond appointment processes was the presence, or not, of flexible working practices as a sectoral norm at executive level that remove the barrier that Hakim (2000, 2002, 2003) framed as personal choice but are in fact organisational barriers that limit working mothers' options (Crompton & Harris, 1998a; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hurley & Choudhury, 2016). My study therefore set out to understand how gender parity had been achieved at executive level within the UK subsidised arts sector by focussing primarily on networks, executive appointment processes, financial precarity and flexible working. Given the growing body of scholarly work looking at inequalities of race and class within the CCIs, of which the arts form a part, and as my awareness grew around the different experiences of inequality at the intersection of gender, race and class, I also chose to incorporate views on people's own definitions and experiences of their intersectional identities. While I maintained a primary focus on gender, my intention behind inviting views on intersectional experiences was to avoid creating a study that exacerbated the problem identified in other feminist work, where

the experiences and perceptions of white, middle-class women are taken as a proxy for the experiences and perceptions of all women.

The following discussion section will bring together the possible explanations found within this study that can explain not just what, but how and why, this sector's different gender outcomes at executive level may have arisen, and how factors beyond appointment processes may have also contributed to this sector's unexpected, but very welcome, gender parity at executive level. It is structured along the lines of the original research questions, showing how the findings support or refute the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and then bringing the strands together to draw conclusions on the contribution and practical implications this study could have on future research and industry practice.

Discussion: Networks, appointment processes and beyond

While multiple studies of gender homophilous networks were identified (Ibarra, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997), as were studies of the role that networks play in job seekers and recruiters finding each other (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1995, 2005; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012), no studies were identified that explored executive appointments in practice within the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. Bushell et al's (2020) concept of the network trap, arising from their unprecedented and detailed study of executive appointments in FTSE 100 and 250 companies, seemed to be closest to uncovering the operational relationship between networks and executive appointments, and why that relationship was underpinning women's under representation at executive level. I identified an opportunity to build on this concept, but from within a sector that was seldom studied, had managed to appoint as many women as men into executive roles, and to which I would have access as a researcher already trusted to work confidentially and professionally alongside Executives and Chairs. I therefore

designed a study that would draw upon direct accounts from executives and appointers within the UK subsidised arts sector that would help make sense of the gender parity found there and nowhere else.

With the literature to date finding that men and women commonly form homophilous instrumental networks grouped by gender, and these networks identified as forming a major barrier to women reaching executive positions, my study started by exploring whether networks in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector followed similarly homophilous patterns. Contrary to Ibarra's (1993, 1997) and Ibarra et al's (2010) findings in other sectors, the interviewees in my study described forming non-homophilous networks from early on in their careers, but no sooner than that. For example, these networks did not date back as far as school days, so the experience of mixed or single sex schooling did not seem to be a factor in setting the foundations of a homophilous network. This supports Bushell et al's (2020) findings that women in FTSE 350 companies also did not have networks reaching back as far as school. However, where Bushell et al found evidence that some network connections dated back to university studies, my study found that the arts executives' and chairs' networks tended to start in the workplace, based on peer contacts inside and between arts organisations. This foundation in work-based contacts could point towards the origins of the unusual non-homophilous nature of networks in this sector, forming connections that may well become social later on, but are grounded in professional contexts where connections are made based on role-holders needing to work together rather than based on homophilous socialising at university. The continued non-homophilous patterns continued as networks grew within arts organisation work settings, where cross-sector collaboration was common practice and work events allow for networking across the sector that are low cost and invitation lists open to people based on their roles, rather than social connections. Contrary

to Ibarra et al's (2010) study of networks within a large corporate firm, the arts sector is such that it is made up of multiple small organisations, with fewer internal promotion opportunities than a large corporation, so arts networks grow between peers from different work organisations. They are as likely to include men mentoring women as women mentoring women. In the arts, key individuals – women and men - were named as actively reaching out to early career men and women, making introductions and sharing information that helped those early career contacts navigate their way successfully through the sector. The women's mentors in this study did not seem any less connected to senior decision makers than the men's, partly because there was non-homophilous mentoring, but also because the senior women mentors seemed as close to key industry contacts as the men. Thus, arts networks that are non-homophilous from early on seem to provide contact with senior and influential women both towards the beginning of someone's career with those women reaching out to others, but also through peers progressing through the sector together and supporting each other on the way up. Thus the presence of senior women early on in these networks, mentoring men as well as women, and the high likelihood that a senior man will mentor an early career woman, go against Ibarra's (1992) finding that men will form homophilous networks for friendship, emotional support and instrumental work and career purposes, while women need to build non-homophilous networks for instrumental work and career purposes because there are fewer high status women than men to help with career progression. It also differs from Bushell et al's (2020) findings that women's non-homophilous instrumental networks contacts seldom lasted beyond the time connections worked together, particularly since my study found examples of women staying in touch with former male managers and colleagues in ways not seen in Bushell et al's study. Where my findings support Ibarra's (1992) and Bushell et al's (2020) description of networks, however, is in the

tendency of the women in my study to describe having a homophilous expressive network of women providing emotional and social support. However, our findings diverge when it comes to the men in my study, some of whom described non-homophilous expressive networks, as well as instrumental. This pointed towards two other sector-specific factors that may explain this divergence – an openness towards sexuality that allowed for less problematic perceptions of men and women mixing in semi-social situations, and the existence of the sector-wide Clore leadership development programme that led to deep bonds forming between the mixed gender cohorts. Women in my study partly attributed the normal practice of networking with both men and women to the fact that there are many openly gay men in the sector and therefore meant there was no perception of inappropriate sexual attraction between them which would otherwise make them hesitate in forming ongoing connections, as found in Oakley's (2000) and van den Brink & Benschop's (2014) studies. While the Clore leadership programme does list more women alumni than men, and was seen as exclusionary by some, those interviewed in my study who had attended a Clore course described making long-lasting and influential network connections from the course with both men and women. The very existence of this programme, and the non-homophilous networks that arise from it, suggest something that is unique to the sector, in that peers from different organisations have an opportunity to develop their leadership skills, connections and careers, and then continue to work alongside fellow programme alumni in the same sector. In sectors where competition between companies would disincentivise such cross-sector collaboration and information-sharing, such an opportunity for long-lasting, non-homophilous networking is unlikely to exist.

Both these factors – an openness around sexuality and a sector-wide leadership development approach – do not appear to have been found in other studies so far. Together with role-based non-homophilous networks forming from early careers onwards, mentoring

between men and women, and a sector made up of relatively small organisations where maintaining contact with former colleagues and managers is standard practice, these findings present a picture not seen in the network literature reviewed earlier.

The kind of sponsorship that Ibarra et al (2010) identified as crucial in gaining promotions towards executive level, based on men's homophilous instrumental networks and women's weaker non-homophilous networks that trap them below executive level (Bushell et al, 2020), was not evident in the accounts shared by the arts executives and chairs in my study when it came to executive appointment processes. Where networks did feed into executive appointment processes, they did not take centre stage as the basis of search and selection of potential candidates in a closed, discrete process where only network information could alert people to an opportunity. Instead, executive vacancies are advertised openly and headhunters seldom used to seek out and screen potential candidates as seen in Bushell et al's (2020) study. This open advertising seems to have been partly driven by an awareness of funder scrutiny, with UK arts councils increasingly vocal in their desire for more diversity in the sector's workforce and creative output, but also because the cost of advertising was significantly lower than headhunter fees. Even though the existence of open adverts were sometimes shared around networks, this was between peers rather than recruiters seeking out applicants. The examples of appointments being made of candidates previously unknown to the organisation shared in this study all point towards a sector that does not rely on networks in its executive appointment processes to anywhere near the same extent as elsewhere. At the other end of the appointment process, at appointment stage, network information comes into play again in the examples of Chairs taking informal references, or sounding network contacts out if they knew they had worked with the candidate who was about to be offered the executive role. On face value, this did not happen particularly

frequently. However, with one Chair admitting that she did, very occasionally, call her network contacts to ask for their opinions of a shortlisted candidate outside the formal process, and another Executive sharing her opinion that "there's a lot more informal, unauthorised contacting other people to make assessments about applicants than on the face that anybody will ever say there is" (EW31), I would not go so far as to say that gathering informal opinions about applicants and candidates never happens. However, even allowing for some unreliability in some of the accounts of how far networks are relied on when it comes to the reference stage of the selection process, the fact that these networks are non-homophilous and that gender parity exists at executive level, points towards the absence of a network trap for women in the UK publicly subsidised arts sector. This is not to discount Bushell et al's (2020) network trap concept – rather, it confirms it by demonstrating that a partial reliance on networks in executive appointments does not disadvantage women if those networks are non-homophilous and thus women are not excluded from valuable instrumental networks. It also supports the recommendations made by Bushell et al (2020) that formalising appointment processes, and ending the "primacy" (ibid, p.129) of networks in these processes, form part of the solution to women's under-representation at executive level elsewhere.

The formalised processes described in my study seemed to be genuinely based on person specifications that set out skills and experience needed to carry out the role, and applicants and candidates scored against these criteria at each stage of the appointment process. The "circumvention by manipulation" (Jewson & Mason, 1986, p.54) identified in formalised processes that have cynically been designed to benefit pre-selected favoured candidates did not appear in any of the accounts shared. The concern about interviewees giving the answers they think they ought, or that the interviewer wants to hear (Alvesson &

Ashcraft, 2012) was allayed by the descriptions of funder observers on some of the appointment panels, and also the large number of executives and Chairs who were appointed without any previous contact or knowledge of each other; both of these suggest that the formal processes described were not a smokescreen for informal appointments based on connections and favour. In addition, the accounts of appointment processes in the past suggested that this is a sector that has moved from successors being chosen by outgoing executives with no due process, or co-founders staying in post for decades, towards genuinely competitive appointments that bring in candidates from outside existing networks. That these processes all started with open advertising, and headhunters used only for administrative support or to proactively diversify the applicant pool by circulating adverts in wider circles than the organisation's networks, is a very different picture from the appointments being made via headhunters and behind closed doors described by Bushell et al (2020), is another indication that these are authentically formal processes. The appetite to move towards open advertising and little use of executive search headhunter services may well have been driven by cost considerations, but the cheapest option would be not to advertise at all and to appoint from a known network through word of mouth. That this is not happening is also an indication that the sector-wide liberal attitudes towards equality and diversity are a driver towards more open recruitments, and that the comment shared by one Executive was an authentic reflection of these attitudes: "it is less acceptable just to appoint people into jobs without advertising them, certainly not in the not for profit bit of our sector" (EW02). This supports the literature that points towards informal processes, masked by formal processes in name only, protecting the dominant, male group at the top of organisational hierarchies (Collinson et al, 1990; Burt, 1998; Acker, 2006; Bushell et al, 2020), not by finding the same practices as found in these studies but by identifying a sector where

the opposite seems to be happening and roles are indeed opening up to more women partly as a result.

While financial precarity in PSAOs did not appear to lead to any more executive appointments for women than for men, based on my study's interviews and a review of the PSAOs that were publicly in financial crisis in and around 2018, so the glass cliff phenomenon did not seem to apply. This means that Ryan & Haslam's 2005 findings cannot be extrapolated out to explain a sector-wide shift in gender outcomes for executive appointments, so my study did not expand, nor refute, that model as long as it remains as originally intended, with individual organisations as the unit of analysis. However, by exploring the issue of financial precarity, my study surfaced the issue of low salaries that interviewees flagged and job adverts from 2008 – 2018 confirmed. While the top of the salary range increased over this time period (£60k to £125k), the bottom decreased (£30k to £26k) and the average stayed around mid £40k. This finding did not contribute to the literature reviewed in advance of the study, but it adds some sector specific data that substantiates the perception shared by many interviewees that executive salaries in this sector are lower than many might expect.

Knowing what these executive salaries are in reality is important when considering how flexible working plays into the gender parity at executive level within this particular sector. While executives studied elsewhere would have been paid at levels that covered adequate full-time childcare (Bushell et al, 2020), arts executives who are also parents have had to find ways of working that adapt around child care responsibilities that do not involve relying on paid for childcare that is beyond their budget. The flexibility described by interviewees in my study mainly included flexible hours, but some also were in or had past experience of shared roles at executive level. The way that interviewees experienced both

forms of flexibility involved high levels of control over how to divide their hours between work and family life, but none of the examples shared involved working anything less than a full-time week. Both forms of flexibility allowed those with caring responsibilities of all kinds to adapt their hours and share their responsibilities when needed. This supports the argument that individual agency and control within flexible working conditions is needed for it to be a support to working parents (Crompton & Harris, 1998a; Grönlund, 2007, Chung & van der Horst, 2017, Tomlinson et al, 2018). Furthermore, the level of responsibility held by these working parent Executives and their tendency to work over and above their contracted hours alongside flexible hours, supports the literature that has found that mothers using flexitime are less likely to reduce hours after childbirth and subsequently avoid the penalties that normally come with part-time working and women's career progression (Chung & van der Horst, 2017; Chung & van der Lippe, 2018).   While some of the working fathers did share examples of adapting their working hours around childcare activities, none of them described themselves as having primary childcare responsibilities, and none of the men interviewed described having caring responsibilities beyond children – compared to the five women who did. This further supports findings elsewhere that where flexible working practices are in place, they will benefit women more than men since women are still undertaking the majority of childcare responsibilities (Chung & van der Horst, 2007; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016; Hurley & Choudhury, 2016). It also underlines the opposition to Hakim's (2002) argument that women's individual choice is the factor in working mothers not reaching executive positions, by casting light into a sector where organisational barriers seem to have been removed at executive level such that women with all kinds of caring responsibilities are able to maintain their executive career alongside family commitments rather than being forced into prioritising one over the other.

At the same time that working women have created or been offered ways of working within PSAOs that accommodate their caring commitments, Black and Asian women, and women with working class backgrounds, have been seeking and creating space at executive level within these organisations that have been seen to be led largely by white, middle-class executives. While this perception is shifting with each new appointment of a woman of colour and/or describing herself as working class, the majority of PSAOs are still led by white executives, with the proportion of BME (sic) Chief Executives reaching 10% compared to an NPO workforce that is 11% BME and a wider working age population in England that is 16% BME (Arts Council England, 2019). That 40 of the 47 executives interviewed in my study described themselves as white reflected these ACE statistics. No sector-wide data is yet available for social class at executive level, but Brook et al's (2019) study of the CCIs in general points towards a long-standing dominance of professional and managerial backgrounds in the sector, with c.60% of the workforce in the CCI sub-sector of music, performing and visual arts from these backgrounds. That 26 of the 47 executives interviewed in my study described themselves as middle class, and 11 of them described themselves as working class (10 of them did not define their class), reflects these CCI statistics from Brook et al (2019). The experiences and perceptions of the Black working class women interviewed, and the working class interviewees of both genders whether white, Black or Asian, however all told a clear story that navigating the UK publicly arts sector with any identity that diverges from the norm of white and middle-class is not easy, and often involved having to find particularly influential mentors to provide support along the way and, in one particular case, having to create new organisations themselves to allow their intersectional identity to be fully realised within the sector.

Contribution

It is not often that the arts sector as a site of work and organisation studies gets the level of focus that this thesis provides. Sometimes arts organisations are caught up in a wider study of the CCIs, alongside many other kinds of organisations in terms of size and profit & loss business models which makes it difficult to map CCI findings onto arts organisations. Sometimes studies of employment within PSAOs drill down into smaller sub-sectors, such as English theatre (Long, 1998; Tuckett, 2019a, 2019b). It is even rarer for executive roles to be the focus of study within the arts or the CCIs, with creative roles often the subject rather than employed leadership positions (Dean, 2005, 2008, 2015; Dodd, 2012; Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012). More often than not, the arts are excluded from the wider body of work looking at gender parity at executive level since they often focus on the corporate sector (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Singh et al, 2006, 2008; Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008; Cook & Glass, 2014; Vinnicombe et al, 2019, 2020). This study therefore provides an empirical contribution to the studies of executive appointments and gender parity, by providing insight into a sector that seems to be operating differently. It also provides an empirical contribution to work on inequalities within the wider CCIs, and to studies of the creative career pathways through the arts, by adding in the experiences and accounts of employed executives in a large group of organisations that may provide a pathway towards greater equality elsewhere.

By identifying the presence of non-homophilous instrumental networks at executive level for men and women, that appear to be equally valuable when it comes to career progression, this study also expands on current theories about homophilous networks and the barriers that these pose to women's career progression. By including the subject of sexuality in discussions of network formation in this sector, this study offers an additional

explanation of why some networks are homophilous and some are not, and signals the kind of sector-wide attitudes towards sexuality needed to move towards diversity at executive level.

The other contribution that this study makes is a practical one, by mapping out a potential model for other sectors to examine and adopt as a way of moving towards gender parity. Part of this map is made up of non-homophilous networks forming for men and women, and organisations genuinely using open and formal recruitment and selection methods and creating flexible working patterns that workers can shape and influence. While funder scrutiny also seems to play a part in shifting practice, it did not come through quota setting or sector-specific codes (voluntary or otherwise) that set out exactly what appointment processes to follow. This external scrutiny instead came in the form of sector-wide discussions around diversity in its broadest sense, with funding consequences publicly signalled but not yet introduced.

The areas for further research arising out of this study are fourfold, still using the arts sector as the research setting. This first of these would be to address the remaining weaknesses in this study, that is to draw in accounts from men of colour, and Welsh organisations, which would most likely be achieved through adopting Lee & Tapia's (2021) model (which is not possible within a PhD project), that of collaborative research between researchers from different backgrounds. Such a study could also include mapping out the intersectional identities of executives across the sector, and the membership of the non-homophilous networks uncovered here, to better understand how far the perceptions of this study's interviewees reach across the sector as a whole. The second of these research areas would be to investigate the music and theatre parts of the sector, to better understand the

persistent under-representation of women in music, and the gendered division between creative, outward facing AD roles and managerial, low profile female ED roles.

The third area for further research would be to further explore the networks and appointment practices for employed positions in the executive pipeline, and those for the voluntary boards of Trustees making the appointments, to identify at what point groups that are currently minoritised within the sector are included or excluded within the sector. The fourth area for further research could then be a study of networks and executive appointment practices across commercial, i.e. non-subsidised, UK arts organisations to see how far the lack of funder scrutiny has an impact on gender outcomes in those work organisations.

Conclusion

The findings from this study, therefore, provide a unique insight at a moment in time into a sector that has achieved what other studies have found lacking – equal numbers of men and women being appointed into executive positions within work organisations. Asking the question, "How have UK publicly subsidised arts organisations achieved gender parity at executive level across the sector when other UK sectors have not?", it opened the door into a world that has grown non-homophilous networks within a culture of inter-organisational collaboration, relatively inclusive networking practices, and an openness around sexuality that removes some of the judgement found elsewhere of men and women forming professional relationships. It found that funder scrutiny is also part of the driver towards gender parity, but not in the form of setting quotas or sector regulations, but by stating wider commitments to equality and diversity and moving the conversation towards funding consequences for those organisations that did not start making progress. It also finds that workplace structures that increasingly adapt to executives' caring responsibilities alongside

their work, in the form of flexible hours and shared executive level positions, play their part in the seemingly perfect storm of non-homophilous networking, formal recruitment and selection methods that settles down into gender parity. The storm, however, is not damage-free. Low and stagnant salaries cannot be ignored, with men often - but not always - landing the highest paid advertised executive roles each year and women often the lowest. Nor should the gender parity – reported to each of the UK arts councils by 2018, and verified by identifying the names of each executive in 1,118 organisations as of that same year – be heralded as a success without acknowledging that it is also a sign that, just as Clarke et al (2005) found, white, middle class women seem to be benefitting from this move towards gender parity ahead of other women.

That is not to diminish the work carried out at executive level by the women of colour, by the working class women, and by the women who are both. It is also not to diminish the work done by the white, middle-class women carried out at executive level that up until relatively recently was predominantly carried out by men. Long may their work continue, and long may the pipeline behind and around them remain. This study shows that instrumental networks for men and women can be non-homophilous in terms of gender, and that this plays a part in improving appointment outcomes for previously under-represented groups. The arts can still act as an example for other sectors who genuinely want to achieve gender parity at executive level, by sharing the answer to the original research question: that the combination of openly advertised, formal executive recruitment and selection processes, non-homophilous networking based on accessible, work-centred activities, oversight from an influential and involved sector-wide body, and flexible working practices that include co-executive roles, all play a part in how UK publicly subsidised arts organisations have achieved gender parity. This combination is missing, so far, in other sectors, and by focussing on just

one area – either networking patterns, recruitment selection processes, external oversight or working patterns – then other sectors are unlikely to learn from the example set by the arts sector. Meanwhile, by proactively providing networking opportunities for other under-represented groups to become part of existing instrumental networks that then become non-homophilous beyond gender, by maintaining formal recruitment and selection methods alongside organisational structures that make space for women of all backgrounds, the arts sector can continue a drive towards achieving intersectional gender parity and break new ground in that arena as well. Unless the sector accepts that this gender parity is just the beginning, and that organisations need to further disrupt and embrace change in attitudes towards race and class throughout a woman's career path to executive level, then the current gender parity may be a victory for some, but a hollow victory for the sector as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix I: interview framework

1. Let's start by talking through the exec appointment processes you've experienced, either as the applicant, or appointer, or observer.
   a. How did they hear?
   b. What process was followed?
   c. What role did references play?
   d. What's changed over the course of their career?
2. In general terms, how would you describe the way in which the arts sector appoints its executives?
3. Thinking about appointment processes, did you know anyone before you applied/screened applications?
4. How financially healthy were the organisations when you first stepped into each executive role?
   a. **listen/probe for** how they measure financial health.
   b. **summarise** Ryan & Haslam's glass cliff theory if they are reticent to encourage openness.
5. I'm interested in how people stay in touch with each other professionally within the sector. Talk me through how you've built up your own network of professional contacts.
   a. How far back does it stretch – university? School days? Former managers?
6. How do you tend to keep in touch with members of your network – what kind of activities?
7. What kind of information is shared within your network?
   a. Do you reach out for help with day to day work issues?
   b. Do you reach out for help with your career choices?
8. You may not have ever thought about this before, but roughly what proportion of men and women are in your network?
9. Are you aware of any women-only networks in the arts sector?
10. Are you aware of any events in the arts sector where Chairs are introduced to potential executive candidates?
11. Do you consider yourself to have had a mentor or sponsor, an active advocate within the arts sector, now or in the past?
    a. **If yes** - what role do you think they have played in your career progression?
    b. **If yes** – what gender is/was your mentor/advocate(s)?
12. Do you consider yourself to be a mentor or active advocate to others in the sector, now or in the past?
    a. **If yes** - What role do you think you have played in your mentees' career progression?
    b. **If yes** – what gender is/was your mentee(s)?
13. A few factual questions now that I'm asking everyone:
    a. At school, were you at a single sex or a mixed school? And private or state?
    b. What's the highest level educational qualification you hold? Which university/school? Which subject?
    c. Have you ever undertaken any management or leadership training?
14. Do you have any childcare or other caring responsibilities/are you aware of the caring responsibilities of execs you've appointed?
    a. **Yes or no** – what impact do you think that's had on your career?
    b. **Yes of no** – do you think the sector has become more flexible around caring responsibilities recently?

15. In my research I focus on gender, but I recognise the intersection at play between gender, race and class when it comes to equality and inequality in the workplace. As far as you are comfortable, talk me through what impact your own intersections of gender, race and class have had in your progression to exec level/appointment choices.
16. I am basing my research on recent data drawn from the various UK arts councils, that indicate that the arts sector is the first sector in the UK to reach gender equality at executive level. Is this apparent gender equality at exec level something you recognise? **If yes** – do you have a view on how this has been achieved?
17. And finally, is there anything you would like to add about gender equality at executive level in the UK arts sector?

Having completed this interview, are there other people you know whom you think I should interview as well? **If yes** - ask for an email intro, or if I can mention their name if I approach.

ADVANCE QUESTIONS TO BE SENT TO IF REQUESTED

The interviews are semi-structured, so we'll be able to go wherever the conversation leads us on the day too and you will be able to skip any questions you don't want to answer, but my key prompt questions will be as follows:

1. Starting with the executive level positions you've held, how have you tended to hear about those opportunities before you applied?
2. Has the way you've heard about new career opportunities changed over the course of your career?
3. What kinds of application processes have you gone through yourself (e.g. application forms, cover letters, head-hunted, etc.)?
4. And what kinds of selection processes (e.g. interviews, presentations, references, etc.)?
5. Thinking about your current and past executive positions, how financially healthy were the organisations when you were first appointed?
6. Thinking about your current professional contacts, would you describe yourself as actively maintaining a professional network?
7. If so, how has that network formed and how do you tend to keep in touch?
8. Roughly what proportion of men and women are in your network?
9. Do you consider yourself to have had a mentor or sponsor or active advocate within the arts sector, now or in the past?
10. If so, what role do you think they have played in your career progression?
11. In my research I focus on gender, but I recognise the intersection at play between gender, race and class when it comes to equality and inequality in the workplace. As far as you are comfortable, talk me through what impact your own intersections of gender, race and class have had in your progression to exec level/appointment choices.
12. I am basing my research on recent data drawn from the various UK arts councils, that indicate that the arts sector is the first sector in the UK to have achieved gender equality at executive level. Is this apparent gender equality at executive level something that you recognise?
13. If so, do you have a view on how this has been achieved?