

**RnB & Me: Lenny Henry talks to
Beverley Knight | Hugh Grant on regulating
the tabloids | Anamik Saha on the End of
Diversity | Time for an Identity Tax? | Untold
histories of BBC Black radio & immersive audio |
Calling Out harassment and Disrupting Narratives in
TV & Film | Jacqueline Rose on post-pandemic
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Horace Ové & Keiran Goddard**

RE PRESENT OLOGY

**The Journal
of Media and
Diversity**

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REPRESENTOLOGY

The Journal of Media and Diversity

Editorial Mission Statement

Welcome to Representology, a journal dedicated to research and best-practice perspectives on how to make the media more representative of all sections of society.

A starting point for effective representation are the “protected characteristics” defined by the Equality Act 2010 including, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, as well as their intersections. We recognise that definitions of diversity and representation are dynamic and constantly evolving and our content will aim to reflect this.

Representology is a forum where academic researchers and media industry professionals can come together to pool expertise and experience. We seek to create a better understanding of the current barriers to media participation as well as examine and promote the most effective ways to overcome such barriers. We hope the journal will influence policy and practice in the media industry through a rigorous, evidence-based approach.

Our belief is that a more representative media workforce will enrich and improve media output, enabling media organisations to better serve their audiences, and encourage a more pluralistic and inclusive public discourse. This is vital for a healthy society and well-functioning democracy. We look forward to working with everyone who shares this vision.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue Six of Representology - The Journal of Media & Diversity.

Is 2024 the year to give up on Diversity? Anamik Saha in his essay argues that whilst it may feel progressive to see, say, more people of colour on our TV screens than in the past, the current ‘super-visible success of a few Black and Asian people’ may be detrimental to communities in the long run.

His call for improved regulation to produce a better media landscape in Britain is echoed elsewhere in these pages by the actor Hugh Grant. Caroline Meaby looks at the concept of the ‘Identity Tax’, while we get incisive commentary from figures in the music, television and film industries, and academic analysis from Dr Liam McCarthy unearthing the untold history of Black BBC local radio.

With heightened discourse around ‘identity politics’ expected to be a feature of election campaigns this year on both sides of the Atlantic, those pushing for a more representative media in Britain may be interested in Representology Live - our first ever academic conference, taking place on June 27th at Cardiff University. We hope to meet some of you there, and as ever, if you have any ideas for future articles, please email: Representology@bcu.ac.uk

K Biswas
Editor



Book your tickets to Representology Live:

www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/representology-conference-tickets-885617103597

or scan the QR code above.



RnB & TIME

Sir Lenny Henry talks to **Beverley Knight** about her experiences as a Black woman in the music industry and on the stage, and how regional voices like hers - no longer in the early stages of their careers - can thrive.

Getting round the Gatekeepers

Lenny:

Let's start with the most basic question - why is media diversity important to you?

Beverley:

Oh, God, it's profoundly important because we need to tell our stories. It's great when you get the opportunity to be on a stage, or an acting role in a film or drama. Or indeed, you know, writing your album and telling your stories that way. We're talking about autonomy - having the ability to make your own stuff when you want to. You want to be heard by people who get what you're saying - from the very first page all the way through to the finished product - whatever that finished product is, whatever medium that is.

Lenny:

You sound very passionate. When you started off, did you have a lot of people - 'Gatekeepers' - in the way of your progress?

Beverley:

I spent a lot of time, in the nicest possible way, exercising diplomacy, diplomacy, and a bit more diplomacy. Because of the stereotype of Black women - you know, of being aggressive and in your face. So, I wanted to do things the way I wanted to do them. But I went on a charm offensive, just to get through the door. And what I found was mostly blokes - white blokes - in suits, no tie, and trainers. No one's telling me about what Soul and RnB was - giving me the definitions of what my own music was and wasn't! That really wound me up.

In reviews, the same types of people would be telling me what I should or shouldn't be doing, as if I haven't breathed this music all my life. You're writing about it because you've studied it for a season - suddenly, you're the arbiter of all things Soul and RnB! That was really frustrating.

Lenny:

I remember the girls from the group Eternal [90s British musicians] talking about when they went to America, and the industry there tried to separate the white member from the others, because they weren't used to seeing an interracial RnB group. I think that there's a sense of 'everybody stays in their lane and we're fine'. The minute you, like, defy narrow genre barriers and expectations, they lose their minds.

Beverley:

By God, you can't do that! You cannot. Music - the gift of music - and the genres do not delineate themselves through race. Otherwise you get ridiculous situations where... what do you do with someone who's biracial? Crazy.

Skin Deep

Lenny:

Do you think things have got better for Black women in the music industry?

Beverley:

First of all, it feels like I started such a long time ago, in one respect. In another respect, it feels like yesterday. Because time has flown and so much has happened. But when I think of what else was around at that time, and I go through the passage of time - the timeline, if you like - of what has been and gone, then I think "oh, yeah, it's a long time ago". I've done alright, I'm still here. I have seen, during my 30 years in the music industry, so many more Black women come to the fore, and 'get it' from Britain. You know, getting their love, getting their flowers. The latest to take over the world, who is a woman of colour - I don't really know her background enough - she's a woman called Raye. It's interesting to me that a lot of the women who are doing well - yes, they're Black, but they're not Black like I'm Black. They're not.

Lenny:

Do you mean they are light skinned Black women? That's a thing.

Beverley:

I do. I do think that there is still - and this happens to women a lot more than men - there is still this thing of women having to look a certain way, and to get their foot through the door. And lighter skinned women tend to have that: 'I am kind of on my own. I'm on my own.'

Lenny:

If that is the struggle you face in front of the microphone, what about behind the scenes - is it still the same people in charge, the 'Gatekeepers'?

Beverley:

By and large, it is changing. It is changing, but it's slow. And the reason why it's slow is because the record labels, the movie studios, the television networks... it's the same old boys' club. We've known for decades, you know, they've got the power. But people are starting to call them out now.

You see, social media has changed the game completely - what we've seen with the likes of the #MeToo movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement has shown that if you try and pull some, some craziness, we can talk to each other. And we can, sort of, move mountains if we need to. But it's still going to be about people getting together. Who has power? Who has the financial clout? And these people are, by and large, still predominantly white.

Lenny:

The thing about the music business - and any of these industries - is that people still gravitate towards what they know, what they trust. It takes a while to earn that trust, doesn't it?

Beverley:

It does take a while. And I think you have to get a couple of hits. Once you've done that you build up a bit of currency. But then, if you don't keep getting the hits, they're like, "oh, she's finished. She's over". And so you have to keep proving yourself. If you don't fit into the box, then it's even harder because you're expected to keep doing things that are familiar. You have to push the boundaries. You have to take risks. You have to experiment. That's what I've done - sometimes it pays off. And sometimes it doesn't. But that's part of the journey.

Rewarding Black Talent

Lenny:

Let's talk about recognition, awards ceremonies. Do you think something like the MOBOs still have a place?

Beverley:

Absolutely. When the MOBO Awards began nearly 30 years ago, there was a clear need for an award ceremony that celebrated the achievements of Black artists in the UK. Mainstream award shows often overlooked Black talent, so the MOBOs filled that gap. And while progress has been made, there is still work to be done to ensure that Black artists receive the recognition they deserve in all facets of the industry.

Lenny:

In America, we see award ceremonies like the Soul Train Awards or NAACP Image Awards. Do you think similar ceremonies are necessary here?

Beverley:

Absolutely. These award ceremonies provide a platform for Black artists to be recognised and celebrated on their own terms. Until mainstream award shows fully embrace and appreciate the diversity of British music, there will continue to be a need for ceremonies like the MOBOs'.

... while progress has been made, there is still work to be done to ensure that Black artists receive the recognition they deserve in all facets of the industry.

New Times

Lenny:

Let's talk about technology. How has it changed the music industry, particularly in terms of diversity?

Beverley:

Technology has revolutionised the music industry by providing artists with the tools to create and distribute their music independently. Platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Bandcamp have democratised the process, allowing artists from diverse backgrounds to share their



I'm passionate about what I do, and I refuse to let anyone or anything hold me back. I've faced adversity throughout my career, but I've always pushed through and come out stronger on the other side.

music with a global audience. While this has made it easier for artists to break into the industry, the sheer volume of content available has also made it harder for individual voices to be heard. However, technology has empowered artists to take control of their own careers, bypassing the traditional gatekeepers and finding success on their own terms.

Lenny:
So, you're saying the model has changed?

Beverley:
Yes, the traditional model of signing with a record label and relying on them to promote and distribute your music is no longer the only option. Artists can now self-release their music, and use social media to build a fanbase and generate income. This shift has empowered a new generation of artists to take control of their own destinies, and find success outside of the traditional music industry structures.

On The Stage

Lenny:
Let's talk about diversity in musical theatre. Do you think there's enough representation, particularly for Black writers and performers?

Beverley:
The lack of diversity in musical theatre is a significant issue - both on and off the stage. While there has been progress in terms of casting more diverse performers, there is still a lack of representation among writers, directors, and producers. Black voices are often marginalised in the industry, and there needs to be more opportunities for them to tell their stories and showcase their talents.

Lenny:
It's not just about race, though, is it? There's also a lack of regional diversity in the industry.

Beverley:
Absolutely. Regional voices like mine are often overlooked in the media industry. Despite the rich culture and talent that exists outside of London, there is still a bias towards the capital and other major cities. We need to see more representation of regional voices in all aspects of the industry - from writing and directing to performing and producing.

Lenny:
And what about age? Do you think it's harder being an older Black woman in this industry?

Beverley:
Being an older woman in the industry is challenging enough, but being a Black woman adds another layer of difficulty. However, I've embraced my age and refuse to let it hold me back. I released an album celebrating turning 50, showing that age is just a number and that I still have so much more to offer.

Diverse Futures

Lenny:
Despite the challenges you've faced, you're still making kick-ass records and thriving in musical theatre. What keeps you going?

Beverley:
I'm passionate about what I do, and I refuse to let anyone or anything hold me back. I've faced adversity throughout my career, but I've always pushed through and come out stronger on the other side. I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had, and I'm excited to see what the future holds.

Lenny:
And what do you hope for the future of diversity in the entertainment industry?

Beverley:
I hope to see a more inclusive and equitable industry where everyone, regardless of race, gender, age, or background, has the opportunity to succeed. We need to continue pushing for change and holding the powers that be accountable for their actions. Together, we can create a more diverse and representative media landscape for future generations to enjoy.

Beverley Knight is an award winning musician and performer who grew up in the West Midlands. She is an honorary Doctor of Music at the University of Wolverhampton.

Sir Lenny Henry is on the Representology editorial board. After eight years, he is stepping down from the role of Chancellor at Birmingham City University.



Hugh Grant on reforming and regulating the British press

In early March, the actor and campaigner held a wide-ranging Q&A session with journalist **Emma Jones** at a Yellow Press event, during which he expressed his desire to see improved press accountability.

EJ:

So, you suddenly shoot to fame - Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994) - and fame is a strange thing, perhaps an unnatural thing. What was it like and how did the tabloids treat you to begin with, and did you go along with it?

HG:

There was a tiny, five minute honeymoon when that film was a success. And yeah, they were quite nice about it. And then the worm turned and it was savage. It was savage.

But, I think it was partly my fault, because I played up to that. You know, that character was written by [screenwriter] Richard Curtis and I thought, well if that's what it takes to have a big hit and for people to love you all over America, I'll just be that person. So I used to go on chat shows in Britain and in America being [posh voice] "Er. You know, well. Gosh!", and it was pretty sick-making, really. So, I accept some of the vitriol that came my way.

EJ:

So, in terms of your life now, you've got your acting career, but you've also got the campaigning side. Tell us a little bit about what it was like giving evidence at Leveson [2011 judicial public inquiry into the culture, practices, and ethics of the British press following the News International phone hacking scandal]. What's that side of your life been like? Is it good to have the two things?

HG:

Well, you know, oddly enough, I'm much more proud of that side of my life than I am of any of the showbiz side. And it all happened by accident in 2011. I went to a dinner hosted by Alan Rusbridger, the editor of The Guardian, and it was for Nick Davies [investigative journalist, author of Flat Earth News and Hack Attack].

And we were all talking about the worst abuses of the tabloid press, and what they did to innocent people - nothing to do with celebrities, it's to do with people who had tragedies in their lives. And we're talking about that. And we were talking about the fact that they were really running the country. Successive governments going back to Thatcher had been, sort of, in their pocket, terrified of them.

The conclusion was that no one will ever care about this in the country unless there's some terrible, egregious abomination that moves the public. And then, oddly enough, within a year that did happen with the Milly Dowler story and suddenly the public was rightly horrified and scandalised.

And at that point a couple of academics, Brian Cathcart and Martin Moore, said, "Well, we've started this thing called Hacked Off. It's about phone hacking and other press abuse - would you very kindly turn up to the green in front of Westminster Palace and say a few words to the media?"

And I did. And it all kicked off from there, and just grew and grew. We took the Dowlers to Downing Street and demanded a public inquiry. And, you know, the Cameron government didn't want to do it, but they had to because they made promises to the Dowlers.

EJ:

Do you think things have changed [since Leveson]?

HG:

I think they're not as bad as they were, but that could be to do with technology. Phone hacking is, we think, now much harder than it was when it was everywhere. Do the commercial newspapers still control government? Yes, absolutely they do.

EJ:

You only have to look at the number of meetings between Rishi Sunak and Rupert Murdoch.

HG:

And that famous quote [attributed to] Rupert Murdoch - as he said, the reason I'm against the EU is because when I talk to Brussels, they ignore me. When I go to Westminster, they do exactly what I tell them to do. And that seems to be the case.

You know, people think we must be a bunch of lefties. Not at all. Tony Blair was one of the worst at this. And you know, he was calling Rupert Murdoch on the morning he agreed to join the Americans invading Iraq and all that. It's terrifying.

In answer to an audience question asking what he would do about press reform if he were to run for Prime Minister:

HG:

One, strengthen regulation of the press. Have an actually meaningful regulator, as we do of any industry in this country which has the power to harm people. They are all regulated - gas, water, alcohol, whatever it is, there's a regulator, medicine.

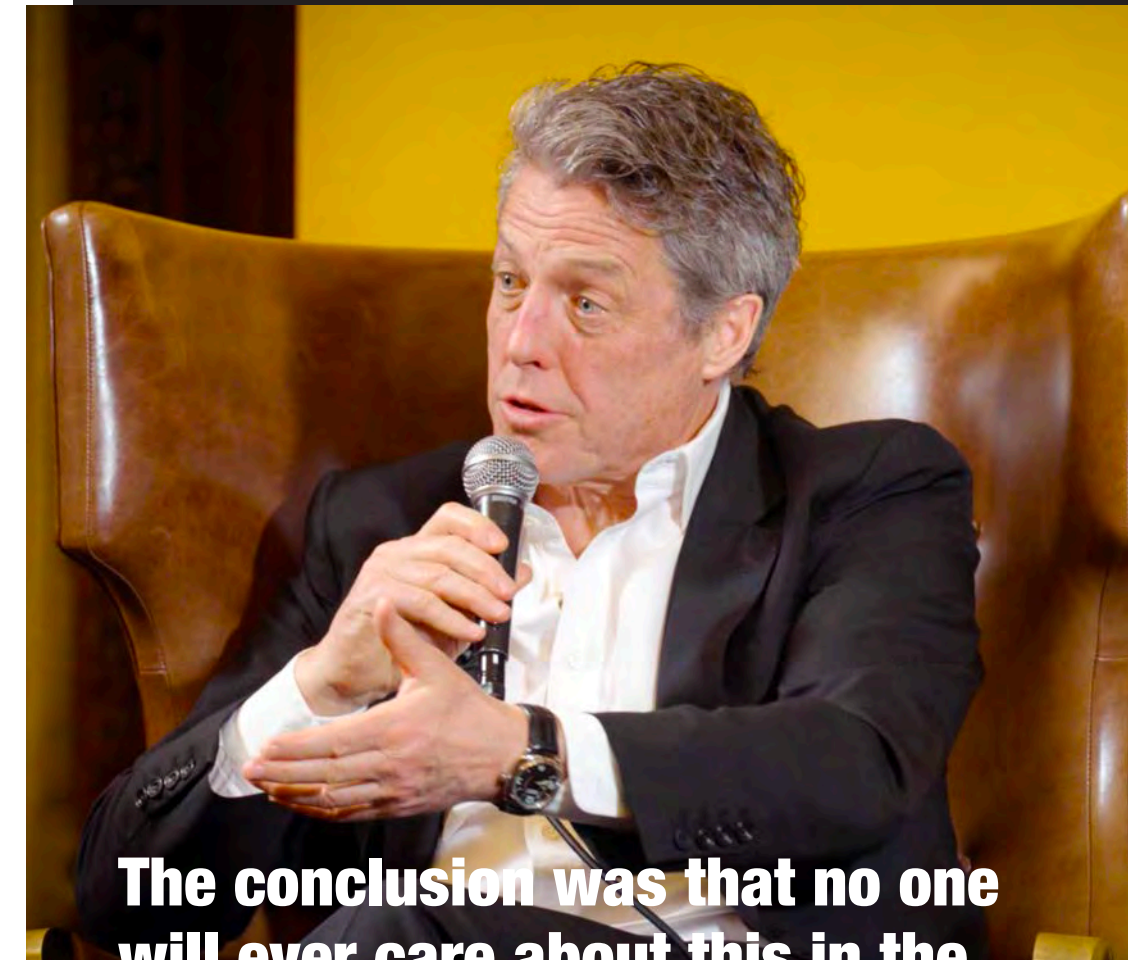
And then, of course, broadcast journalism - heavily regulated, it came through the technology of the 1920s. There's a box in the corner of our room that has the power to influence our opinions and distort our democracy, so let's have quite strict regulations. We have Ofcom and all that, you know, duty of impartiality and all these things which actually make our broadcast journalism the envy of the world.

But the newspapers, meanwhile, are allowed to continue to regulate themselves and have demonstrated repeatedly over the last few decades that that simply doesn't work.

Because so much of our press has been captured by big business - big oligarchal owners who care about their profit line most, and their political agenda - unfortunately, government does have to step in. Not regulate the press themselves - that would be disgusting - but come up with an arrangement such as Lord Leveson came up with after a year of his public

inquiry, in which you have the press continuing to form their own regulator, but there's a little body of decent people who look at [the efficacy of] that regulator every year or so.

That's one route to make it better. The other route has always been through ownership. Is it crazy that our print press has been owned by an Australian American who is not British? By brothers who live on a tax dodging Channel Island, or by Lord Rothermere of the Daily Mail, who is a non-dom? The owner of a British paper has to be British, I think.



The conclusion was that no one will ever care about this in the country unless there's some terrible, egregious abomination that moves the public. And then, oddly enough, within a year that did happen . . .

Hugh Grant is a Bafta and Golden Globe award winning film and television actor. In 2019, he was nominated for a Primetime Emmy for his portrayal of Jeremy Thorpe in *A Very English Scandal*.

Emma Jones is a Welsh journalist who formerly edited *Smash Hits* magazine and worked on *Fleet Street* for a number of tabloid newspapers.

They were in conversation on Friday March 1st in London at an event for Yellow Press Books.



**END
DIVERSITY**

The hypervisibility of people of colour in the public realm may not benefit meaningful attempts to dismantle racism. **Dr Anamik Saha** believes the language of 'diversity' upholds the status quo and should be done away with.

Whilst growing up in the 1980s, my sister and I would play a game called Spot-the-Asian. The rules of the game were simple: between the two of us we would watch hours of television and when a Brown person appeared - usually Art Malik - we would scream loudly for everyone else in the house to come see.

It did not matter that the characters we saw were only ever shopkeepers or terrorists. At a time when there was a dearth of Asian representation in mainstream media, such as negativised images nonetheless amounted to an important form of recognition. These days, Asians, along with other groups of people defined by race, can feel like a ubiquitous presence on our screens. From a cursory flick through any streaming platform, it appears that Black, Brown and Asian people are having a fantastic time, leading both ordinary and extraordinary lives. They are falling in love and safely raising families, building successful careers as judges, scientists and military generals, even as leaders of the free world. No longer violent antagonists, corner shop owners or taxi drivers, they are more likely to be solving crimes, fighting supervillains and saving the world from destruction. This is a far cry from the days of Spot-the-Asian.

In the twenty-first century, we have gone from invisibility to hypervisibility regarding the representation of race. Diversity – or, to be more precise, the language of diversity - is shaping contemporary media in radical ways. To put it another way, so much of what we consume in the media has been made according to the logic of diversity.

Yet, there is a disconnect. Despite the superdiversity we encounter in media content, the insides of the creative and cultural industries – as academic and policy research demonstrates on a seemingly

. . . in terms of media content: the superdiversity we encounter on our screens is shallow, or what Kristen Warner describes as “plastic representation”.

annual basis – remains steadfastly White. A further subtext is how the turn to diversity in the media appears to have had little impact on politics, where politicians (even the Brown ones) find that espousing explicit anti-immigrant rhetoric remains a fast-track to election. To return to the specific issue of racial inequalities in the creative and cultural industries, it may seem on the surface that the emphasis on diversity does not go far enough and needs

better resourcing and more effective implementation. But what if diversity, as an approach, is fundamentally broken? Could it be the case that diversity is the problem itself?

The emergence of diversity

‘Diversity’, in its general sense, simply means variety, but this definition has expanded in recent times. These days, diversity refers directly to a set of practices and an institutional language designed to ensure that people from different racial and social backgrounds

(including those based on class, disability, gender and sexual identity) are included or involved in a given context. Diversity has become the dominant way in which racial inequalities inside creative and cultural industries are understood, talked about and addressed, in both policy and public discourse and even in activist circles.

The emergence of this newer definition of diversity stems from three things. Firstly, the turn to diversity can be considered an inevitable consequence of what the cultural theorist Stuart Hall called ‘multicultural drift’. Here, Hall uses the concept to describe the increasing visibility and ‘natural’ participation of ethnic minorities in British life, through different waves of migration. It is a slow shift, like tectonic plates drifting across ocean beds. Multicultural drift is always under contestation, met with nationalistic resistance that enacts hostile social policies designed to halt or slow its progress. Nonetheless, there is something inevitable about multicultural drift, though it lacks a specific purpose. A consequence of multicultural drift is that the national population has, quite literally, become more diverse. Furthermore, it follows that as society becomes more heterogeneous, as minoritised populations become more integrated into society, they become more assertive and demand those rights that have been historically denied. As alluded to above, diversity has become the main way in which the demand for equal rights is voiced in contemporary public discourse, where the representation and the visibility of minoritised groups in public life has become a key social justice goal.

Secondly, it emerges from New Labour’s Creative Industries policy. Diversity as a term has always been present in modern UK cultural policy, part of a broader multicultural policy that shaped the state’s approach to the arts since the 1970s. However, it was instrumentalised by Tony Blair’s New Labour in a way that suited its increasingly neoliberal agenda. New Labour wanted to foreground the economic potential of Britain’s cultural and creative industries (which provided the justification for the intensification of the marketisation of the sector). Under creative industries rhetoric, diversity plays a key role. Diversity is reconceptualised as a driver of innovation, originality and competition, while aiding social integration and cohesion through increasing the individual’s social capital. The economic case for diversity is in the ascendancy and is what shapes culture-making in the present moment. This economic rationale for diversity has also seeped into mainstream anti-racist discourse, where activists will make the case that diversity is good for business.

Thirdly, diversity is also a product of technological change and platform capitalism. One important consideration here is the rise of the new streaming services. These services are based on a subscription model - a model in which programmes and films are commissioned, made and distributed based not just on their capacity to generate ratings, but also on how they contribute to an overall catalogue, access to which is sold to customers around the world. In this new production context, content is valued for the ways in which it adds variety or, indeed, colour, to an existing library. A monocultural catalogue is not going to attract subscribers. In other words, diversity is at the core of the business model of the media production arms of the giant tech companies.

A further important technological development that has enabled the diversity turn is the emergence of social media as a site where content can be made and shared. Social media platforms have radically lowered barriers to entry, allowing people from under-represented communities to create and share their own self-crafted stories and experiences with the masses in a way that was previously impossible. While it is not as obvious, diversity is also shaping this context - a context in which value is created through users creating a personal brand to amass followers. In this data-driven world, leaning into one’s racial identity can lead to lucrative sponsorship deals with brands trying to engage more diverse audiences and communities. Again, diversity is proving to have an economic value.

Critiquing diversity

The turn to diversity can feel like progress. To repeat, when once they were invisible, Black, Brown and Asian people now feel like an inescapable presence in the images and sounds that saturate our society, whether that is in a party-political broadcast, a superhero movie, the front cover of a fashion magazine, a supermarket advert, a social media feed, or a competitive cookery programme. Moreover, historically white institutions now strive for diversity in their boardrooms, even in government cabinets. Job and promotion applications must evidence a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. The very integrity and legitimacy of the biggest, most important public and

cultural institutions in society rely upon showing that they take diversity seriously.

Yet it is my contention that diversity - as a language/discourse, as a set of policies - actually serves an ideological function that keeps the status quo in place. There are two facets to this argument. Firstly, in terms of media content: the superdiversity we encounter on our screens is shallow, or what Kristen Warner describes as “plastic representation”. It presents a post-racial depiction of the world, one in which racism appears to have been overcome. While we must avoid a simplistic reading of media that evaluates its content in terms of how it accurately represents society (the politics of representation is much more complex than that), this moment of diversity, in which the representation of people of colour in the media strives for positivity and where people who are defined by race appear to be free from the harms of racism, can feel detached from the actual experience of racial/ethnic groups. Social research shows that racialised communities remain structurally disadvantaged in nearly all spheres of life. Yet, through the logics of diversity, we are given a vision of society that is shaped by a discourse of what Jo Littler calls “postracial neoliberal meritocracy” - presenting society as a level-playing field, on which those people who are racialised as ‘Other’ can succeed if they just work hard enough, where racism can no longer be used as an excuse for a lack of progress.

Second, in the context of the creative and cultural industries, as mentioned above, the emphasis on diversity has had little impact on the persistent racial inequalities inside the cultural industries, despite the super-visible success of a few Black and Asian people. Research shows, that despite the emphasis on making the cultural industries more diverse, and decades of initiatives that are aimed at increasing the number of people from racialised backgrounds in the creative workforce, we see very little change or, at best, incremental improvement. It is significant that these initiatives are founded on the deficit model, based upon fixing a supposed lack in people from marginalised backgrounds in terms of training, skills, experience and networking abilities. The advantage of the deficit model, from the cultural elite's point of view, is that it deflects attention from the racism inside these organisations that makes them such a hostile place for racialised 'Others' (whether it is through explicit forms of discrimination, or through a stifling creative environment that enacts tighter control on those who do not fit the somatic norm), and the forms of privilege and status that effectively keep it a closed shop. While we see superdiversity on our screens, the people who monopolise the profits from this diverse content thus all belong to the same social elite and, indeed, have the same 'ethnic' background.

I should note that, from my own research over the past decade, research that entails hundreds of interviews with people who work inside the creative and cultural industries, issues of diversity, and the lack thereof, are a source of stress and anxiety for media executives and creative managers. The social justice orientation of diversity means that it contains a disruptive quality. In this regard, the turn to diversity can be read as the defensive response from the elite group that feels its cultural authority to be under threat.

On the flip side of the coin, diversity is the way in which major public institutions and corporations are learning to proactively capitalise upon this new demand for racial difference (although with mixed results). In other words, diversity becomes a way for the dominant group to protect its status and privilege while appearing to be inclusive. Diversity, as a practice, is the way that cultural industries appear to be listening to, and meeting, the demands of marginalised groups, while again keeping existing hierarchies in place.

Conclusion: end diversity

We need to reject the diversity paradigm. In its place, I argue for more radical media reform, including regulation that breaks up the concentration of corporate media, the development of a more radical, representative and robust public service media, and public funding for grassroots and more community-orientated media. Such reforms are intended to remove barriers to entry, to make creative work more sustainable. Moreover, this new paradigm is focused on creating the conditions that can open-up representational practices, allowing those from marginalised backgrounds to tell their stories in whatever way they want to, whether exposing racial injustices, exploring the complexity of cultural identity, or creating cosmic tales about space cowboys (Black and Asian people like weird sci-fi too).

What I have described are economic forms of redress. This needs to be coupled with a proper reckoning with the dynamics of race and racism and how they shape cultural production. One of the quietly devastating effects of diversity is the ways in which it buries the discussion of racism. This is part of a post-racial turn in which society has convinced itself that racism is no longer a structural force that limits the life-chances of those defined by race and, instead, is an individualised problem involving those who hold racist beliefs. Diversity, as an institutional practice, has

paradoxically side-tracked any talk of institutional racism. It must be understood that rejecting diversity in favour of a more assertive anti-racist approach does not mean dourly calling out everything, or everyone, as racist. Rather, it necessitates a sensitive and nuanced analysis of how the dynamics of race lead to the privileging and disadvantaging of certain groups of people. Such an understanding sheds light on how to radically reorganise the media – to take it from the grip of an elite group and to ensure what Nancy Fraser calls a “parity of participation”, where everyone has an equal capacity in culture-making.

Diversity distracts from any discussion of the radical structural change that is needed to meaningfully address inequality. It also places limits on what we imagine media can be. Diversity is not our end goal. Rather, it prevents us from getting there.

Dr Anamik Saha is Professor of Race and Media at the University of Leeds' School of Media and Communication



The identity tax

Caroline Meaby shares the experiences of identity taxation for minoritised workers in the UK television industry.

'MY IDENTITY IS A TAX, RIGHT? BUT WHEN YOU PAY TAX, THERE SHOULD BE A BENEFIT FOR IT, RIGHT?'

In 1994, the Stanford University professor, Amado Padilla, wrote an article about his frustration that he and his fellow “ethnic” academics were assumed to be “best suited for specific tasks because of our race/ethnicity or our presumed knowledge of cultural differences” (Padilla, 1994). He noted that this work, which was time consuming and often emotionally draining, went unrewarded by the very organisations that benefited from it. He also noted that his “nonethnic colleagues are seldom affected by similar obligations”.

This is a phenomenon known as ‘identity taxation’ (Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012). It recognises that the burden organisations place on historically marginalised social identities, such as ethnicity, gender and disability, is identity work (Watson, 2008). Moreover, additional tasks that are inextricably linked to an individual’s background, and which benefit the employing institution, but are not properly supported, recognised or rewarded, can be viewed as a form of ‘taxation’ (Johnston & Yarrow, 2022).

When applied in the context of diversity initiatives, it also shifts the burden of fixing structural problems onto members of those groups who are most affected by such problems. As Sara Ahmed has noted, institutions place diversity expectations “on the shoulders of ethnically diverse people, which can add to fatigue and increased workload which might affect progression ambitions and have ramifications on their emotional and mental wellbeing” (Ahmed, 2012, p.4). In the TV industry, mentoring and training schemes have been the most prominent response with which to address under-representation (Newsinger & Eikhof, 2020), and these often rely on contributions from minoritised people who are already in the industry and giving their time and expertise for free (Dent et al., 2021).

I came across the concept of identity taxation while studying for an MSc in Organisational Psychology as a mature student, one who had previously spent over a decade working in the TV industry. It intrigued me. I recalled some of my previous roles in the industry, particularly the ‘diversity’ mentoring schemes that I’d helped to set up and deliver. I knew I had approached potential mentors specifically because they were minoritised; I could also look back on the times I knew I’d been asked to do extra work because I am a brown woman. Looking back, I calculated that I’d paid the tax myself, as well as having collected it on behalf of the industry. I was interested in whether the ‘taxation’ analogy resonated with minoritised TV professionals, what effect it had on individuals’ experience and careers, as well as the implications for the industry.

My research study respondents identified identity taxation in a number of ways, including: (a) being regularly called upon to be an ‘expert’, despite not having any particular expertise beyond their own lived experience; (b) being required to ‘educate’ colleagues on matters of diversity; (c) being tasked with communicating difficult news to minoritised contributors on behalf of non-minoritised decision makers; (d) being given the most junior staff to train, simply because they shared the same skin tone; (e) being pressured to mentor on diversity schemes; and, (f) being required to be a visible embodiment of diversity at events or in marketing material.

I developed three main themes from the data:

Theme one:

Identity is a duty

‘Representation is an important part of the work that we do. So our lived experience becomes a key part of the work that we’re creating, and therefore there is a kind of underlying responsibility as a minority ... to push better representation forward, otherwise, what’s the point?’
(Participant E)

Participants were acutely aware of their additional responsibilities, on top of their formal job roles, for example, feeling an ongoing responsibility to ensure nuanced on-screen representation of people with a similar cultural heritage or protected characteristics. This wasn’t always a comfortable position to be in:

‘I can’t be the person who explains something to you just because you think that that’s my background... [it] can sometimes feel like people have got an assumption that you have some kind of knowledge base that I don’t.’
(Participant G)

I really wanted to grab him and be, like, come on, dude, you really need to work a lot harder than the girl that’s sat next to you, than your white counterpart, who’s actually, probably, just as lazy as you . . .

Disabled participants particularly noted the pressure of being expected to contribute expertise based solely on their individual lived experience, with some noting that this was specialist work:

“Can you just advise us about this disabled character in a wheelchair?... Can you comment, can you give advice? Can you recommend?”... [I say] why didn’t you just go and pay somebody who is not me to give you that advice?’ (Participant B).

Some participants noted their fear that, by underperforming at work, they may harm the prospects of others with similar minoritised identities:

‘If I mess up, I’m not just representing my own name, not just my career, I’m representing, you know, probably British Asians, British Indian directors. And then it’s another like, stick ... because also what happens a lot is they’ll go: “oh, we tried someone from that background, and they weren’t that great.”’ (Participant D)

This led to people absorbing feelings of frustration and failure when training others:

‘I really wanted to grab him and be, like, come on, dude, you really need to work a lot harder than the girl that’s sat next to you, than your white counterpart, who’s actually, probably, just as lazy as you, but no one’s picking up on it... I felt like it was almost, like, my responsibility to look after him... And I almost felt like I’d failed a little bit when he didn’t step up.’ (Participant F)

A number of participants explicitly noted that others were not subject to the same expectations:

‘There’s been more than one occasion where I’ve been asked to, kind of, lend my voice to something, [while] colleagues who I’ve worked with... [for] nearly 20 years... [have] probably never been asked to be on a video about an initiative at [NAME OF COMPANY REDACTED], and I feel like I get asked to be on every single one and so, yeah, I guess it just sort of tugs that little thread in the brain.’ (Participant G)

‘Lots of white middle-class people sail through life without having those expectations, either internal or external.’ (Participant A)

Theme two:

Identity as a process

From a psychological perspective, I was interested in how experiences of identity taxation can either solidify, conflict with, or subvert an individual's self-conception. One striking example came from someone who described herself as being "perceived" to be working class because of her accent, which then led others to push her towards certain types of work:

'I feel that cause I'm from Bradford and, you know, like, have an accent, that all fitted their narrative of what a diversity person [should be].' (Participant H)

In contrast, others had entered the industry specifically because they wanted to use their identity for wider impact:

'From day one, I've seen my career as being very tied up with my identity as being disabled, and also the power of working in the industry that I do, which has that potential for social impact. So, if I was working making washing powder, I wouldn't believe in its power to change the world in the same way as I do [with] television and broadcasting.' (Participant I)

The relationship between the professional self and the minoritised identity was described as a constant, and sometimes unsettling, dialogue:

'I'm constantly doing this push and pull of going, do I want to be seen as a British Asian? Or, do I just want to be seen as an executive producer, and somebody that works in this industry. And I think it's neither and both at the same time.' (Participant E)

'You're not sure whether you're in that role because you're the best person for that role, or you're in that role because you're the best black or mixed race person to be in that role, and that creates... issues of slightly second guessing what you're doing, and second guessing decisions, and whether you're qualified to be there, or not qualified to be there.' (Participant C)

'I always thought I'm very good at my job, and people can see that I'm good at my job, so that's why I'm getting work. And it was only as my career progressed when I started questioning whether or not I was getting work because they needed somebody from an ethnic minority background, or somebody who's working class - or was I still there because I was good at my job?' (Participant F)

Theme three:

Taxation - who benefits?

'It's the accumulation of it, when you're constantly being asked about it, it just becomes taxing, it becomes a burden... who are you doing it for? Cause you're not really you, as an individual, not getting anything out of it.' (Participant B)

An important component of identity taxation is the feeling of being "used by the system" but not being rewarded by it (Padilla, 1994). Attitudes to identity taxation were linked to perceptions of the gap between industry discourse on commitments to diversity versus lived experience.

Most participants reported feeling cynical about the industry's real appetite for change. This participant, who entered the industry through an entry-level diversity scheme in the 2000s, felt that by being encouraged to join a leadership diversity scheme years later, they were still being taxed, while the benefits had not yet materialised:

'Have we not come really far when, [after] 20 years, it's the same schemes? Possibly doing the same thing or not doing the same thing, I don't know... The bigger picture is, why do we still need them? Why do I still have to be grateful for being given this thing, as opposed to just being able to get on with it?' (Participant C)

'You just think it is a tick box exercise, a lot of these things, it's like to show their funders that they've reached out to disabled people... And then, you know, my company share that they've done something to do with disabled people... this just entrenched my cynicism even more, really.' (Participant B)

Participant D, who had, over the course of his career, built up a contact book of freelance production crew from minoritised backgrounds, found those contacts were in demand post-2020's renewed diversity commitments. His experience of taxation was being treated as an unpaid "recruitment agency" by companies who wanted a quick fix:

'They were kind of using this as some kind of fast track, and a few times I think they had bad experiences because the person just wasn't ready for the role... [They're] not really trying to develop people. They're not really trying to change the industry. They're just trying to save face as quickly as they can.' (Participant D)

This participant noted that the labour involved in being a minoritised voice on industry panels and in fora was a tax on their own career:

'I think that if I was to do time looking at a spreadsheet, it's ... probably quite clear that my career has suffered, rather than benefitted, from the amount of work that I've done to make sure that I get a voice in that room.' (Participant F)

'... it's ... probably quite clear that my career has suffered, rather than benefitted, from the amount of work that I've done to make sure that I get a voice in that room.'

Another interesting observation was related to how some aspects of identity were perceived to have value in certain circumstances, but not in others. One participant described requests from the workplace to deploy her disabled identity as "constant", but told of the frustration when her input was disregarded as she raised concerns about content from her perspective as a Black woman:

'In any other example, they would have taken my opinion on, and run with it, and gone "...this is a really good point of view, we shouldn't be doing this..." It's that, kind of, you want my opinion when it suits you.' (Participant B)

The value ascribed to identity taxation is contingent on power dynamics that exist in the work setting, where some intersections of identity have more value than others:

'I'm middle class. I went to university. I'm southern and posh sounding. I don't feel like I'm challenging... but I still tick the box. And so, you know, they'll be like: "oh look, she's a good brown person. We can put her on the screen"... Yeah, it's kind of a complicated feeling because you think... am I being played?' (Participant G)

Conclusion

I started this research with a number of expectations. It wasn't a surprise to me that people described 'identity taxation' as the additional work minoritised people in TV do on behalf of others through mentoring or training. What did surprise me was listening to people reflect upon their nuanced relationships with their own identities, and how these are brought to the fore at work when that difference is instrumentalised by others, echoing Hall's assertion that identity also relies on a conception of the 'other', "... you are what they are not... [identity] is a structure representation which only archives its positive through the narrow eye of the negative" (Hall, 1997, p.21). It was striking that, in my sample, people who said they had realised benefits from 'identity taxation', were the ones who had made an active choice to centre their identities through inclusion-focused work. Others, who felt the taxation as a burden, were getting on with the same jobs as their non-minoritised colleagues, while shouldering - and resenting - the extra demands made on them.

Given that it relies on the currency of representation, it's time for the TV industry to open up further dialogue on the identity tax. I was struck by how many participants felt their careers might have progressed further had they refused to take on elements of additional work; further quantitative research on how much industry diversity initiatives rely on additional work by minoritised versus non-minoritised people could start to reveal how much the cost of fixing structural problems relies on contributions from those most affected. A greater sensitivity about conflating an individual's lived experience with expertise would show more respect for the nuances and intersections of identity.

Open conversations with those who "volunteer" to support others, with room for them to negotiate what benefits they might receive in return, might identify what 'identity tax credits' could offset what the industry demands from certain individuals.

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Call ing out

**Kate
Wilson**

Perhaps I am contrary by nature, but I've never liked being told what to do. The use of the imperative will inevitably initiate a miniature revolt in my brain and my gut: nothing is more likely to curb my appetite than a restaurant named 'Eat!'. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the proliferation of well-intended 'Speak Up!' programmes and policies across our harassment-plagued film and television industries has caused me some anxiety.

I was interested and eager to read Anna Bull's report, *Safe to Speak Up: Sexual Harassment in the UK Film and Television Industry Since #MeToo*. Interviewing 18 subjects (17 women and 1 man) who have experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual violence in the workplace since the *New York Times* and *New Yorker* articles that outed Harvey Weinstein and others were published in late 2017, Bull endeavours to measure the aftershocks of the subsequent #MeToo movement to determine exactly how far afield the tremors were felt, and their ongoing impact on survivors. Bull interrogates the evolution and effect of the UK's industry-wide trend of telling victims to "Speak up!" and report their experiences, determining the trend's success, or otherwise, with a view to identifying obstacles to reporting.

For my palate, there are several flies in the ointment of Speak Up policies and programmes and, therefore, makes the whole thing rather hard to swallow. Firstly, the duty of care and legal requirement to proactively create a safe place of work, including one that is free from harassment and discrimination, rests with the employers, and Speak Up! policies endeavour to shift that duty of care (or a proportion thereof) from the employer to the victims of discrimination - the employees. To be clear, while victims of sexual harassment and sexual violence undoubtedly have an important role to play in initiating formal proceedings against alleged perpetrators, they have no legal duty under employment law or criminal law to report their

experiences at all. Bull's report perpetuates the shift of responsibility for sexual harassment and sexual violence in the direction of the victim, interviewing only victims, of which 17 of the 18 are women. I would savour the opportunity to read a report that asks the perpetrators of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence, including business leaders who are responsible for the workplaces where those perpetrators thrive, how we move forwards, and to hear men's perspectives on these matters.

Speak Up! policies may be used by employers as a defensive tool, enabling

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them to deny any knowledge of incidents or prohibited behaviours: "We received no reports and therefore cannot have been expected to act." Are Speak Up! policies really for the victims' benefit, or are they an instrument made by, and for, the employer? To quote Audre Lorde, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at

his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."

Secondly, by their very nature, Speak Up! policies and programmes begin a discourse in the aftermath of the event, implicitly telling workers that sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace are par for the course: "Les jeux sont fait and we, your employers, failed to protect you. Now, where to begin?" In my opinion, the timeline of an incident of sexual harassment or sexual violence does not start with the unwelcome hand on the small of the back, or the inappropriate language. or

Incidents do not happen in a vacuum, but, to borrow from Professor Liz Kelly, on a continuum where one experience blurs into the next, affecting the next, and the next, and the next!. While victims work in offices, industries, countries and a world neither psychologically nor physically safe, and while the process of reporting instances of sexual harassment and sexual violence may cause as much, if not more, psychological, physical, financial, professional and reputational damage than events themselves, victims must not be pressured into reporting their experiences. Victims may be empowered and supported to report, but we must not be so eager as to oblige them to do so.

Perhaps it is not just my contrary nature that resists the imperative to "Speak up!"

When I was young, I dreamt of making it in Hollywood and working in the movies - enthralled by showbiz, enamoured by the idea of seeing my name in the credits on the silver screen. We can easily conjure an image of starlets disembarking planes, trains and automobiles in Los Angeles (or at Leavesden), offering themselves up for discovery, but there are equal numbers of young people arriving who aspire to be filmmakers, screenwriters, cinematographers, designers, each fuelled by a dream, perhaps less photo-ready than the ingenues, but equally vulnerable in the pursuit of an aspiration that can only be realised if they are somehow seen - invited into the inner-circles of studio bosses and cigar-chomping super-producers.

And I got there, kind of. I made a circuitous 5,500 mile journey from London to Los Angeles, attending UCLA, interning for the production company of a bona-fide A-list celebrity and, ultimately, securing sponsorship for a work permit - the holy grail of the immigrant worker. I was seen, plucked out of obscurity and given my shot. I couldn't have had better timing, I thought, landing at a glorious time for independent film, as ambitious auteurs and distributors tried to replicate the impressive critical reception and stupendous box office returns of Miramax films like *Pulp Fiction*.

You will be unsurprised to learn that the dream was short-lived, and I was back in a cold, wet, London within 3 years of graduating university. When I tell people about some of the workplace experiences that drove me home so quickly - the late night phone calls, the unsolicited gifts of red roses and lingerie, the oversharing of experiences with prostitutes and porn-stars - they are quick (and entirely right) to label the unwanted sexual and romantic attention as sexual harassment. "Why," they predictably and universally enquired, "didn't you speak up? Why didn't you tell somebody what was happening to you?"

It is essential to consider my story in the context of the local, national and global culture in which it and I existed. In the 1990s, in a town run by Harvey Weinstein and co, I did not have access to the lexicon of sexual harassment, of grooming, of coercion and gaslighting. What would I have said, exactly? And to whom would I have said it? I had never seen such a thing as a Dignity at Work Policy, or met anyone from HR, although I did once confide to a woman in a position of power about the worst of these experiences, a run-in amounting to physical and sexual assault, and was told it was, "a private matter between you and him."

It is not true to suggest there were not protections in law against sexual harassment in the United States at the time - the Civil Rights Act 1964 had made discrimination on the basis of sex illegal, while the Equal Employment Regulations 1980 had extended the definition to include sexual harassment, and the Civil Rights Act 1991 had enshrined the right to sue and claim compensatory and punitive damages. As I completed my university education, the effectiveness of the legal framework had been demonstrated to me, and other women, through two main avenues:

1 Through politics:

in 1991, Anita Hill accused Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas, her one-time supervisor at the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (of all places), of sexual harassment. Despite taking and passing a polygraph test, Hill was not believed, and the US Senate confirmed Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court.

2 Through film,

our most powerful cultural medium: arguably as a response to Thomas' Supreme Court confirmation and its associated hearings, in 1994 Warner Brothers released an adaptation of Michael Crichton's *Disclosure*, where Michael Douglas's character is sued for sexual harassment, threatening both his career and his personal life, by a former lover who initiated the act forcefully, before becoming his boss. Yes, Michael Douglas plays the victim of a psychopathic woman who sexually harasses him and then exploits the legal system to seek further revenge.

Suffice it to say that I do not believe speaking up in the late 1990s would have done me or my career any good. I believe that Kelly's continuum extends far beyond each person's individual experiences, beyond geographical and temporal boundaries, into the political, social and cultural spheres that shape our understanding and expectations of each other and the wider world. While my individual experiences undoubtedly met the legal threshold of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence, I existed in a context where reporting my experiences was not a possibility, for reasons including the normalisation of that behaviour, my belief that nothing would be done, my ignorance of what to say, or to whom it should be said, my past experiences, my overwhelming feeling of guilt and complicity, and the fear of losing my job, reputation

and the opportunity to continue working in the industry in which I desperately wanted a future.

Bull's research does not go back to the 1990s, of course, but limits itself to experiences of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence since late 2017, seeking evidence of change catalysed by the #MeToo movement and an ensuing Speak Up! trend. While a majority of interviewees had taken some steps towards formal reporting - anything from disclosing the

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experience to family or friends to leaving their job - the most interesting part of the report, in my opinion, is the list of reasons why her interviewees had not formally reported their experiences to their employer, namely:

- Sexual harassment was normalised or tolerated in the workplace
- Believing that nothing would be done and/or that they would not be supported in reporting

- No information was available about reporting, or there was no-one to whom to report
- Interviewees had previously experienced, and/or reported, sexual harassment or sexual violence
- Interviewees felt complicit; or that it was their fault; or that it wasn't serious enough to report
- Their workplace had wider discrimination issues, a toxic culture, or difficult working conditions

Through this all too familiar list, I recalled uneasy associations - the reasons for not reporting are unchanged since my first experiences of the industry in the 1990s. While we may have started to see the evolution of legal frameworks that aim to prevent discrimination and some commendable improvements to employers' policies and procedures, the continuum and context in which these experiences are happening are insufficiently changed. My suspicions are confirmed by further research, including the 2021 UN Women UK report into the prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment and sexual violence in public spaces, and further observations of current affairs and culture, including inquiries into the behaviour of Jimmy Saville, Philip Schofield and Russell Brand, and BAFTA's choice for their 2021 Outstanding Contribution to Film Award, Noel Clarke.

So, where do we go from here? How do we move the dial towards a culture in which it is safe to report without putting victims of sexual harassment and/or sexual violence at risk of further harm? How do we protect workers without shifting the duty of care onto their already embattled shoulders, respecting their very good reasons for not reporting? How do we move forwards, acknowledging the context and continuum in which we exist, and in which these behaviours persist?

- Fearing the loss of a job or the damage to one's reputation
- They were blocked or dissuaded from reporting

Having returned to the UK at the start of a new millennium, I found opportunities in the much smaller film and TV sector hard to secure, but sexual harassment equally unavoidable, prevalent, and just as damaging. I retrained as a consultant, attending law school and working across the arts and cultural sector, only returning to film and TV after ten years of recovery and rehabilitation, open-eyed to the many and various industry pitfalls. I spoke with other women and began to find my voice and niche and, in 2021, I shared some of my experiences with two other loud-mouthed women who had found their voices too: Jules Hussey and Delyth Thomas, a producer and director respectively. Together, we developed the Call It! App - a data collection and signposting tool.

Call It! is an incredibly simple piece of technology addressing incredibly complex issues. If workplace culture (including discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual violence) were climate change, then our app is a thermometer. We don't pretend that an app can solve the problems we face, but an app can help us measure and better understand these problems, and in so doing, it can improve opportunities to create safer, fairer places of work, all the while engaging with victims where they are - here and now - in a world that is far from perfect, where it is not always safe to speak up.

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You can learn more about the Call It! app here: www.callitapp.org



DISRUPT THE NARRATIVE TIME

**Josh Cockcroft,
Delphine Lievens,
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Supervision:
Dr Rachel-Ann Charles)**

Executive Summary

The British Film Institute (BFI) is the cornerstone public funder within the UK film industry. They have publicly acknowledged the need to improve their efforts towards diversity & inclusion (Kanter, 2023)¹ and are considered a leader in shaping inclusion with their protocols that are typically adopted by the wider industry. The role the BFI plays in equality, diversity and inclusion can not be overstated as they build and shape the talent pipeline that flows out towards the wider industry - the failure to be inclusive at this level is only amplified later.

This study examines BFI data, taken from 2019-2020 specifically, as a recent and typical year pre-pandemic, observing across the characteristics of gender, disability, class, and race. It is well documented that most research focuses on funding awards and this study aims to address the deficit of research in understanding the make-up of applicants who submit to the film fund, as well as the make-up of applicants who are awarded. Subsequently, this study is able to make an assessment on the success rates of different diversity characteristics.

The concept of intersectionality is a framework for understanding how individuals' multiple social and political identities result in a unique combination of discrimination and privilege. The existing research highlighted the need to address inequality in the film industry from an intersectional perspective. While an intersectional analysis did not end up being possible, our research was able to perform a granular analysis of the results, and our findings highlight the issues of the continued use of 'catch all' terms such as BAME which homogenise the experience of diverse communities.

Our analysis shows the following key findings for the development and production funding distributed by the BFI National Lottery Filmmaking Fund:

- Two thirds (64%-68%) of awards were made to female identifying filmmakers.

- People with a disability, despite making up 1 in 5 of the UK population, saw less than 1 in 16 applicants awarded BFI funding.
- The success rate of producers who attended non-selective state schools (17.6%) was less than half that of producers who attended independent or fee paying schools without a bursary (38.1%).
- Our analysis of ethnicity outlines a complex picture, highlighting under-representation of Asians and East Asians, and exposes a limited perception of racial diversity.

This research also highlights the inconsistent nature of progress, underscoring the need for continuous pressure and rigorous monitoring to sustain progress towards equitable funding. Moreover, our study emphasises the necessity of analysing data intersectionality, recognising that individuals possess multiple layers of identity

and often face multiple systemic barriers simultaneously.

The last decade has seen the launch and discussion of a range of schemes designed to improve diversity in the industry. Our findings support Nwonka's (2020)² view that rather than improving diversity in the sense of reducing exclusion on the basis of racial characteristics, these schemes and their accompanying rhetoric enable inclusion of a tiny minority of individuals who are allowed behind the curtain. This hypothesis would indicate not improved equity but rather selective inclusion, or 'tokenism', that exposes the narrow and dangerous perception of diversity held by industry power holders.

... rather than improving diversity in the sense of reducing exclusion on the basis of racial characteristics, these schemes and their accompanying rhetoric enable inclusion of a tiny minority of individuals who are allowed behind the curtain.

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2. Nwonka, C. (2020) 'The New Babel: The Language and Practice of Institutionalised Diversity in the UK Film Industry' Journal of British Cinema and Television, vol. 17 (1), p24.

The study's key recommendations include:

- The publishing of annual intersectional analysis, including applications, awards by count, and value of awards. This aligns with best practices of grant-giving foundations for transparency and accountability.
- Urgent large-scale intervention to create transformative inclusion in the industry for people with a disability.
- Abolition of homogenisation of ethnicity using catch-all terms and vocabulary, levelling up the BFI executives to fully understand racial diversity and the complexity of diaspora, and setting targets for different ethnicity groups.

In 2023, as part of their new ten year strategy, the BFI opened applications for their reformulated development and production funds, along with a restructure of the BFI Filmmaking Funding team who manage the funds. The fund reprioritises equity, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, talent development and progression, creative risk taking, and a UK wide reach. Diversity, equity and inclusion has been explicitly spoken about as a priority of the BFI since at least their 2012-2017 'Film Forever' strategy, and was the focus of their 'BFI2022' strategy from 2017-2022, but in our assessment, by 2019 the BFI funding was still struggling to distribute equitably. It will take some time to assess whether the BFI's new 2023 strategy will be successful in delivering on their priorities around diversity, equity and inclusion in their latest strategy.

About the BFI Film Fund

The BFI is a cornerstone public funder in the UK. They have defined their role as a champion of "new talent and unfamiliar stories from unfamiliar voices" (BFI, 2023)³. For many emerging filmmakers, the BFI is their first stop in developing their talent and projects; where many access their first breaks.

Historically, the typical BFI Film Fund annual budget is £25m. By comparison, BBC Films has an annual budget of £11m and Film4 £25m (Tabbara, 2022)⁴. Those attracting BFI funding are more likely to be awarded funding from BBC Films or Film4, and vice versa.

To further support emerging talent, the BFI also operates BFI Network, which specialises in new and very early career filmmakers and funds the production of short films. The commissioning of short films is managed by a team distinct from the BFI Film Fund.

Outside of public funds, film funding is conventionally sought through commercial sources (distribution finance, sales advances, etc). Commercial funds tend to be more risk averse and put a premium on track record, which means emerging and marginalised filmmakers are unlikely to gain financial support and are heavily reliant on public funds when starting out. The BFI and other public funders therefore have a key role in shaping the talent pipeline that eventually flows out towards the bigger commercial market. One can assume if the talent pipeline is not diverse at the earlier emerging stage, it is unlikely to become more diverse at midpoint or later stage. Consequently, the work that the BFI and other public funders do is vital to the diversity, inclusion and equality of the wider industry.

How the BFI Film Fund Works

Teams who wish to apply for the BFI Film Fund must fill in an application covering key details of their project and team. After basic eligibility checks, the BFI Film Fund team firstly assess an application on the following criteria:

1. Does the application respond to one or more of our core objectives for the fund?
2. How compelling and feasible are the filmmakers' creative and strategic statements?
3. Has the application engaged meaningfully with the BFI Diversity Standards?
4. Do the ambitions of the project feel realistic for the experience of the team?
5. Does the application make a compelling argument for National Lottery support?
6. Would the project be a distinctive addition to a balanced slate of projects?

Projects which are successful in the first stage will then go under a more thorough review. If successful, a Letter of Intent to fund will be issued in order that the team can raise supplementary funds, and the final decision will be made ultimately by the BFI Lottery Finance Committee.

Data Collection

The BFI holds a rich dataset covering the intersectional characteristics of applicants and awards made through their funds. This data is derived from the monitoring forms applicants complete as part of their funding application.

For this study we requested an anonymised dataset of applications, including diversity data and outcomes to enable an intersectional analysis of the data. After agreeing to provide the data, over the course of a year the BFI ultimately reversed their decision due to GDPR concerns, and were only able to provide data aggregated by individual characteristic type.

The data provided covered applications decided in the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, aggregated by answer to each diversity monitoring question for each of the three kinds of applicant - director, writer or producer, all of which are required to make an application for funding. We were provided with statistics covering the number of applications, number of awards, value of awards, and the value of awards expressed as a range. The BFI confirmed that the year was, from their perspective, 'typical' compared to other years, and can be thus treated as representative of BFI funding. By typical, this is in reference to the levels of applications and funding awards made, and does not refer to patterns of socio-economic characteristics. The data provided was not intersectional, and the aggregation prevented some forms of analysis, but still serves as a rich resource to examine the equitability of the BFI's funding practices.

In this report we focused on examining Gender, Disability, Class and Race.

Gender

The marginalisation of women in the film industry, especially in the role of director, has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in recent years (Cobb, 2020)⁵ - a conversation that has created much needed pressure for change.

The analysis did suggest that a course correction for women was clearly underway with 65.52%, 64.44% and 67.86% of BFI Film Fund awards given to women writers, directors, and producers respectively. (figure 1)

We were also able to assess that the success rate for directors, writers and producers who identified as female was 38.6%, 38.7% and 31.6% respectively, in comparison to an average success rate of 33%. (figure 2)

This course for parity needs to be maintained, and close observation on the films' global distribution, box office results, and inclusion in film festivals needs to be given careful consideration to ensure this momentum is maintained and sustained across the entire film value chain.

There has been ample evidence of the systemic underfunding of women in the screen sector, and the difficulties that they have (and continue) to face as a result of structural barriers and discrimination at all levels, leading to a shocking statistic (Screen Skills, 2019)⁷ that only 38% of the screen workforce are women, versus 47% of the total workforce. Our findings that the BFI are significantly correcting for decades of

figure 1

	Percentage of the UK population that identify as female	Percentage of applicants who identify as female	Percentage of awardees who identify as female
Writers		40.3%	65.5%
Directors	47.8%	38.4%	64.4%
Producers		50%	67.8%

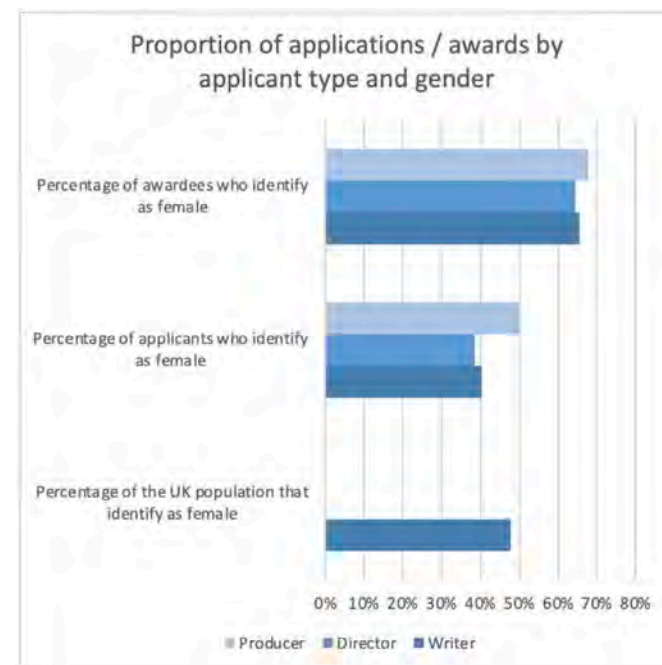
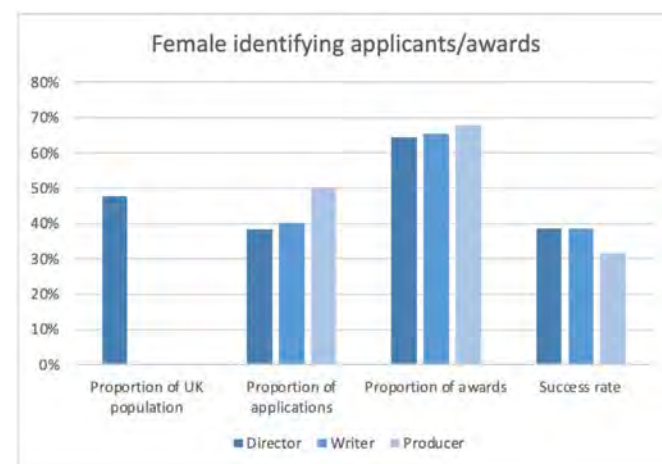


figure 2

	Directors who identify as female	Writers who identify as female	Producers who identify as female
Census	47.8%		
Applications	38.4%	40.3%	50%
Awards	64.4%	65.5%	67.8%
Success rate	38.6%	38.7%	31.6%



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figure 3: Percentage of applicants and awards and disability

Disability	Census	Applicants	Awardees
Writer		6.4%	7.4%
Director	17.8%	10.6%	12%
Producer		3.4%	1.8%

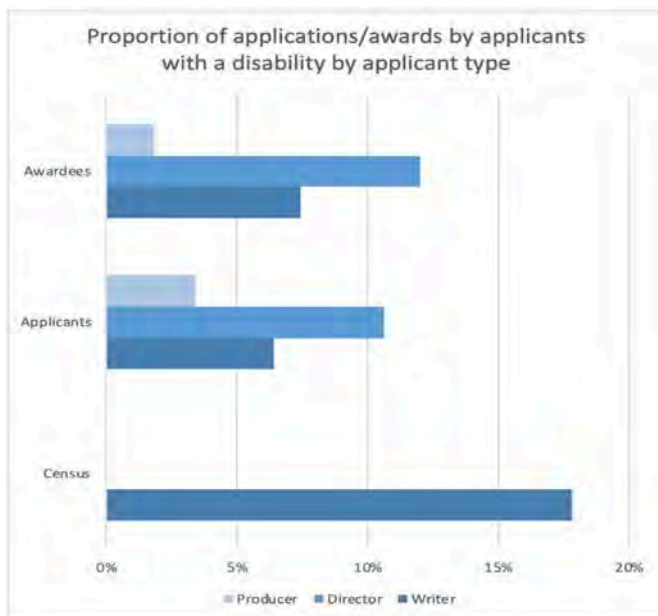
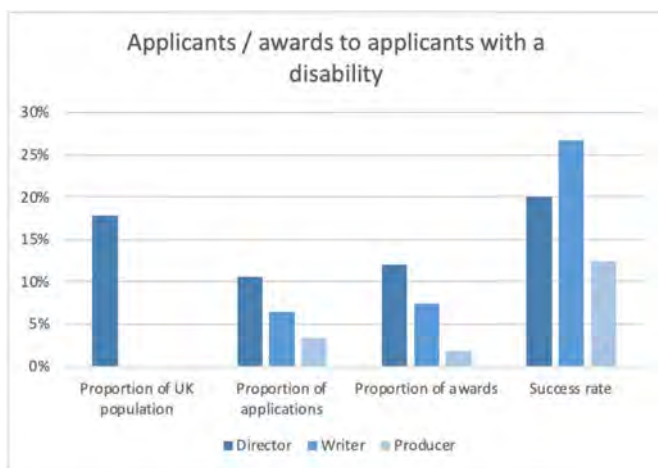


figure 4: Success rate of applicants and awards by disability

As a proportion of total	Directors with a disability	Writers with a disability	Producers with a disability
Applications	10.6%	6.4%	3.4%
Awards	12%	7.4%	1.8%
Success rate	20%	26.6%	12.5%



marginalisation is an indication that there are shifts in the industry, reinforced by the appointment of Mia Bays, a long term campaigner on gender equality in film, as Head of the BFI Film Fund (BFI, 2021)⁷.

Disability

According to the last UK census, 17.8% of the population indicated having a disability. This is over 10 million people. As significant as this community is in the population, historically it remains largely underrepresented and unauthentically depicted (Creative Diversity Network, 2022)⁸. In our analysis, we found a deficit of writers and directors from a background of disability making applications to, and awarded from, the BFI Film Fund. Of all applications to the BFI Film Fund, 6.4% came from writers with a disability, 3.4% from producers with a disability, and 10.64% came from directors who indicated a disability.

(figure 3)

Directors and writers with a disability averaged a success rate of 20% and 26% respectively; both lower than the average success rates of 33%.

(figure 4)

The combination of the low application rate combined with a low success rate are part of, and contribute to sustaining an underrepresentation and inauthentic portrayal of the disability community.

A number of studies and reports in recent years have indicated that while the industry is improving in creating entry level training opportunities for people with a disability, that basic issues around accessibility still

remain (Creative Diversity Network, 2022)⁹.

Furthermore, people with a disability are less likely to be able to subsidise and fund their own work than those without a disability. Lack of accessibility can perpetuate a hostile environment where very few disabled filmmakers are able to succeed in the industry. There are also few disabled individuals working in the key institutions, particularly holding editorial positions, commissioning and decision making power. The BFI has consistently failed to meet its employment target for those with a disability of 18%, and has achieved barely half of that (BFI, 2023)¹⁰.

Our findings clearly indicate that filmmakers with a disability are continuing to face structural discrimination to accessing BFI funding through both the proportionally low application rates, and the significantly lower than average success rates. The scale of exclusion is huge and needs large scale intervention and transformation. As stated in Disability Deep Dive (2022, pg.7) “if we want to reflect the UK workforce (17%) and population (18%) then our evidence suggests we need over 13,000 more disabled people to enter and be retained in the industry.”

Class

There are two questions that assess class within the BFI monitoring system - these are:

- What type of school did you mainly attend between the ages of 11 and 16?
- When you were 14, what did the main income earner in your household do for a living?

While imperfect, the ‘Parental Occupation at age 14’ question is considered the most accurate measure of socio-economic background. This question typically gets the highest response rates of all socio-economic questions, and is accessible to all nationalities (Social Mobility Commission, 2021)¹¹.

We found that for most applying writers, directors and producers, the main income earner in the household when they were 14 came from modern professional occupations. In contrast, the percentage of applicants whose main income earner came from a background of routine or semi-routine manual occupations was notably lower.

(figure 5)

When looking at responses to the type of school attended, especially in combination with success rates, the data suggests that producers who attended state school (non selective) had a significantly lower success rate.

(figure 6)

The significant impact of both education and family wealth to later outcomes is well documented. The glaringly high success rate for producers who went to independent or fee paying schools is particularly notable - indicating that it is specifically familial wealth which has a significant impact, not just the quality of education.

The runway to a regular and sustainable livelihood for a producer is extremely challenging - as such - producers without means and from working class backgrounds by their nature have shorter runways for survival, which creates a

figure 5: Percentage of applicants and awards by socio economic background

Socioeconomic income	Writer		Director		Producer	
	Applicants	Awardees	Applicants	Awardees	Applicants	Awardees
Clerical and intermediate occupations	9.0%	2.7%	6.7%	0.0%	4.9%	2.2%
Middle or junior managers	8.4%	2.7%	8.2%	6.1%	9.2%	2.2%
Modern professional occupations	35.3%	51.3%	30.6%	36.4%	26.6%	44.4%
Routine manual and service occupations	4.8%	5.4%	3.7%	6.1%	6.0%	6.7%
Semi-routine manual and service occupations	6.5%	5.4%	8.2%	3.0%	6.0%	0.0%
Senior managers and administrators	11.4%	10.8%	12.7%	15.1%	15.2%	8.9%
Technical and craft occupations	6.0%	5.4%	9.0%	6.1%	10.3%	6.7%
Traditional professional occupations	10.8%	8.1%	14.9%	15.1%	14.7%	22.2%
Unemployed/ never worked	1.2%	0.0%	1.5%	6.1%	2.2%	0.0%

Percentage of applicants and awards by school background

	Writers		Directors		Producers	
	% of app.	% of awards	% of app.	% of awards	% of app.	% of awards
Attended school outside the UK	14.1%	6.6%	22.2%	0%	23.2%	21.2%
Independent or fee-paying school - bursary	4.3%	6.6%	4.8%	6.4%	9.7%	8.5%
Independent or fee-paying school - no bursary	11.4%	11.1%	11.8%	12.9%	10.8%	17.2%
State-run or state-funded school - non-selective	55.9%	51.1%	51.3%	61.2%	43.8%	31.9%
State-run or state-funded school - selective (includes faith schools)	13.0%	22.2%	9.0%	19.0%	11.8%	21.2%
Other	0.5%	2.2%	0.6%	0.0%	0.52%	0.0%

figure 6: Success rate of applicant by school

	Success rate for writers	Success rate for directors	Success rate for producers
Independent or fee-paying school - bursary	37.5%	28.5%	21%
Independent or fee-paying school - no bursary	23.8%	23.5%	38.1%
State-run or state-funded school - non-selective	22.3%	25.6%	17.6%
State-run or state-funded school - selective (includes faith schools)	41.6%	46.1%	43.4%
Other	50%	0%	0%

Success rate of applicant by school background

School type	Writer	Director	Producer
Independent or fee paying school - with a bursary	37.5%	28.5%	21.05%
Independent or fee paying school - with no bursary	23.8%	23.5%	38.1%
State funded school - selective (includes faith schools)	41.6%	46/1%	43.8%
State funded school - non selective	22.3%	25.6	17.6%
Other	50%	0%	0%

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figure 7

	2021-2022	2020-2021	2019-2020	2018-2019
Ethnically diverse	26%	21%	28%	16%

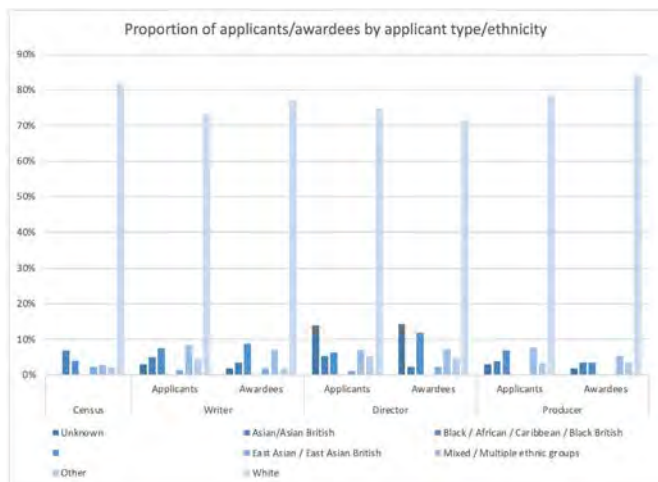
figure 8: Success rate by applicant type and ethnicity

	Writer	Director	Producer
Unknown	14.3%	23.1%	14.3%
Asian/Asian British	16.7%	10.0%	22.2%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	27.8%	41.7%	12.5%
East Asian / East Asian British*	33.3%	50.0%	[zero applications]
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	20.0%	23.1%	16.7%
Other	9.1%	20.0%	25.0%
White	25.10%	21.6%	25.5%

*application and award figures for East Asian / East Asian British were particularly low, with zero applications made by Producers who self-identified as East Asian / East Asian British, and just two applications from directors, and three from writers.

Proportion of applications / awards by applicant type and ethnicity

Ethnicity	Census	Writer		Director		Producer	
		Applications [% of total]	Awards [% of total]	Applications [% of total]	Awards [% of total]	Applications [% of total]	Awards [% of total]
Asian/Asian British	6.87%	5%	3.5%	5.8%	2.38%	3.8%	3.5%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	4%	7.5%	8.7%	6.4%	11.9%	6.8%	3.5%
East Asian / East Asian British	2.3%	1.2%	1.7%	1%	2.3%	0%	0%
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	2.8%	8.3%	1.7%	6.9%	7.1%	7.6%	5.3%
White	81.7%	73.3%	77.1%	74.7%	71.4%	78.3%	83.9%
Other	2.1%	4.5%	1.7%	5.3%	4.7%	3.4%	3.5%
Unknown		2.9%	1.7%	13.9%	14.2%	2.9%	1.7%



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bias in the industry to work in favour of those who have access to independent wealth - those who can survive until payday, which sometimes will never arrive. It is of no surprise then, that the producers who do survive, who do succeed, will more often than not come from a background of economic privilege.

Race

Most research undertaken in the film sector has traditionally examined race under a single banner referred to as "BAME" - Black and Minority Ethnic groups, a term which has recently experienced significant criticism, termed as homogenisation by Malik and Ryder (2021). The BFI published targets for the diversity of its applicants using another homogenising term, 'ethnically diverse', to aggregate all non-white applicants. The BFI shared the following information about the ethnic diversity of their funded productions which shows for the most part, the BFI exceeding their targets (BFI, 2022)¹³.

(figure 7)

The problems of using a catch-all term to collect all non-white applicants and awardees masks a more complex picture, reflecting the different barriers faced by different communities who have experienced racial inequity. In our report, we have examined the data of the five groupings used by the BFI to understand more deeply the experience of communities from different backgrounds of colour. The categories used by the BFI to collect data on ethnicity groups put together a range of communities who have radically different experiences, but begin to provide a more nuanced

understanding of funding to applicants from a range of ethnicities. (figure 8)

Disaggregating all non-white people from the catch-all 'ethnically diverse', a different picture begins to emerge. The under-representation of Asians and East Asians demonstrates clearly the limitations of aggregate terms and its impact on the ethnic diversity of films funded by the BFI. In 2019 there were no applications to the BFI Film Funds from producers of East Asian / British East Asian heritage (and therefore no awards made).

However, caution should be taken when comparing the success rates of different minority ethnicities when applying for BFI funding. Although more work needs to be done to encourage an increased level of applications from certain minority groups, this should not be done at the expense of others. All ethnic minority groups are in need of continued inclusion support, and as one survey respondent in the Review of the BFI Diversity Standards (New Inclusion, 2022)¹⁴ put it, "the Diversity Standards [should] be more of a floor rather than a ceiling, acting as a baseline to aim for and then go beyond by reaching higher levels of diversity and inclusion."

Similar to the disability community, the East Asian / British East Asian or Asian / British Asian communities show disproportionately low rates of application and awards received. As noted in The Exclusion Act (Thai and Lievens, 2021)¹⁵, the combined East Asian / British East Asian and Asian / British Asian community make up the largest minority group in the UK, but often

have less visibility and power in the race equality debate.

The last decade has seen the launch and discussion of a range of schemes designed to improve diversity in the industry. Our findings support Nwonka's (2020)¹⁶ view that rather than improving diversity in the sense of reducing exclusion on the basis of racial characteristics, these schemes and their accompanying rhetoric enable inclusion of a tiny minority of individuals who are allowed behind the curtain. This hypothesis would indicate not improved equity but rather selective inclusion, or 'tokenism', that exposes the narrow and dangerous perception of diversity held by industry power holders.

Conclusion

In reviewing available research and our own data, we have observed progress for female identifying filmmakers in gaining success for funding. However, people with disabilities, people from challenging socio-economic backgrounds and people of colour continue to be marginalised. The industry for these groups is highly exclusionary and subsequently means filmmakers are unable to thrive and sustain livelihoods.

But there is nuance to add - any progress has a habit of being inconsistent, so continual pressure and strict monitoring is key in sustaining any course correction - this is particularly of importance to gender parity. More granular monitoring will also aid better evaluation of diversity and inclusion schemes themselves, which allows for advancements and improvements within the

field. For people of colour, the clear takeaway is that homogenisation is dangerous, and consideration and acknowledgement of the full spectrum of diversity in communities of colour is critical and vital in the endeavour to create an inclusive, more accurately representative, and arguably therefore more commercially successful industry.

Finally, through undertaking this research, it became apparent that having access to intersectional data will be increasingly vital in moving forward, and improving the quality of evaluations - humans are layered and multidimensional and consequently will rarely be subjected to just one systemic barrier.

The BFI states "At the BFI we champion new talent and unfamiliar stories from unfamiliar voices" (BFI, 2023)¹⁷. As a public funder, the BFI set the mission and the ambition for inclusion through their Diversity Standards. Nwonka (2021)¹⁸ suggests that "the BFI possesses, at least within the popular cultural imagination, dominion over how the industry performs diversity", and their Diversity Standards have been adopted by other key players in the industry including BAFTA, Film4 and BBC Films.

The BFI as a public funder has a leading and vital role in shaping the whole UK talent pipeline because they function to invest in new talent. They host and nurture the "nurseries" of our film industry. The filmmakers they support at the early stages of their careers are what the wider industry inherits later.

Ultimately, a failure to be inclusive at this level is only

amplified later. We recommend a number of practical steps that the BFI could take that would go some way to reducing the systemic barriers facing many applicants and which has served to maintain the screen industry as an exclusive, homogenous and elitist industry.

- The BFI commits to publish annualised aggregated data at a granular level of applications, awards both by count and by value of awards. This is in line with best practice reporting practices of grant giving foundations.
- The BFI reviews its data collection practices and protocol to improve the quality and consistency of its monitoring data, funding awards can be made conditional on provision of diversity data.
- The BFI tracks and is fully transparent about prior contact with applicants and potential applicants, and publishes aggregated data to that end.
- The BFI works to ensure diversity within the decision makers working in the BFI Film Fund.
- The BFI reviews its approach to talent outreach, and considers how it can reach and support applications from filmmakers whose characteristics are underrepresented in the industry.
- The BFI implements ring fenced budgets for applicants with characteristics which are severely underrepresented in the film industry.

The issues of equity are not unique to the BFI. There is a substantial body of work

which has been undertaken by funding organisations in the UK to improve practices related to equitable funding which the BFI could engage with, including guidance on good practice developed by the Foundation Practice Rating and thinking regarding data collection, taxonomy and transparency developed by the DEI Data Standard. These initiatives are just two examples of funder led initiatives to improve equitable funding practice.

Many of the challenges faced by the BFI in trying to be an equitable funder are also the subject of deep discussion and efforts to correct the failure to be truly inclusive by charitable foundations. There are multiple initiatives, projects and recommendations for best practice that could be adopted by the BFI to improve the equity of their funding practices.

Josh Cockcroft is a British-Zanzibari producer and development consultant who founded Climate Spring.

Delphine Lievens is a freelance film consultant and former Head of Distribution at Bohemia Media.

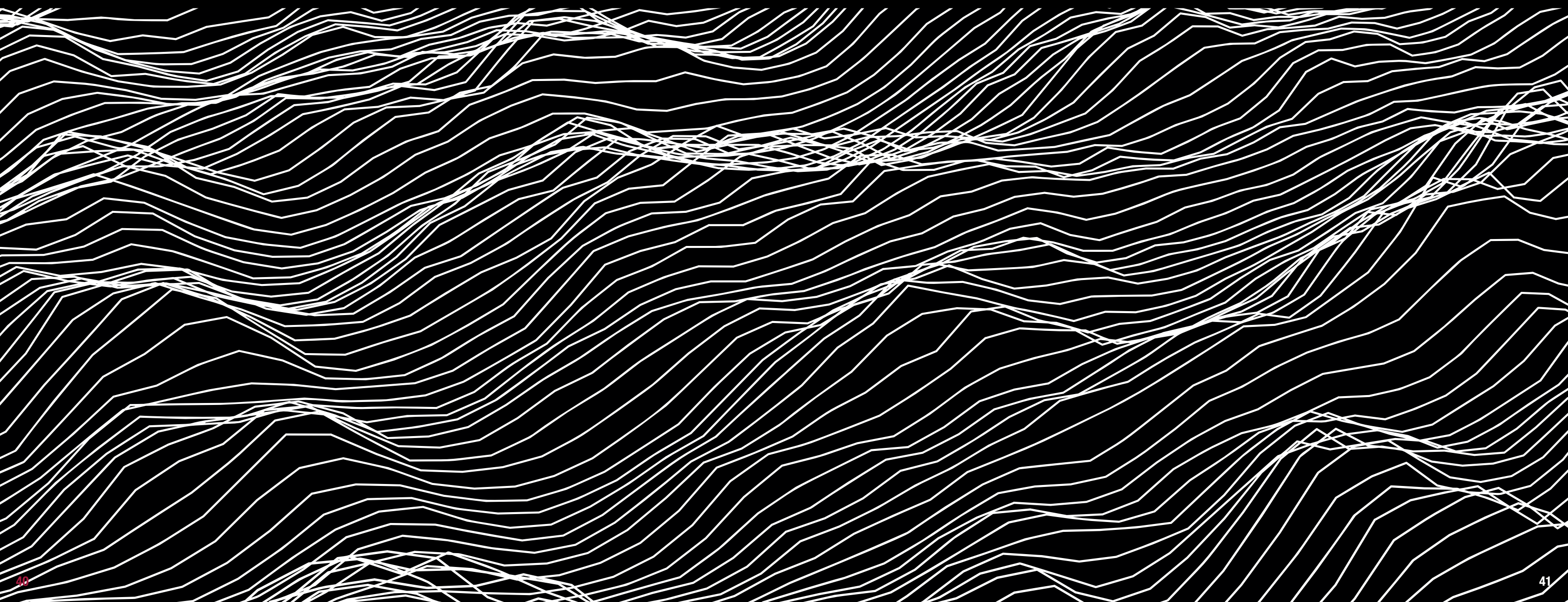
Chi Thai is a British Vietnamese independent filmmaker who produced the award winning Raging Grace (2023).

Dr Rachel-Ann Charles is a Course Director on the MA in Global Media Management at Birmingham City University.

Read the full report here: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/research-pdf-13353695799652024.pdf>

Immersive and Inclusive Audio

Dr Leslie Gaston-Bird



Preface

As the newly appointed President of the Audio Engineering Society (AES) from January 2024, I will be focused on a wide range of activities: from hosting large conventions and conferences to smaller training and development sessions; education initiatives; fostering new membership strategies; supporting our various committees, which include everything from standards and publications to education, Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI); and making sure our sections across the globe remain energised. Throughout my time in AES leadership, I have primarily focused on immersive audio and inclusion. This year, I am eager to see how the work we do “behind the scenes” is affecting positive and measurable change, particularly at the Audio for Virtual and Augmented Reality conference to be held later this year.

Here is the report I compiled for the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity, having attended the previous AVAR conference in 2022.

Introduction

Immersive audio is a broad term which refers to the technology that allows listeners to perceive sound as coming from “all around” the listener. According to Roginska et al., “Immersive Audio” is a term that has been adopted as the effort to bring “360°” of sound to a wider audience, beginning with Gerzon’s “ambisonics” technology (referred to later) and evolving to include virtual reality, augmented reality, and mixed reality gaming today. [Roginska et al., 2017]. The immersive market is forecast to be worth almost 4 billion USD (3.36 bn GBP) by 2030 [JC Market Research, 2022].

Considering the growing size of the sector alongside its appearance in these different and varied markets, the issues of representation, diversity and inclusion are particularly important for a number of reasons:

- Underrepresented groups (including but not limited to women, gender non-conforming people, disabled people, and Black and Global Majority) should have equal access to jobs, and access to the technology with which to craft compelling stories from diverse points of view.
- Sound is experienced subjectively and influenced by culture, therefore diversity is essential in exploring the full potential of the technology and connecting to different audiences.

This paper looks to explore representation in immersive audio by focusing on existing academic literature and reviewing discussions on the issue, exemplified by observations I made at the AES AVAR conference in August 2022. Participation of women and other minorities in this currently growing profession is key towards ensuring stories are being told which reflect the rich tapestry of society.

As an audio professional with over 30 years of experience, including the honour of serving as the President of the Audio Engineering Society, I have a unique perspective in the industry. My research focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion and immersive audio, and this paper seeks to bring these interests together to examine the issue, and elevate the discussion to ensure that underrepresented voices are part of emerging trends in immersive audio.

Literature review

This research is supported by statistics from various audio related sub-disciplines including music, television and film, and video games. The Annenberg Inclusion Study has shown that only 3.5% of producers for chart-topping songs were women [Hernandez et al., 2022], although that number has increased as of 2024 to 6.5% [Smith et al., 2024]. Participation at AES conferences between 2012 and 2019 shows that no more than 24% of presentations were by women, and of those related to immersive audio no more than 13% [Young et al., 2019]. In the UK, the number of women working in audio for games fell from 16.10% in 2019 to 9.2% in 2021. [Schmidt, 2019 and 2021], and while that same geographic breakdown was not available in 2023, participation by non-males in the industry as a whole fell from 19% to 12%.

In terms of ethnicity, about 25% of game music and sound engineers are non-white, with 2.3% of Black heritage [Schmidt, 2023]; however, it is believed there are no Black people in leadership positions, supported by a statement from Wilbert Roget II. In a panel hosted by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), he states, “we’re in a situation where not only are there not many of us in total, but especially not in senior or leadership positions. I honestly can’t think of a single non-white audio leader or director, and only a small handful of non-male ones.” [Roget et al., 2020].

Emma Butt authored an article for Representology that found out of 60 roles in audio post production (dialogue editor, sound effects editor, and dubbing mixer) only one mixed-race person was a member of a post production team, while only three white women out of 60 were involved in audio post production for the highest rated shows on BBC1 and BBC2, and only one white woman was involved for ITV (who worked on two separate productions). Channel 4 had no women, and Channel 5 had one white woman (a re-recording mixer) [Butt, 2020].

Background

If you look at a few select papers from academic conferences related to audio engineering, you will discover the origins of many of the technological innovations we take for granted today. The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Symposium on Auditory Perspective in 1933 first defined stereo as three channels: left, centre, and right [Fletcher, 1934]. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Michael Gerzon from the University of Oxford was experimenting with recording sound using height information - after all, sounds come from above us, too. Academic conferences such as AES AVAR can be an indicator of emerging trends as these technologies make their way into the devices we use today.

This could be a home theatre with front, centre, and rear loudspeakers (some systems also allow “height” speakers to be mounted in the ceiling); a cinema where we can

experience sounds moving behind us and above us; a virtual reality (VR) headset with head-tracking capabilities that make it possible for you to turn your head and see from where sounds are coming; or “spatial audio” that you can hear through your earbuds on certain music streaming platforms.

Voices of the industry

The report captures industry thinking and practice in respect to diversity through the AES AVAR conference at Seattle, Washington (USA) in August 2022.

Conference Details and Representation

The AVAR conference is a globally representative event, against which the UK’s performance as a technology participant and its performance with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) can be compared.

Women at the conference interviewed for this report ranged from emigres to the USA (who came from as far away as Russia and Australia, and who are now working for major media companies) to others based in the United Kingdom and Europe.

Their perspectives were useful for framing existing data and helping to get a picture of where the immersive audio industry as a whole stands in terms of DEI.

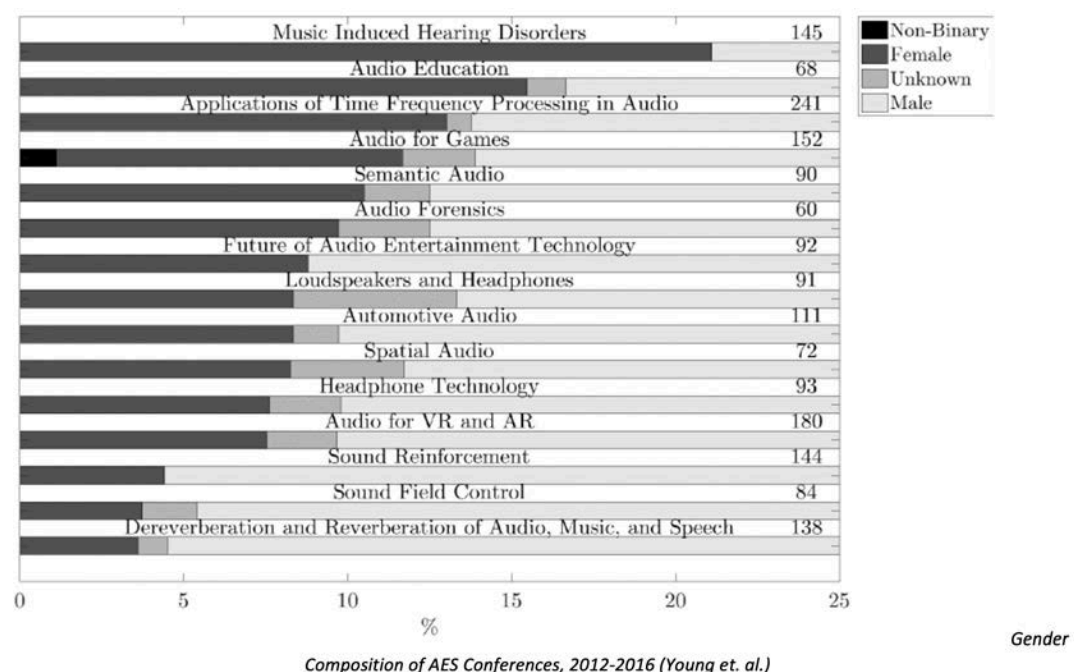
Academic and industry research institutions from all over the world came to the conference, including attendees from the UK

representing the University of Southampton, the University of Surrey, and the University of York, and the BBC, among others.

Buzzwords like spatial audio, head-tracking and head related transfer functions were discussed as engineers presented their latest findings, mostly to do with how to convincingly reproduce sound from all directions in real and virtual environments.

In my notebook I jotted down my observations in the margins. How many women were in attendance? How many people of colour? The reason I wanted to document these numbers is because when representation is low, the data might be pointing to certain symptoms. For example, Amandine Pras and her colleagues at the University of Lethbridge embarked on a study to “capture important demographic information about the audio industry and recording producers/ engineers’ experiences of discrimination in the studio.” [Audio Engineering Society, 2019]. Their study, published in the Journal of the Audio Engineering Society found that when compared to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields, recording studio workplaces score 33% worse on the silencing and marginalisation of women,

1. As someone who identifies as African-American, I prefer the term “people of colour” to acronyms like BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic)



33% worse on gender-related workplace microaggressions, and 24% worse on sexual objectification” [Pras et al., 2021].

I would have preferred to have access to a demographic breakdown of attendance, since no one can tell simply by looking at someone how that person might identify in terms of race and gender. However, the conference organisers did not capture this data for presenters or attendees. Nonetheless, in 2018 the AVAR committee acknowledged a lack of representation in that year’s event and pledged to make changes by asking the AES Board of Governors to set aside proceeds from that convention to invite future guests from a more diverse pool of speakers [AES AVAR Committee, 2018]. As of 2022, the committee seems to be making inroads with esteemed keynote speakers Anastasia Devana, founder of Hear XR; and Dr. Veronique Larcher, director

of Sennheiser’s AMBEO Immersive Audio programme. The third keynote was by Karlheinz Brandenburg, CEO of Brandenburg Labs.

During casual conversations I had with individual women, some noted the slight improvement in the number of women attending AES AVAR. Although this was encouraging for some, I also sensed a resigned shrug from others. Altogether, there were around 250 people in attendance, not including online attendees. Including two of the keynote speakers, I counted 20 women, most of whom were there to present a paper, poster, workshop, or panel.

Besides myself, there was one other woman of colour; Dr. Kyla McMullen of the University of Florida, who spoke about the results of her study, “3D Audio to Augment the Museum Experience.” I also noticed 10 men who might fit the description of “person of colour”. If my tally was applied to the industry as a

whole, it could mean the conference was representative of the corresponding data: 8% women, and 4% people of colour.

In fact, there is data to support these *prima facie* observations. In an effort to address the lack of data regarding attendance at conferences, author Kat Young and her colleagues did a deep dive into the data to quantify the number of women and non-binary individuals presenting at AES conferences [Young et al., 2018]. They found that women presenters consistently totalled fewer than 25% of all the papers, presentations, and workshops.

Further, they categorised their findings by topic. As shown in the graph below, “Spatial Audio”, “Immersive and Interactive Audio”, and “Audio for VR and AR” were among the topics with lowest representation – consistently below 10%. Audio for Games is just over 10%.⁸

	Male	Female	Other / Non-binary
USA	82.3%	13.7%	3.9%
UK	90.8%	9.2%	0%
Rest of World	89%	10.9%	0%

GameSoundCon Game Audio Industry Survey (2021)

Game Sound

My informal tally at AES AVAR, together with the data from Young et al. (2018) is also backed up by data in other industries. In the field of sound for video games, Brian Schmidt and his colleagues at GameSoundCon.com found in 2021 that 9.2% of game sound engineers in the UK are women, compared with 13.7% in the USA. That number for women in the UK was down from 16% in 2019, and down from 19% to 12% when looking at non-males in the industry worldwide in 2023 [Schmidt, 2023].

Immersive Audio for Film, Television, and Music

Another place where we can find participation data is in directories of certified professionals. On their website, Avid (manufacturer of Pro Tools software) lists the individuals who have earned certification as an “Avid Certified Professional Pro Tools | Dolby Atmos” (<https://www.avid.com/learning/ind-a-certified-professional>). Worldwide, in 2021 there were 89 engineers listed (Avid lists engineers who pass the certification, it is not clear if anyone has opted not be listed), only 6 of whom were women. In the UK, there were 10 engineers listed,

only one of whom is a woman (it happens to be the author).

Looking at Grammy award winners in the immersive sound category, there is an interesting trend. There are three credits in the category: “immersive mix engineer”, “immersive mastering engineer”, and “immersive producer”. Of 16 winning immersive mix engineers, Leslie Ann Jones, Elaine Martone and Ulrike Schwarz are the only women represented. Of winning immersive mastering engineers, one woman, Darcy Proper, has won 4 times.

The UK group “2 Percent Rising” (founded by mastering engineer Katie Tavini) took their name from the Annenberg statistic. In the four years since that study was published, things have slightly improved; 2.8% of producers were women in 2021 [Smith et al., 2021], and 6.5% in 2023 [Smith et al., 2024].

Social Media Spaces

Participation in social media groups is a way for professionals and students to network and learn more about many different technologies, including immersive audio. In the Dolby Music Mixing Professionals group, I looked at the profiles of 1,500 members visible to me and

found that of its 2,205 members, only 2% are female [Gaston-Bird et al., 2021]. Furthermore, less than one percent of profiles were people who appeared to be Black. One of the group’s admins confirmed my findings about the representation of women by sharing the demographic data from the group (race and ethnicity data is unavailable).

Hidden Figures: Perspectives of Women Working in the Industry

Although only 44 of the members of the Atmos group are women, there are other women’s-only groups dealing with immersive technology. For example, the group Women in AR/VR boasts 11,000 members. However, engagement in the group is quite low. When I tried to poll how many women worked in sound, I received the following answers:

- “I only work in audio for VR/AR”: 3 votes
- “I work with audio and image”: 6 votes (including two men)

One respondent shared an explanation of why engagement might be low. In a separate survey, I asked, “what does participation feel like in mixed gender versus gender-exclusive spaces?”

She offered the following:

“The spatial sound and immersive audio community is already small. When you limit yourself to creating a women-only space within that community you severely limit the ability to have the conversations necessary to promote and advance the technologies and the art form. If the few women that have the knowledge to really share and enhance a community are too busy to fully maintain the community I find these communities fall apart pretty fast due to lack of engagement.”

- Survey respondent

“It took me four years to be taken seriously,” said one of the AVAR presenters about her experience as a woman working in the field of audio for augmented reality. Another woman admitted she felt intimidated by the amount of higher level of mathematics present in some immersive audio research, referring to herself as a “just a designer”. Yet she is very involved in mentoring and runs a Discord server to teach people about sound design for Unity, a software programme used for designing video games.

Both McMullen (an author of a website featuring young African Americans in STEM) and another AVAR presenter told me about their experiences with other scholars who approach their male colleagues to ask questions, rather than directing the questions to them, demonstrating a common microaggression: being dismissed or overlooked because they are women.

Recommendations

Dr. McMullen does not shy away from conversations about equity, being empowered by her tenure appointment to speak about pipeline initiatives. Such efforts need to be led by the right people with the right experience with DEI, she says. “We are reinventing the wheel when we don’t even have a car.”

Other women are taking charge of building the “vehicles” for access to the technology by starting networking mentoring programmes. In the UK, the

Yorkshire Sound Women’s Network, 2 Percent Rising, Saffron Sound, and the Omnii Collective are examples of groups working to shift the balance of women in music technology and audio engineering.

The Black Sound Society was founded as a support network for sound technicians and post sound mixers in film and television. Mama Youth provides training for young people from underrepresented backgrounds to enable them to succeed in the media industry.

The recommendations for overcoming barriers to entry include:

- Establishing employee network groups (also known as Affinity groups, and Feminist audio collectives as catalogued by Dobson [n.d.]
- Scholarships
- Certification and upskilling
- Continued unconscious bias training
- Building social capital by uplifting role models, creating mentorship opportunities, and networking as described by Laird [2016].

Conclusion: Informing policy and practice

Dr. Amandine Pras and her colleagues at the University of Lethbridge encountered a response in their study of microaggressions in the studio. “Look at that famous engineer who is a woman/transgender person/ racial minority: they did just fine,” they recounted. I have also encountered similar sentiments about my

presence in immersive audio. “You’re different Leslie, you’re hungry” I have been told or, “You’re like a unicorn,” since encountering a Black woman doing re-recording mixing is rare. However, Pras’s team envisions a future in which underrepresented groups can thrive “without having to be absolutely exceptional.” [Pras et al., 2021]

In order to investigate the concerns of women and minorities who seek to work in immersive sound, I have since started an initiative called “Immersive and Inclusive”, which provides both online and in-person immersive audio training in a safe space. Over a few months, 121 applicants have sought funding to attend the training, over 30 scholarships have been awarded for Pro Tools User certifications, and another 5 women have received Avid Pro Tools | Dolby Atmos certificates from our programme, including 2 from the UK. The myth that women are “just not interested” is unfounded. In fact, our students are determined enough to complete 24 non-consecutive hours of intense training to earn a certificate which provides them with a sense of pride and accomplishment. The results of that study were published as part of my doctoral dissertation [Gaston-Bird, 2024].

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... told me about their experiences with other scholars who approach their male colleagues to ask questions, rather than directing the questions to them, demonstrating a common microaggression: being dismissed or overlooked because they are women.

In order to dig deeper, I went back to my field notes from the AES AVAR conference and to interviews I held with women enrolled in immersive audio workshops (which I taught) to find more perspectives.

LEFT BEHIND AND LEFT OUT:

The first 30 years of
Black Programming on
BBC Local Radio:
1967 – 1997

Dr Liam McCarthy

Abstract

As the BBC replaces local programmes with regional programmes for Black communities across BBC local radio in England, this article explores the hidden history of the origins of this undervalued local output from 1967-1997. This demonstrably popular programming by Black broadcasters for both local Black communities and the wider local radio audience was established against a backdrop of the patronage of White local radio station managers and the unsympathetic policies of a corporate centre that appeared out of touch with a changing multicultural Britain. This is a hidden history of missed opportunities that has bequeathed a legacy of debate around institutional racism at the BBC.

Introduction

When Herdle White, the longest serving black presenter on BBC local radio, closed the microphone fader on his last BBC Radio Leicester radio show in May 2023, he ended an illustrious broadcasting career that stretched back for more than half a century (Leicester Mercury, 2023).

Despite White being in his eighties, his retirement was accelerated by the BBC's decision to replace locally based Black programming across BBC local radio with regional shows (*The Voice*, 2022). Little has been written about the early days of local Black programming, presented by local Black journalists and DJs for local Black communities and the wider audience of BBC local radio. The end of these local programmes and the breaking of decades old local connections between the BBC and Black communities therefore seems to be a good stepping off point from which to go back to the start. It began in 1968 with Herdle White at BBC Radio Leicester, who was first asked to present a short weekly 'Caribbean News' feature. This was soon developed into a sequence programme featuring community driven local news and events set in a mix of Black music. As the appendix to this article shows, by 1974 the BBC's twenty local radio stations were still producing only four targeted Black programmes. This slow progress was partly due to BBC management working on the assumption that Black communities did not want separate or targeted programming. That belief had been sustained since 1965, when a meeting was held at

Broadcasting House between the BBC and invited guests from 'West Indian' communities, during which the delegates argued that better representation on air was preferable to separate programmes (BBC WAC 1975:1). By 1997, there were still only 13 Black programmes across the BBC's 36 stations in England, which by then also included some overnight rebroadcasts of BBC World Service African and Caribbean programmes on local AM transmitters (BBC, 1997: 83). It is important to highlight that this was taking place in a media landscape without streaming, listen-again facilities and affordable or accessible internet connections. If you didn't hear a programme live, then you missed it. Nevertheless, thanks to audience research by the Commission for Racial Equality we know that programmes such as *Black Londoners*, on BBC Radio London, *'n'l Rule* on BBC Radio Manchester and *Reggae Reggae* on BBC Radio Birmingham were demonstrably popular (Anwar, 1983: 67). The aim of this article is therefore to track the development of Black programming across the first thirty years of BBC local radio through the following themes: Patronage, Policy and Programmes. Firstly, it will examine how the independence of BBC local radio station managers meant that their patronage was essential if Black programming was to be established; Secondly, it will assess the BBC's policies towards Black communities who were, after all, licence fee payers; and thirdly, it will provide a broad outline of the programmes that made it to air and the financial and editorial struggles that ensued. Providing the architecture of these early

years will give future academics the context that they can use as a stepping off point to explore the uneasy relationship between BBC local radio and Black programming up to the present day.

Patronage: Black Programming, White Hegemony

From 1967 through to the late 1980s, the patronage of BBC local radio station managers was the defining factor in deciding whether local stations would broadcast Black programmes. It is somewhat ironic that Black programmes were therefore developed through a system of White middle-class privilege within the BBC. There were no central policy directives on the matter and it was therefore left to the White – and almost exclusively male – station managers to provide output targeted at local minority communities, if they wished to do so. For many station managers, the outcome of a government supported BBC meeting with West Indian communities in 1965 had given them their lead on the matter. In the mid-1960s, political discourse in Britain was subject to one of the many 'immigration' crises that are regularly inflated by the mass media. This one had been brought to the fore by the controversy surrounding the election of Conservative MP Peter Griffiths in Smethwick in the 1964 General Election. Griffiths had fought and won the election on a racist ticket by exploiting the anti-immigrant views of local working class voters, enabling him to buck the electoral swing against the Tories (Reekes, 2018: 401-104). Fearful of the impact of increasing immigration on its electoral

prospects, Harold Wilson's newly elected Labour government – with its wafer-thin majority – put pressure on the BBC to hold talks with 'immigrant groups' about how it could help drive the integration of immigrants through its broadcasts (Schaffer, 2014: 26-27). The BBC therefore held two conferences, chaired by the Director General, Hugh Carlton Greene, at Broadcasting House, with representatives of South Asian and West Indian groups and High Commissioners. As a result, an Immigrants' Programme Unit was set up in Birmingham to make programmes for South Asian immigrants (Schaffer, 2014: 35). However, there was no such unit to broadcast to Black communities, since the 'West Indian' delegates at Broadcasting House made it clear to the BBC that they had 'no wish to have special programmes for themselves' (BBC WAC, 1975:1). This effectively held back significant programming for Black communities by at least a decade, as the BBC considered the matter had been settled. A decade later, in 1975, the BBC was still expressing its belief in what its management believed was an established view when, in a paper to the Annan Committee on Broadcasting, it repeated the fears of the 1965 delegates:

'They [the delegates] were concerned that special programmes could produce an impression of separateness which they neither felt nor wished to emphasise. Their main desire was that the BBC should help secure them an equality of respect and opportunity in Britain through its representation of West Indians in

programmes and through its employment of them.' (BBC WAC, 1975: 2)

By still invoking the spirit of 1965 in the mid-1970s, when Black communities in Britain suffered from rising and systemic racism across society, indicates a lack of understanding within the BBC of its role as a public service broadcaster to connect with marginalised communities. Indeed, the BBC was slow to action the plea for better representation and employment from the 1965 conference delegates, who had inadvertently given BBC managers an opt-out when it came to Black programming. It was a 'veto' that local managers exercised, despite the evidence of significant growth in the size of the Black populations across England which, in 1965, were estimated by the BBC to be over 400,000 strong (Hooper, 1965: 5). By 1974, the Community Relations Council provided statistical evidence of important changes in the composition of Black communities as African communities settled in Britain in increasing numbers (Kohler, 1974: 10-13). From the 1980s, it became clear that there were growing communities in Britain from a wide number of African countries, including Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Sierra Leone, plus the Caribbean islands. As with the South Asian diaspora these were not homogeneous communities and varied across the country, thus strengthening the arguments for local programming to reflect local community heritage and interests (CRE, 1985: 1).

Despite this growing array of statistics, evidence of the disadvantages suffered by local Black communities and lobbying by local and national groups, such as Community Relations Councils, BBC local station managers were still operating independently, using 'gut feeling' to decide on programming. A study of the programme listings, which can be seen in the appendix to this article, certainly confirms the lack of any central co-ordination across BBC local radio. *The Herdle White Show* at BBC Radio Leicester was broadcast to local Black communities that, even by 1983, were little more than 5,000 strong, representing just 1.8% of the local population (Leicester City Council, 1984). Yet the station management at BBC Radio Bristol, which was launched in 1970 and broadcast to an area that included one of Britain's oldest Black communities, did not broadcast a Black programme until the early 1990s, when Vernon Samuels began Black Echo. It was a similar situation on Merseyside, which launched in 1967, where the station manager argued:

'Programmes for Immigrants. We do none at all. Peculiar position in Merseyside where large scale 'immigration' took place in the Nineteenth century and relatively little since means this section of the community is virtually integrated. Almost all are English speaking and regard themselves as Merseysiders and lame ducks like the rest of us. Hence, no need for special programmes.' (BBC WAC, 1970b)

There were no central policy directives on the matter and it was therefore left to the White – and almost exclusively male – station managers to provide output targeted at local minority communities, if they wished to do so.

This contrasts with the later launch of BBC Radio Bedfordshire in 1987, when Black programming was part of the programme mix from the start, with the *Man Ezeke Sunshine Show* and *Black Voice*, which were on air for a combined three hours a week. In the centralised BBC local radio of the 2020s, it is difficult to understand the almost complete independence of station managers in BBC local radio from the 1960s to the 1980s. In effect, BBC local stations in this period would reflect the character and editorial drive of their station managers. This ensured that no two stations sounded the same, targeted the same audiences or, indeed, broadcast – or chose not to broadcast – Black or Asian programmes (See Linfoot, 2011: 271). This independence was both a weakness and a strength, as it allowed station managers to go against the grain in developing Black programming in places such as Leicester and Nottingham, if compared to Bristol and Liverpool with their long-established black communities. Against the grain? Certainly. Some local station managers developed programmes and built links with local Black communities that offered a different perspective to the BBC’s centrally expressed policies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Policy: England's Black Communities and BBC Policy

From examining documents at the BBC’s Written Archives, it is clear that from the mid-1970s, the BBC was grappling with the idea that it should be doing more for Black licence fee payers, but management was not sure how to achieve this. The title of its first major strategy paper, in 1977, framed the notion that this would be an uncomfortable transition – *‘The Broadcasting Problems Associated with Asian and Black Minorities in the United Kingdom’* is a 35 page minute for the BBC’s General Advisory Council on how the BBC was finding the going difficult (BBC WAC, 1977). It is a classic corporate fudge, and made little difference, although it did identify a number of themes that would come back to haunt the BBC. Having noted that, more than a decade after 1965, there had been no audience research into the needs of Black and South Asian communities, it suggested new research should be commissioned – but crucially offered no funding for it (BBC WAC, 1977: 15). On employment, it stated that the BBC was emphatically against targeted training for potential Black and South Asian candidates for BBC jobs – indeed, it offered an excuse for the BBC: ‘It may be that journalism is not a profession that holds many attractions for Asians and Blacks in Britain. Relatively few apply to the BBC’s own news trainee scheme: but again, this does not reflect discrimination by the BBC’ (BBC WAC, 1977: 33). In summary, here was the BBC suggesting that something should be done, but care

should be taken not to over-represent Asian and Black minorities, and any changes made too quickly might be counterproductive in terms of race relations. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of a new multicultural Britain.

Five years later, in 1982, another attempt to set out a cohesive strategy was made in a paper entitled *Ethnic Minorities and the BBC*. This showed that the corporation was becoming more aware of its shortcomings and highlighted two key criticisms that it regularly faced:

‘... that the BBC is not carrying out properly its obligation to these communities as a self-proclaimed equal opportunities employer; and that its programming does not adequately reflect the multi-racial character of British society today or cater more than grudgingly for the special needs of the ethnic minorities.’ (BBC WAC, 1981)

On employment, the BBC acknowledged that ‘no systematic attempt has been made to monitor the level of black employment’ within the BBC. The best it could highlight, in an organisation of twenty thousand people, was a series of less than a dozen individual success stories of people gaining short term contracts. *Ethnic Minorities and the BBC* again pointed to a lack of qualified applicants for posts and suggested that external bodies, such as the CRE, could fund external training schemes that might provide applicants of a higher calibre. Showing an astonishing lack of sensitivity, this paper went on to argue that minority presenters might struggle

with impartiality, giving as an example:

‘... can a black presenter justify to his listeners dealing in a “balanced” way with a speech by Enoch Powell?’ (BBC WAC, 1981: 6)

This statement might capture the prevailing views of the period but, in effect, the BBC was here suggesting that to be editorially ‘White’ (and probably male) was the ‘normal’ default position and that minority broadcasters needed to embrace an ‘editorial Whiteness’ (Lewis, 2008). It completely ignored the possibilities of the same difficulties of impartiality that might affect its journalism around politics or sport, for example.

In pulling together its internal strategies and policies in 1983, the BBC made many of the same points in *‘Multi-Ethnic Broadcasting: A Strategy for the Next Five Years’* (BBC WAC, 1983). Here, at last, the BBC recognised that the 1965 Conference at which delegates had argued against separate Black programming was almost two decades old, ‘a new and more assertive generation has grown up’ and that, therefore, ‘the balance is strongly in favour of special programmes’ (BBC WAC, 1983: 10-12). However, once again, the BBC argued that changes should be introduced ‘slowly and sensitively’, although it conceded that ‘Afro-Caribbean Local Radio output should be developed and extended’ (BBC WAC, 1983: 22). As with other strategies from the corporate centre, no new funding was forthcoming and, therefore, editorial managers failed to substantially develop or extend Black programming

on BBC local radio. Black presenters and programme teams remained on the fringes of their local stations, while Black communities remained on the margins of the BBC’s output.

On the few occasions that the presenters of Black and Asian programmes across BBC local radio came together on training courses, or in BBC ‘multicultural conferences’, their frustrations about the lack of local management interest in their programmes came to the fore. Following a ‘multi-cultural news’ course at BBC Radio Training in 1983, Jim Latham, the Senior Instructor for Journalism, wrote to local radio managers to express his concern:

‘A very high degree of cynicism was apparent in the course members and it was very depressing to find that they were as cynical about the BBC and Local Radio as they were, for instance, about

‘... can a black presenter justify to his listeners dealing in a “balanced” way with a speech by Enoch Powell?’

(BBC WAC, 1981: 6)

the Police There was a very strong feeling that Local Radio was paying little more than lip service to the needs of these communities.’ (BBC, 1983)

It would take another decade before BBC local radio launched its own ‘manifesto’ through which to take the service into the twenty-first

century. In *BBC Local Radio 2000*, serving minority communities finally became a centrally mandated obligation for local stations: ‘these are not heavy burdens we load reluctantly onto bowed shoulders – they are opportunities to serve the audience and increase our reach and share’ (BBC, 1997: 74). It pointed to the 13 stations then providing 71 hours of output for Black communities across England, and to a new Community Affairs Unit based at BBC GLR in London, to provide syndicated material – including BBC World Service programmes – and editorial expertise for local stations.

Programmes: ‘Success’ and ‘Community Value’ despite the BBC

Despite the need for patronage by White managers and a backdrop of unsupportive central BBC policies and strategies, Black programming on BBC local

radio, from the 1960s to the 1990s, was popular with its target audience. This is a tribute to the dedication of the freelancers and volunteers, who were starved of resources and production effort but who continued to deliver programmes that were shunted to the margins of BBC local radio schedules. Only one programme, Black Londoners, on BBC Radio

London, ever broke out of what Mitchell calls ‘poorly funded off-peak slots’ (See Mitchell, 2011: 57), which others have labelled ‘ghetto’ slots (Tsagarousianou, 2002: 216). The tables below show the combined output of Black and Asian programming across BBC local radio in England between 1974 and 1997. These tables show that broadcast deregulation in the late 1980s and the expansion of split frequency broadcasting (see Starkey: 2015: 109) saw the development of Asian, rather than Black, programming, and this was partially aimed at securing the BBC’s AM transmitters. They also highlight how the independence of local station managers was a factor in the slow build-up of Black programming on BBC local radio.

THE GROWTH OF BLACK PROGRAMMES ON BBC LOCAL RADIO

	1974	1977	1983	1987	1994	1997
Number of BBC Local Stations with Black programmes	4	5	8	9	10	13
Total Hours	2.5	6.75	17	27	56*	71*

*Includes Overnight broadcasts of BBC World Service News Programmes for Africa and the Caribbean.
Sources: BBC WAC, Radio Times Local Editions (1987), BBC Local Radio 2000

There was no logic or central planning to this programme development, as the output for BBC Radio London and BBC Radio Leicester shows. In 1994, only one hour a week of local Black programming was being broadcast on BBC Radio London, in a city where over half a million people of African-Caribbean heritage lived. This compared to three programmes, *The Herdle White Show*, *Talking Blues* and *In The Spirit* – between them accounting for seven hours a week – at BBC Radio Leicester, broadcasting to less than 10,000 Black people (BBC, 1997: 83).

The impact of split frequency broadcasting in securing big increases in Asian programming on AM (Medium Wave) frequencies in Leicester and the West Midlands can be seen in the table below (McCarthy, 2023: 200). This was partly a defensive move by the BBC to stop the transmitters in key markets being handed to commercial competitors, and an embryonic BBC Asian Network began in the Midlands. It grew into a quasi-national station on BBC local radio AM transmitters in the 1990s before becoming a digital network station in 2002.

THE GROWTH OF ASIAN PROGRAMMES ON BBC LOCAL RADIO

	1974	1977	1983	1987	1994	1997
Number of BBC Local Stations with Asian programmes	10	12	16	17	17	21
Total Hours	7	14.25	17	36.5	92.5*	253**

*Includes 57 hours per week on BBC Radio Leicester & BBC Radio WM branded ‘Asian Network’.
**Includes 175 hours per week on BBC Radio Leicester & BBC Radio WM branded ‘Asian Network’.
Sources: BBC WAC, Radio Times Local Editions (1987), BBC Local Radio 2000.

The appendix to this article shows for the first time a comprehensive list of the Black programmes, and the duration of the broadcasts, from 1970 to 1987. The information was gleaned from a variety of sources, including BBC Local radio HQ files, the BBC's strategy papers and the *Radio Times*. The sporadically produced central lists – which also included Asian programming – were often pulled together as a counterblast to critics of the BBC to prove that, as a public service broadcaster, it was connecting with ethnic communities.

Even though the BBC carried out no research into listening by Black licence fee payers until the 1990s, there is research available to show how popular Black programming was amongst its target audiences. An audience survey by the CRE in 1983 found that almost three quarters of respondents listened to *Reggae Reggae* (73%) on BBC Radio Birmingham, with more than half (55%) tuning into *I'n'I Rule* on BBC Radio Manchester (Anwar, 1983: 67). It was a similar picture in London, where the daily *Black Londoners* programme was equally popular. These figures are an outstanding example of how the BBC missed out on the connections that this programming was making. Relatively small investments could have produced disproportionately strong results – as was seen in the development of the BBC Asian Network in the Midlands.

Nowhere is this lost opportunity more evident than in London, where BBC Radio London provides a

case study of how BBC local radio station managers attempted to connect with the largest Black – and South Asian – communities in Britain. From the launch of the station in 1970, there was a reluctance to broadcast programmes with any serious news content for ethnic minorities, viewing this as a second order priority (BBC WAC, 1970). However, after significant pressure on BBC Radio London during the Pakistan – Bangladesh civil war in 1971, the station began broadcasting Bengali and Hindustani language programmes in October 1971 for South Asian communities. However, it was to be a further three years before the first programme aimed at the growing Black communities (including current affairs) was launched. *Black Londoners*, presented by Alex Pascall, began in early 1974 as a monthly half-hour broadcast 'after pressure by community workers and a grant of £200 from the CRC' (*CRC Journal*, 1976:12). By 1976 it was felt that the programme should be broadcast weekly but, in a row over funding that would be a constant drag on the programme, we are told that 'Radio London is willing to grant "Black Londoners" £500 towards production costs, but they have made it clear that due to budget cutbacks, that is all they can give' (*CRC Journal*, 1976:12). Thanks to a further CRC grant, *Black Londoners* did become a weekly programme in 1976 and then daily (Monday – Friday) from May 1978 (*Radio Times*, 1978). Funding would, however, be an ongoing issue, one which was never properly addressed by station management.

When *Black Londoners* became a daily programme, the larger South Asian communities still only had an hour long weekly programme, entitled *London Sounds Eastern*, which was presented in English after the station encountered editorial difficulties with the Bengali and Hindustani language programmes (McCarthy, 2023: 76). It can be argued that the difference in hours of output for Black and Asian communities resulted from the effective and organised lobbying of BBC Radio London by Black community groups – and the patronage of the station managers. There is evidence of outside groups applying constant and vigorous pressure on the station. In 1982, the Black Women's Radio Group (BWRG) criticised all of the London stations – Capital Radio, LBC and BBC Radio London – for their lack of appreciation of the views of ethnic groups (Local Radio Workshop, 1983: 130). This critical appraisal came from an April 1981 study of the output of the three local radio stations that coincided with coverage of the aftermath of two huge stories for Black people in London: the inquest into the Newcross Fire, in which 13 young Black people had died in a suspected racist arson attack in January 1981; and the evidence gathering for the Scarman Report following the Brixton Riots of April 1981. The survey did highlight the importance of *Black Londoners*, which the BWRG praised for its 'excellent coverage on the Inquest', and it argued that more reporting by Black journalists would enhance BBC Radio London's coverage of issues that impacted local Black communities (Local Radio Workshop, 1983: 126). As much as they felt *Black*

Londoners went some way to covering Black issues, they were less complimentary about *Reggae Rockers*, which had replaced *Reggae Time*. The BWRG felt that this programme had too much music that could be heard elsewhere and there was not enough truly local content (Local Radio Workshop: 37). When presented with this report and analysis, the BBC was, perhaps unsurprisingly, defensive; Derrick Amoore, the station manager of BBC Radio London, was dismissive, as he told the *UK Press Gazette* in April 1982:

'From the nature of the research, the failure of the conclusions to follow from the research and the general tone; It's what I'd expect of the extreme left wing'. (*UK Press Gazette*, 1982)

Among the other groups to pressure the station management was the 'Black Londoners Action Committee' (BLAC), which argued that 'the BBC was racist in its policy towards the programme' by not giving Black people editorial control of its programming (*Morning Star*, 1981). BLAC picketed the station in November 1981, when members – including future London MP and Labour Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn – pointed out that to present the shows the BBC only employed 'a staff of two, employed on temporary contracts with a weekly budget of just £40' (BBC, 1981). It pressed the BBC for a larger budget, proper union pay rates and, importantly, editorial control for the Black freelancers working on the programme (BBC, 1981). None of this came to fruition, and these were constant themes in relation to community programmes across BBC local radio, which often relied

on the goodwill of freelancers and volunteers. Alex Pascall, the presenter of *Black Londoners*, recalled that after the street riots of 1981, 'Black people from all over Britain were calling in, MPs were coming in to be interviewed. Oh, it was a time of turmoil' (*The Guardian*, September 2020). According to Pascall, the importance of *Black Londoners* at this time of strife cannot be overstated – looking back, he told *The Guardian* that the programme played an important role in calming community tensions:

'Britain could have gone up, really. Black people were angry. The youth were angry. The elders could not deal with the children'. (*The Guardian*, September 2020)

Both *Black Londoners* and *Reggae Rockers* were certainly popular among Black listeners in London. Research by the CRE in 1983 showed that 69% of respondents listened to *Reggae Rockers* and 59% tuned in to *Black Londoners* – these were figures far in excess of any general programming on BBC Radio London (Anwar, 1983: 67). Indeed, the radio station was under constant pressure from central management because of its poor audience figures. The Managing Director of Radio (MDR), Aubrey Singer, told the BBC's Board of Management in 1979 that 'During the eight and half years of its existence Radio London, regrettably, has failed to make much impact' (BBC WAC, 1979a). Singer was introducing the Board to a possible way forward, as outlined in an internal and confidential 'London Community Radio Study', a desktop report conducted by BBC managers in 1978 (BBC WAC, 1979b). This was a genuine attempt to address the needs of Black, Asian and, to a lesser extent, other communities such as 'Cypriots, Moroccans and Chinese' in London. The study suggested that this should be a separate service to BBC Radio London, and would broadcast 'brown programmes, many of them in languages ... during daylight hours' and 'black programmes ... from say 6 pm to 2 am' (BBC WAC, 1979b: 15). Among the potential problems the study highlighted were two that stand out for their stereotypical generalities: 'special precautions need to be taken to prevent the station being taken over by groups such as Black Power', and that 'experience has shown that most Asians find it difficult to adopt the impartial stance which is required of BBC broadcasters' (BBC WAC, 1979b:16). This use of language, and its 'othering' of Black and Asian people, suggests that this was never really going to be adopted as a serious policy, leaving Londoners from ethnic communities suffering from more than a 'perceived marginalization' (Tsagarousianou, 2002: 216). However, at an estimated cost of at least £500,000 per year and leaving the existing BBC Radio London intact, this was never going to fly at a time when MDR was writing to all BBC local radio staff about plans to cut local budgets by 25 percent (BBC WAC, 1979c). The pressure on poor listening figures reached its climax in the late 1980s, when BBC Radio London, BBC Radio WM and BBC Radio Manchester came under serious threat of closure unless they dramatically increased their audiences. In the West Midlands, programming for Asian communities was embraced and, together with BBC Radio Leicester, an emergent BBC Asian Network began on the AM transmitters of the stations. Management at BBC Radio London might also have looked at the potential for growth in audiences through Asian and Black programming but took a different route. In October 1988, Matthew Bannister,

the new station manager, closed down BBC Radio London for two weeks, before relaunching it as BBC GLR. The launch party was featured live on BBC One's London Plus television programme and portrayed the station through a sea of white faces and interviews with white DJs and managers (BBC, 1988). Indeed, BBC GLR began with no programmes targeted at ethnic minorities, even the daily *Black Londoners* show was dropped in the shake-up. Trevor Dann, the Assistant Editor, explained that the plan was meant to be a positive, as the new management aimed to:

'... create a radio station for the whole of London. We wanted to invite everybody through the front door, not build ethnic minorities an annexe in the back garden'. (Dann, 2018)

While the aim to integrate Black and Asian Londoners' issues and voices across the whole output makes absolute sense, without the people, legacy and stories from the daily *Black Londoners* programme, this proved difficult. There is a counterfactual argument that suggests a development of *Black Londoners* could have been pursued by the BBC in a similar manner to that of the *Six O'clock Show* on BBC Radio Leicester, which led directly to the BBC Asian Network. We shall never know - but the loss of *Black Londoners* was a serious blow to Black communities in the capital.

Nevertheless, two years later, the management at BBC GLR recognised that it needed to re-invent its targeted ethnic programming in a fresh way. A new one hour weekly show entitled *Black London*, took its place as part of a tranche of programmes targeting Black, South Asian, Gay, Jewish and Irish Londoners. It built on the long running co-operation between the station and the Inner London Education Authority, in which radio training courses were offered to local people in areas such as White City and Lambeth. These courses were effective talent searches offering a new front door to BBC GLR, bringing people from diverse backgrounds into the BBC. However, funding remained an issue. David Dunkley Gyimah, one of the early presenters of the new *Black London* programme, recalled that it suffered from the same problems that had bedevilled it in the 1970s and 1980s:

'We did it really knowing that the money that they were offering us was a pittance, but it was our kind of foot in the door. So, again, the trade-off for us was to say, look, we didn't have this opportunity. Now that we have it, they're paying us really diabolical money ... I think once it became about 16 months, then you felt, okay, now this is a job and now we need more resources for the job ... we just didn't have the oomph to make it an incredible programme'. (Dunkley Gyimah, 2023)

Consequently, there was a high turnover of presenters – but many, like Dotun Adebayo and Vanessa Feltz, became household names and now BBC Radio London has the most diverse presentation schedule of any local radio station across the BBC.

Away from London, station managers undertook a variety of initiatives to try and flush new money out of central management and, in particular, 'the ethnic reserve fund' of Michael Barton, the Controller of BBC local radio. One documented project was 'Operation Percolate' at BBC Radio Nottingham, the home of *Back 'a Yard* from the early 1970s. Black and Asian producers from London were parachuted into the station to try and build up links with local communities (BBC, 1985). A public meeting in Nottingham, which was attended by 'fifty representatives of the Asian and Afro communities' and organised by the project team, was described as 'angry', with a strong view being expressed that this 'tokenism was offensive in the face of the major problems faced by minority populations in this country' (BBC, 1985). As for *'Back 'a Yard'*, the London producers found it to be 'centred on a very small, almost elite section of Nottingham's blacks' (BBC, 1985). The result of Operation Percolate was a one off payment of £6,000 from the Controller to the station, which lapsed after a year, and the impetus to bring in new black and Asian staff rather fizzled out – tokenism won again.

There was no reason why local station managers could not divert money to Black programming - they had the independence to do so and, in the case of some stations, notably BBC Radio Leicester and BBC Radio WM, they did divert significant sums into Asian programming in particular. That most stations did not and that these programmes drifted along at the fringes of the BBC local radio schedules speaks volumes about the lack of importance that was placed on the needs and views of Black licence fee payers. In late 2023, the remaining local Black programmes on BBC local radio were 'regionalised', striking another blow to Black communities across England – seriously risking the severing of the remaining community links with local stations.

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Conclusion

This article has examined the problematic relationship between Black communities in England and BBC local radio stations between 1967 and 1997. It was a relationship based on the patronage of almost exclusively White station managers exercising their editorial freedom in a series of eccentric decisions. For example, there was no targeted black news programme on BBC Radio London until *Black Londoners* launched as a monthly show in 1974, while Black people in Bristol had to wait until the early 1990s for *Black Echo* to be broadcast. The limited programming that did make it to air in the 1970s and 1980s has to be set against a backdrop of BBC policies and strategies that seemed to mitigate against any extensive programming

for local Black communities. Indeed, in many cases, local station managers were pushing against the grain of a central BBC bureaucracy that appears to be more concentrated on addressing its critics than serving Black licence fee payers. This situation set the course for

debates about institutional racism in the BBC that continue to the present day. Conversations with practitioners during the course of the preparation of this article has revealed that there is still a sizeable audio archive of these programmes, though sadly not at the BBC. The former presenters, who have their personal stories to tell, have personal archives, while some copies also survive in various audio archives across the country. This is an important history of more than half a century of troubled connections between the BBC and Black communities that deserves to be explored further.

This article began with the retirement of Herdle White from BBC Radio Leicester. White told me that, while he had a generally positive experience in Leicester, he recognised the wider difficulties in the BBC:

'I leave the BBC with a bit of sadness, because from day one I talked about diversity ... I think over the years the BBC has let down the Black community. They pay into the BBC licence fee, and what do they get for it? Very little. And now, with the changes they are making, they are getting even less. They don't have a voice and I think that is very sad'. (Herdle White, 2023)

White was referring to the BBC local radio plans to offer 'regional' rather than 'local' programming for the Black – and South Asian – communities from late 2023 (*Radio Today*, 2023). Chris Burns, Head of Audio for BBC England, is one of the senior management team spearheading the drive to regionalise parts of BBC local radio output – including

community programmes - to release £19m of funding to improve the BBC's local online presence across England (BBC Media Centre, 2023). In the past, as a Community Producer at BBC Radio Bedfordshire, Burns was a supporter of the importance of local Black presenters talking to local Black communities, telling the *Radio Times* in a 1987 feature: 'It has been Radio Bedfordshire's policy to recruit presenters for *Black Voice* from the local black communities' (*Radio Times*, 1987: 72). This article has argued that the instincts expressed by Burns in the 1980s are not only still valid but are even more important in the 2020s, as the BBC still tries to work out how to connect with Britain's Black communities.

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EX D M E P A

Black Programmes on BBC Local Radio 1970 – 1987

1970:

Station	Programme	Duration
Radio Leicester	Herdle White Show	15 minutes weekly
Radio London	Reggae Time	75 minutes weekly
Total Duration		1.5 Hours

1974:

Station	Programme	Duration
Radio Birmingham	Reggae, Reggae	60 minutes weekly
Radio Leicester	The Herdle White Show	30 minutes weekly
Radio London	Black Londoners	30 minutes monthly
Radio Manchester	Callaloo	30 minutes weekly
Total Duration		2.5 Hours

1977:

Station	Programme	Duration
Radio Birmingham	Reggae, Reggae	60 minutes weekly
Radio Leeds	Calypso	30 minutes weekly
Radio Leicester	The Herdle White Show	50 minutes weekly
Radio London	Reggae Time	90 minutes weekly
	Black Londoners	90 minutes weekly
Radio Nottingham	Back 'a Yard	90 minutes weekly
Total Duration		6.8 Hours

1983:

Station	Programmes	Duration
Radio Derby	Black Roots	45 minutes weekly
Radio Leeds	Calypso	90 minutes weekly
Radio Leicester	The Herdle White Show	90 minutes weekly
	Talking Blues	60 minutes weekly
Radio London	Black Londoners	60 minutes – Monday to Friday
	Reggae Rockers	120 minutes weekly
Radio Manchester	I'n'l Rule	120 minutes weekly
Radio Nottingham	Back 'a Yard	75 minutes weekly
Radio Sheffield	Back 'a Yard	60 minutes weekly
	NB: Different Shows	
Radio WM (Birm.)	Sound System	60 minutes weekly
Total Duration		17 Hours

1987:

Station	Programmes	Duration
Radio Bedfordshire	Man Ezeke Sunshine Show	120 minutes weekly
	Black Voice	60 minutes weekly
Radio Derby	Black Roots	120 minutes weekly
Radio Leeds	Caribbean Eye	90 minutes weekly
Radio Leicester	The Herdle White Show	120 minutes weekly
	Talking Blues	120 minutes weekly
Radio London	Black Londoners	60 minutes – Monday to Friday
	Rockers FM	120 minutes weekly
Radio Manchester	I'n'l Rule	120 minutes weekly
Radio Nottingham	Back 'a Yard	150 minutes weekly
Radio Sheffield	Back 'a Yard	120 minutes weekly
	NB: Different Shows	
Radio WM (Birm.)	Sound System	180 minutes weekly
Total Duration		27 Hours

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JACQUELINE ROSE: A WOMAN IN DARK TIMES

On choosing the present moment to write a book on death:

I think it falls into place because of the pandemic firstly, and then secondarily, the outbreak of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Although I don't want to pick that out as if war was not going on all the time, and to play into how selective the West is in relation to different global conflicts. One of the shocking things has been the hospitality towards Ukrainian refugees, which people in the UK have been willing to display, compared to the neglect of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and Ethiopia. There's been a horrible white undercurrent to how these wars are received and reported and thought about. The book is about living death. We have been living death under the pandemic in a way that has been much less amenable to the forms of denial, disavowal, evasion, blindness, which characterises, notably in the West, many peoples' relationship to their own mortality. I think one of the things the pandemic has done is brought death into homes and interior spaces. It's been a huge disrupter of domestic and also of social space. If you think of the corpses being burned on the streets of Italy, for example, and you think about the rapid acceleration of the pandemic's dying rate, it's as if suddenly people are experiencing death in the spaces which they like to think protected them from it. Like all over the streets, for example, and in the home.

In the West, the home has always been presented as a bastion of safety. But of course, if you're a woman, you know that's nonsense. If you're a feminist, you know that's nonsense. The home is not a bastion of safety for women and probably never has been. During lockdown in the UK, the rate of violence against women dramatically increased.

I would say the pandemic has shifted people's sense of their own mortality. It's made it impossible to pretend that we're immortal. And it's been a terrible shock to many people to have it so flagrantly present in their lives and out of control. Which is why I suggest in the piece on Camus' remarkably prescient novel, *The Plague*, that counting is a form of magical thinking that appears during the pandemic, when every evening on the news you get another array of figures, one after the other. And in the end, I, for one, felt punch drunk. The figures became meaningless. Because what each number, in fact, is referring to is an individual death, something you can't convey through a run of figures, right? As if numbers could give us the illusion of control at a time when it was impossible to capture what – who – was being lost. So there were various forms of alienation and proximity to death at the same time, which I think made it a unique moment for most people.

On the psychological and social repercussions of life after the pandemic:

When I talk about 'mortality entering the living room in new ways', I should add: in the West. Which is to say that it is only the privileged communities and the privileged regions of the world who ever had the delusion that death was something that could be avoided, that death was a kind of stalker you could outpace.

It's only in certain cultures that there is the delusion of immortality. It's very important to say that this was a very discriminatory way of distributing mortality across the globe with huge differences relating to class and race. I think two things are happening. One is that the pandemic brought to the surface and made visible the forms of social, racial and class inequality, which are the mainstay of a capitalist economy. And what you're then confronted with is the horror of what passes for the so-called every day. The horror of progress, for example, which is the supreme Western aim. The idea that progress is something which can be advanced in the name of capital. And we know now from the climate catastrophe that what globalisation has been doing in advancing and progressing across continents is actually destroying the planet. So, there are various forms of hubris that collapsed and then reasserted themselves.

There was a feeling at the beginning that this was going to be a new equality that would cut across racial, class, social divisions. And indeed there were forms of solidarity, like the marches for Black Lives Matter, which were genuinely progressive and multi-ethnic and multiracial and seemed to signal a new universalism. But in fact, for the most part, in terms of who died and who lived, money counted, status counted, the class quality of the air you breathe counted. All made a huge difference. There was no equality – in fact if anything, the faultlines running through society have got worse.

The nurses are key because they displayed an ethos which is light years from how Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak see the world. The nurses offered us a different ethic, a type of militancy – or as Simone Weil would put it, 'virile determination' – which plays havoc with the idea of them as passive do-gooders whose role it is to uncomplainingly mop up the faults of the social fabric. That is why their going on strike is so bold and brave. The idea of the nurses being militant destroys the whole cliched image of them as self-sacrificing. Some employers and ministers have been insisting that nursing is "a vocation" and that there should therefore be "no pay rise", almost as if one follows from the other. You are meant to be poor if you are noble. So, it's a deadly, unjust and punitive mix.

On defying the 'new normal':

When anybody ever says 'normal' to me, I get very anxious because a lot of my thinking – and there's a substantial essay in the book about Freud's concept of the death drive – comes through psychoanalysis, in which the 'normal' is something of which we are encouraged to be deeply suspicious because we are all subjects of the unconscious. We have knowledge that we don't know we have and which we often wish we didn't have. So for psychoanalysis, the 'new normal' would be a facade.

If anybody says "new normal" to me I think: "heaven help us". The last thing we want is to go back to normal.

I'm suspicious of the term 'Post-COVID' because I don't think the pandemic is over and, in fact, the rates are increasing in the UK and elsewhere. This is the 'new normal', the fact that we never know when it's going to strike. What we do know is that we are hideously unprepared again. Nothing has been done about the failed quality of PPE, and the corrupt contracts awarded to the providers for what often turned out to be useless protection, and nothing has been done about the dissemination of the vaccine so unequally across the world. Pandemic research centres have been shut down by the British government so the preparations for it repeating itself have been got rid of. Of course, on grounds of cost, but also as part of Johnson's – and now I would say

Sunak's to some extent – kind of boosterism, which is, "it's over and done with". It is a fundamental premise of psychoanalysis that nothing perishes in the unconscious, so nothing is ever over and done with.

I saw Steve McQueen's incredible short film about the Grenfell Tower tragedy – the June 2017 fire in the Kensington tower block in which 72 people died – where the camera just tracks into the burnt tower five months after it happened, and before it had been covered up again, and it

If anybody says "new normal" to me I think: "heaven help us". The last thing we want is to go back to normal.

leaves you physically rotating around that tower for 20 minutes, so that you feel as if you're going to be ill. It is so disturbing and so powerful. One of the most striking things about the film for me is that you can see in the background identical towers that did not burn and are still standing there. And you're thinking, has the cladding been changed? Has it been altered? Have the fire precautions been altered? I don't know. Certainly not sufficiently across the country. So the 'new normal' is allowing for mass killing to happen again the next time.

On the need for flexibility in contemporary feminism:

Trans-exclusive feminists feel that they are defending a biologically based category of woman, and that trans women, for example, are usurping their space. I think the feeling that trans women are all potential predators, which gets the loudest publicity, follows from the first, which is that if being a woman is a biological given category, then any trans woman is a usurper. I think it's hugely problematic, firstly, because of the unjust aspersion of violence which it casts across all trans women. And secondly, because, as Freud said, femininity and masculinity are theoretical constructs of uncertain content. Freud believed that the passage from the biological assignation of sex at birth to being a man or a woman is as infinitely complex as the human mind. And crucially, whatever journey you take, all the discarded journeys you could have taken will still persist in the unconscious.

I'm part of a feminism that, of course, believes that there are men and women who can be biologically assigned at birth, but that is the beginning and not the end of the story.

As Freud famously said, every sexual act is an act between at least four people, because you've got other members of your internal script, as it were, who are jostling for space, even as they may well be being repudiated at the same time. Seen in this light, heterosexuality itself is not natural or pre-given, but itself involves an act of repudiation of the sexual paths that you could have taken, which I think plays an important part in the phobia against people who actually do take those paths, who bring them back to life and claim them as their own. Not because they're totally different, but, more powerfully, because, in fact, there is a deep connection to them. For psychoanalysis, you always remain unconsciously in touch with all the possibilities, lived and unlived, of your psychosexual subjectivity.

In *Women In Dark Times*, I argue that women are in touch, if not always with that psychosexual complexity, but they are in touch with the region of the mind that does not fit into the socially sanctioned positions on offer. I would certainly want to include trans women in that.

I can sum it up by saying I'm part of a feminism that, of course, believes that there are men and women who can be biologically assigned at birth, but that is the beginning and not the end of the story. And that we have to be flexible about the category. Not only on grounds of human rights, but also because we need to have a Freudian take on this, which is whatever sexual identity you eventually assume for yourself - and we need to recognise that that is a precarious, complex and interminable process - there are other stories with which you are unconsciously aligned and are bound to be. Perhaps, therefore, we can be a little bit more flexible about the category of "woman", and who is allowed to be part of it.

More basically, I just feel that to exclude trans women from the category of woman is a form of coercion, which takes the form of 'I will tell you who you have a right to be'. And I think to get down that path is very risky politically indeed.

On learning from the French thinker Simone Weil:

What changed Weil forever was when she volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War and was there long enough to witness, not just the violence of the Francoists against the insurgents, but the reverse. She also didn't support the Second World War to begin with, because she wanted it to be conditional on France abdicating its power over its colonial peoples. So she wanted to bring into the conversation things that were taboo, like the capacity for violence of a revolutionary resistant population struggling against fascism, and that they could be inhuman in their violence too, and the violence of democratic nation states against their colonial subjects.

But she was also extraordinary in the sense that she broke boundaries in ways that read like a diversity manifesto. I mean, she really is saying we must identify with the most disadvantaged, racially exploited class, the most vulnerable, factory workers and the poorest people in the world. We must do it because, she recognised, it is repellent to us. Because if you are in a privileged position, you hold onto it for dear life, which is why privileged people are so aggressive towards the people beneath them, because they know they're not entitled. Nobody's entitled to live at other people's expense.

I would say, although she wouldn't define herself as a feminist, any more than Rosa Luxemburg or Marilyn Monroe necessarily would, that they have a link to their inner worlds which goes to the heart of what it is the mind can tolerate. And I do think that women have access to that domain, precisely because, as Freud, and Lacan after him, argued in ways that are seen as very controversial, the woman is one step outside of the law. Freud famously said women have a weaker sense of justice because they do not identify with paternal law as the little boy does. Well, I'm part of the generation of feminists who read that and thought: Great women do not identify with paternal law. They can have better ideas. They're not enjoined to embody that form of masculinity. That has to be a gift, as well as an exclusion. So I think that idea of a kind of knowledge, unconscious knowledge, which pierces through the facade of our social and sexual arrangements, as something which women are particularly in touch with, really does run through most of my writing.

THE PLAGUE

JACQUELINE ROSE

Fitzcarraldo Editions

The Plague: Living Death in Our Times is out on Fitzcarraldo Editions

Jacqueline Rose was in conversation with Joana Ramiro: joanaramiro.com



THE WAY, WAY

Rhian E Jones

Actor Michael Sheen collaborates with James Graham and Adam Curtis in a three part BBC drama set in the South Wales town of Port Talbot.

The Way, ironically enough, tries to go in several directions at once. It is both dystopia and family drama, with elements of social realism, folk horror and near-future fairytale.

The three-part series is the directorial debut of Michael Sheen, who, from declaring himself a ‘not for profit actor’ and returning his MBE to his current portrayal of the NHS’s founder Aneurin Bevan at the National Theatre, is committed to the radical traditions of his craft, and to excavating the particularly radical past of South Wales. Also behind *The Way* are the screenwriter James Graham and the documentary-maker Adam Curtis, both known for social and political critiques of Britain’s past and present.

For all the rhetoric of recent years on ‘left behind’ areas of the country, it is still rare to see provincial working-class lives sympathetically explored as drama, rather than being used as political cudgels. From its setting in Sheen’s Port Talbot hometown to its use of locals as extras amongst a constellation of Welsh acting talent, everything about *The Way* seems refreshing, necessary and well-intentioned - but how well does it work?

On its release, *The Way* shared schedule space with programmes commemorating the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike. These provided a valuable reminder that much of post-industrial Wales has already attained a kind of dystopian existence following the cataclysmic experience of the strike. Decades of political and economic neglect have generated an endemic bitterness and fatalism, even

in towns like Port Talbot, where industry survives precariously in the form of its iconic steelworks.

Against this austere backdrop, *The Way* introduces the Driscoll family, all coping with varying degrees of maladjusted discomfort. The legacy of the Miners’ Strike is interestingly complicated by union rep Geoff’s rejection of the militant activism of his father’s generation, and its attempted resuscitation by present-day peers, including his estranged wife, Dee, in favour of pragmatic, though futile, negotiation with the bosses. It is an equally bold move to make their daughter, Thea, a police officer – one profession still providing reliably steady employment.

In the first episode, triggered by two deaths in the community and rumours of the steelworks’ closure, the town’s passivity is stoked into active resistance, aided by the power of local myth and memory. Although the great industrial struggles of nineteenth-century Wales are referenced, the strongest echoes are of 1984-5, as the town is occupied by brutal police and private security forces. As Dee becomes a fiery matriarchal leader, her drop-out son, Owen, breaks free of the numb individualist confines of medication and mindfulness and into collective action. Her words and his deeds go viral on social media and, with South Wales under martial law, the Driscolls are forced to flee through a hostile England to the uncertain safety of mainland Europe.

Perhaps because its sense of self is so strongly rooted in Wales, the drama rather loses its way once over the border. Even in the mounting absurdity of the second and third episodes, things feel more immediate than futuristic, from image manipulation and ubiquitous surveillance to policing and intelligence outsourced to algorithms. Like Russell T Davies’ *Years and Years*, *The Way* attempts some obvious arguments about displacement, migration and asylum by inverting the narrative, humanising its subjects as an ordinary British family. Owen’s love interest, Anna, herself a recent Polish arrival in Port Talbot, reminds the Driscolls that their personal catastrophe happens to others “every day, all over the world”. It is doubtful how well this somewhat sanitised depiction succeeds, as the Driscolls stay startlingly fortunate on their journey to the coast, evading capture despite their fame as fugitives, and encountering an unlikely number of friends and allies.

Decades of political and economic neglect have generated an endemic bitterness and fatalism, even in towns like Port Talbot, where industry survives precariously in the form of its iconic steelworks.

To make too much of its far-fetched aspects, however, is to miss that *The Way* is operating by conventions other than realism. Its tonal inconsistency and requirement, at times, for a good-faith suspension of disbelief, are deliberate. Sheen has described *The Way* as “trying to capture what it has felt like to be living in our culture over the last 10 years, where you are never sure if you’re living in a sitcom or horror film”. Accordingly, its genres jostle and jar - the already-retro swinging set-piece at the Driscolls’ Auntie Elaine’s collapses into Carry On farce, while Luke Evans’ frontier bounty hunter seems to have wandered in from another drama altogether.

This collaging and glitching of stories and images is a trademark of Sheen’s co-creator, Adam Curtis, whose technique is evident in the splicing of archive footage from strikes and riots; action followed via social media feeds and security cameras; and the touches of magical realism in the ghostly visitations of Geoff’s father, or Owen’s hallucinatory fantasies in drug withdrawal. Curtis’s preoccupations with the past’s uncanniness, the destructive effects of nostalgia and the normalisation of extremism, are all at play in *The Way*. With the mysterious ‘Red Monk’ of Port Talbot, ancient prophecies of doom, and a sword liberated from the steelworks’ museum, *The Way* also seems to be a partial homage to deliriously weird 70s dramas like Penda’s Fen or Children of the Stones, with their intrusion into everyday life of the primaeval and arcane.

While this overload of ideas and allusions is fascinating and admirably ambitious, it is so much, in such a tight timeframe, that *The Way* struggles to become more than the sum of its parts. Its hauntology and mysticism sit uneasily with its attempted laying of real-life political and personal ghosts. Although it was ten years in the making, it is remarkable that *The Way*’s release coincides not only with the Miners’ Strike’s 40-year anniversary but also with threatened job losses at Port Talbot’s Tata Steel plant. The latter announcement was greeted by protests – stopping short of the fever-pitch depicted in *The Way* – and a predictable lack of concern from the government. This ripped-from-the-headlines quality means that complaints about *The Way*’s on-the-nose ‘preachiness’ are rendered redundant, but also make its ultimate lack of resolution more resonant. *The Way* shows us where we have been and where we are, but – in a suitably bleak mirror of reality – fails to offer a plausible way out.

Rhian E Jones is a journalist, editor, author, and broadcaster who grew up in South Wales: <https://rhian.substack.com/>

You can watch *The Way* on BBC iPlayer: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/m001w93j/the-way>



Horace Ové and Black screen representation

**Dr Clive
Chijioke
Nwonka**

The late Horace Ové was a Black British filmmaking pioneer. Through revisiting his landmark film *Pressure*, Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka assesses his legacy in his industry and adopted homeland.

The passing of the great Trinidadian-born Black British filmmaker, Sir Horace Ové, on 16 September 2023, was a moment rightly felt as the loss of a pioneering figure in British culture. It was also a moment that seemed to further compound a sense of Black cultural loss, specifically in the arena of film, which had been felt just 15 months earlier, at the time of the equally impactful death of the Barbados-born, Black British Menelik Shabazz in June 2021. Here, Black Britain had, within the space of less than 2 years, experienced the passing of two of the most important figures in the historic struggle not only over Black cinematic representation, but also its radical nature, which had provided so many with a visual and narrational template with which to explore the contours of race, difference and injustice.

Ové's passing caused the expected spirited discussions around the relationship between British film culture and Black identity, and in the several months that have passed since this loss, it has motivated a deeper reflection on the more personal experiences and narratives that emerge from engaging with his work. This was not always captured in the widespread, emotive obituaries that met the news of his death, reverberations from which were felt not only in the UK film industry but also across the cultural world - a testament to both the significance of Ové's life and the continuing impact of his creative imagination.

Somewhat inevitably, these obituaries and tributes centred upon the recognition and celebration of the most identifiable of Ové's works,

the 1975 film *Pressure*. Widely understood to be the first Black British feature film, it is the theatrical release of its new 4K restoration that took a central place within the BFI's appropriately titled *Power to the People: Horace Ové's Radical Vision*, a season of screenings throughout November 2023 that celebrated Ové's contribution to British film culture. Indeed, it was in the very preparation of my own contribution to this season, chairing the screening of this restored film, that news emerged of his death, and we were naturally drawn towards a revisitation of his film's historical and contemporary resonance - a source of collective mourning, but also collective celebration.

For those who have yet to give *Pressure* a necessary visit, it is concerned with the everyday, Black-specific experiences of Tony, an unemployed British-born teenager who, upon leaving school, is suddenly thrust into a landscape of racism and inequality. All this is framed by Ové through a stunning visual approach unifying documentary-realism with what can be described as moments of surrealism to accentuate the internal, psychological life of racism and its impacts upon our protagonist. The film produces a number of cross-generational associations and emotions that are evoked in the very term '*Pressure*' as a means of describing Tony's existence as one conditioned by multiple points of struggle, both external and internal.

Ové's film places Tony at the centre of a continuous struggle over identity,

belonging and politics, both within the nation and within the diasporic family unit. From one perspective, *Pressure* refers to the reconciling of the differences between his experiences and expectations as a young Black and British man from those of his Trinidadian parents. From another, in confronting the realities of British society and racism, and the false hope of social assimilation, Tony's 'pressure' is also found in his development of a Black consciousness, one marked by nuance and debate, and the allure of the Black radicalism of his older brother in the face of police brutality and corruption. However, given the status of *Pressure* as a landmark British film that broke down institutional and cultural barriers, a 'pressure' was also present within the context of its very production. Having been funded through the BFI's then Production Board and completed in 1975, *Pressure*'s theatrical release would be held back for nearly three years.

It would be perfectly acceptable, just as many have discovered the film through its occasional presence within British cinema programming, or Black film scholarship in the country, to understand watching *Pressure* as a kind of rite of passage. I first encountered *Pressure* as a postgraduate student exploring what, for me, was a film frequently referenced in the works of the key Black thinkers, such as Kobena Mercer, and others, who took a Black cultural studies approach to the historical analysis of Black film - the racism such films attempted to address and in which they

were deeply embedded, in the context of the UK film industry. However, what was initially planned as an intellectual reading of Ové's film, was reconfigured as a moment of Black cultural identification and recognisability, a particularly powerful experience, given the dominant whiteness of British film culture. For someone who had grown up within the Black communities of northwest London, *Pressure* offered a novel cinematic engagement

continuing resource for me - frequently as a form of cultural resistance, something to be cited in moments when discussions on British film were devoid of any consideration of the Black British contribution to it. On many occasions, it was presented as evidence to new and sometimes doubtful minds of the historic manifestations of anti-Black racism - how its continuation might place greater significance on this film as one that made vital

. . . in confronting the realities of British society and racism, and the false hope of social assimilation, Tony's 'pressure' is also found in his development of a Black consciousness, one marked by nuance and debate, and the allure of the Black radicalism of his older brother in the face of police brutality and corruption.

with the familiar geographies of Black west London, and the iconographies of the Harrow Road, that gave the sense that the film was an entry point into a Black historical documentation of my own cultural and regional identity. For me, like for so many others who had come to the film decades after its production, it offered an entry into a Black cultural history that, until that point, had seemed to have been hidden from mainstream film culture.

In the years that followed, as I made the transition from student to educator, *Pressure* would be a

links between the past and the present. *Pressure* provides a visual window into a cultural and political world and experience that seem to have been hidden or pushed from the dominant canons of British film culture, and the pedagogies of higher education. Its impact has justified its inclusion as one of the seminal texts and artefacts that have come to define Black British cultural production across a variety of mediums, be they music, art, visual culture or literature.

Whilst it may be the case that *Pressure* is the most well-known and referenced

of all of Horace Ové's works, it would be remiss to focus our attentions solely on this film, for Ové's broader creative output displayed a continuous interrogation of identity and, in so doing, made an indelible mark across British visual culture. Films such as *Playing Away* (1987) offer a comedic account of how questions of identity and national belonging are bound into sporting culture, and the outstanding documentary *Baldwin's N***** (1969), captures the landmark lecture from the American intellectual, James Baldwin, in a monochrome, cinema vérité form that, 55 years since its making, still gives the feeling of intense proximity - a present audience placed back in the very room in which Baldwin spoke of the contradictions and multi-modal violence of the Black experience in both the US and in Britain. Such films offer an insight into the depths of Ové's cinematic influences, which ranged from the Italian neo-realism of Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), to the poetic cinematic language of Satyajit Ray's '*Apu Trilogy*'.

Ové's films produce a visual and political lineage identified in the work of filmmakers such as John Akomfrah, Ngozi Onwurah, Steve McQueen, and many other Black British filmmakers, indebted to the aesthetic and narrative principles of Ové's work. They benefit from an industrial condition which, despite its continuing marginalisation of racial difference, has allowed these filmmakers to develop careers and make creative statements that may have taken much longer to come to fruition were it not for the seismic interventions made by Ové.

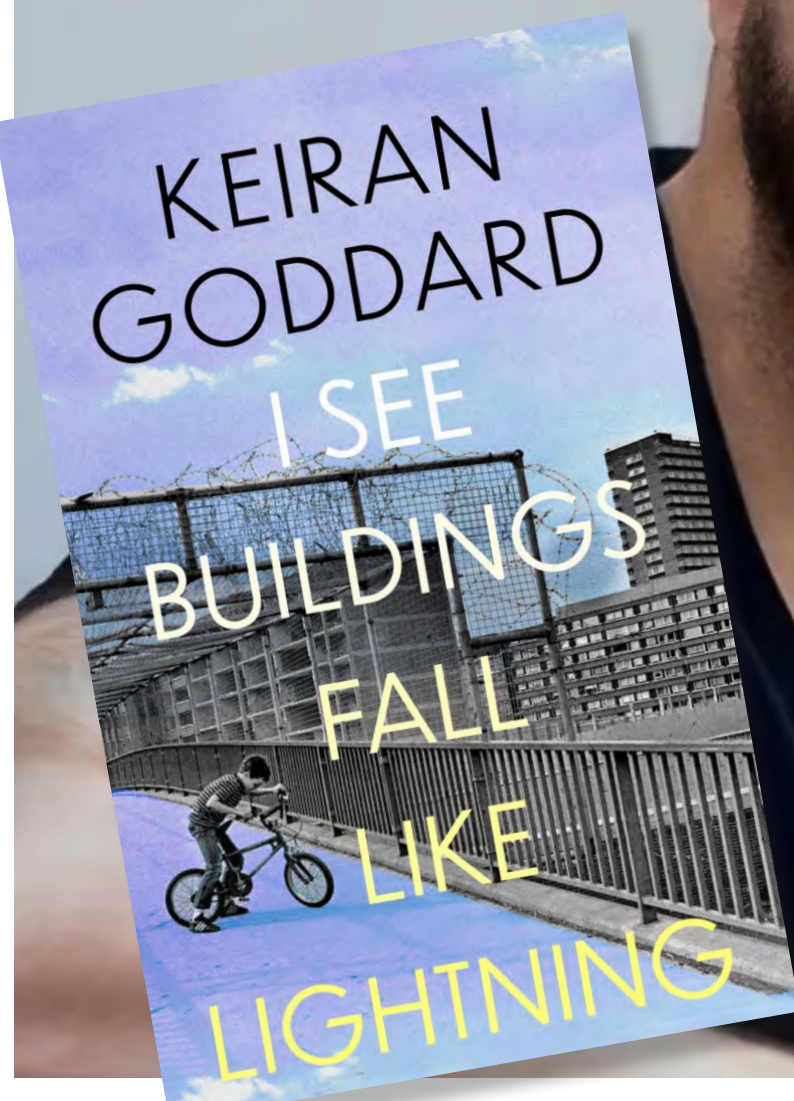
Legacy seems to be a frequent (and highly deserved) term to be applied when discussing Sir Horace Ové in the context of his cinematic works and their cultural influence. It is very true, for me, that the experience of watching *Pressure* in its 4K restoration offered a different kind of Black cultural encounter, and not one achieved simply through the connections that the film's depictions of racism, inequality and anti-Black policing make with the present day. Rather, even for those of us so familiar with the film, *Pressure*'s revisitation, throughout the BFI's *Power to the People* season, allowed for a Black communal gathering around the depiction of a Black social, political and cultural world in mid-'70s Britain through which so much of the nation's Black presence finds identification, relevance and connection. In watching *Pressure* from the vantage point of the present - and Sir Horace Ové's passing will surely continue to compel new audiences towards this - we are participating collectively in the preservation of this legacy.

Dr Clive Chijioke Nwonka is Associate Professor in Film, Culture and Society at University College London's Institute of Advanced Studies, and a Faculty Associate of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation.

REPRESENTOLOGY RECOMMENDS

Keiran Goddard

is a novelist, born and raised in Shard End, Birmingham, whose debut *Hourglass* was listed for the Desmond Elliott Prize. His latest book, *I See Buildings Fall Like Lightning*, is out now on Little, Brown.



Read

Susannah Dickey
(Picador)
ISDAL

A rare and impressive thing, this. A book that takes joy in the linguistic and formal freedoms offered by poetry, but that simultaneously exhibits a degree of intellectual and rhetorical clarity that at times feels almost essayistic.

Nick Bano
(Verso)
Against Landlords

We are in a total mess. We stole the future prospects, security, health and mental wellbeing of an entire generation in order to create an extractive paradise for a handful of rentiers. Bano paints this bleak, bleak, bleak picture with admirable clarity.

Becca Rothfeld
(Virago)
All Things Are Too Small

In this collection, Rothfeld has written some of the most invigorating and moving essays I have read in years. One in particular, on Weil, God and appetite, was so powerful and audacious that it actually made me laugh with joy and admiration.

Michael Hardt
(OUP)
The Subversive Seventies

Looking at a wide range of movements around the globe, from the United States, to Guinea Bissau, South Korea, Chile, Turkey, and Italy, this book made me think again about resistance movements in the 1970s and what they might usefully teach us.

Watch

BBC iPlayer, BFI Player
Blue Bag Life

A beautiful, painful documentary about addiction and the various ways it can shape and distort us. There are a thousand films about this topic, but what sets this one apart is its understanding that, at the very heart of things, stories of addiction are always love stories.

Storyville
Nae Pasaran!

Documents a group of Scottish Rolls-Royce workers, who between 1974-78 refused to make parts for the Chilean air force in the wake of Pinochet's atrocities. A study in solidarity, friendship and the outsized impact of moral courage. Never more relevant.

BBC iPlayer
8 Bar - The Evolution of Grime

Ewen Spencer's documentary on the most significant British artform to emerge this millennium. Spencer makes precisely the right choices, leaning less on talking heads wanging on about "culture" and more on a series of utterly visceral, thrilling live performances.

Netflix
Wham!

Worth watching for three reasons. One, it is a timely reminder that George Michael was a staunch comrade and one of the most underrated songwriters of his era. Two, it is a timely reminder that praise is very different from love. And three, it is a timely reminder that learning to take pleasure in the success of your peers, devoid of jealousy, is good for the soul

Listen

Billy Woods & Kenny Segal
Maps

Album of 2023 for most people with ears. This record has so many brilliant lines that I find new ones to love with each listen, but perhaps more than that, I was blown away by the delivery – elastic and expressive, barks and yelps, simpers, silences and sighs.

Nourished by Time
Erotic Probiotic 2

I'm not sure I really understand this record, but that's also not really what records are for. Sometimes it sounds like early Boyz II Men and sometimes like Blue Nile, which is a combination that only a fool wouldn't love.

Podcast
Know Your Enemy

It is too easy to dismiss conservative ideas simply by engaging with the relentless stupidity of their most popular proponents. Instead, this podcast takes a serious look at some of the most brilliant conservative minds, and examines them on their own terms. It's still easy to dismiss them, of course, because they are wrong ... but it's more polite this way.

Podcast
Hoaxed

A series about the Satanic Panic that swept a Hampstead suburb in the mid 2010s. It has all the ingredients of a good conspiracy theory; children as floating signifiers, sexual prurience, health anxieties, the internet whisper machine, opportunist grifters ... makes me grateful we've moved on from all of that (cough).



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Henry** AT

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Journalistic articles should be between 1,000 and 3,000 words, and can take one of the following forms

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