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University of Southampton

Faculty of SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

(RE)NEGOTIATING CREATIVITY: SUSTAINING DIGITAL AND CREATIVE CAREERS OVER THE LIFE COURSE

By

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University of Southampton

Abstract

Faculty of SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy

(RE)NEGOTIATING CREATIVITY: SUSTAINING DIGITAL AND CREATIVE CAREERS OVER THE LIFE COURSE

by

Benjamin Preston Thomas

Attaining and sustaining a career in the digital and creative industries is hard. Training that is often expensive and difficult to navigate, informal hiring practices, precarious employment, and long, intense, and inflexible hours, all come together to limit access and progression for many people. Moreover, as these conditions interact with people's changing priorities and needs over the life course, the ability to sustain work is often not possible, reflected in the high rates of worker attrition (Carey et al., 2020; Steele, 2022). With a critical labour shortage in these industries, tackling the loss of older workers by addressing the challenges of digital and creative work is important. While there is much recent literature which speaks to the challenges (for example Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini, 2020), less is said about those people who have managed to sustain their careers in the face of these challenges, whose circumstances present examples of the conditions which are needed in order not to be 'filtered out'. This thesis addresses this gap, exploring the strategies that older workers in the fields of Video, Games, and Websites have been able to use in order to sustain their careers.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Benjamin Thomas

Title of thesis: (Re)negotiating creativity: Sustaining digital and creative careers over the life course

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: .... Date: 26/5/2023

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Definitions

Capital .... The capacities of an individual. Includes cultural, social, economic, symbolic capitals (Bourdieu, 1986).

Habitus .... An individual's disposition, formed by their possession of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Field..................................... A social space which constitutes a unit of analysis.

Fields of study .... The social spaces being researched, which are Video (TV, film, YouTube), Games, and Websites.

Temporal consciousness ..... The 'experiences and meaning of time' within a Bourdieusian field (Atkinson, 2019)

Participation profile .... The share of time spent between multiple social fields (Levy & Bühlmann, 2016)

Reflexive habitus .... Arises as someone compares the 'logic' of one Bourdieusian field with another (Decoteau, 2016)

Critical Realism (CR) .... The methodological approach to the research

Abduction............................. The critical realist process of thematic and theoretical analysis (Rees and Gatenby, 2014)

Retroduction .... The critical realist process of contextual analysis of individual cases (Rees and Gatenby, 2014)

Chapter 1 Introduction

> There were a couple of times where I had to say… 'I've got to go home now.' Someone would come in at five to six… and then say, 'Can you make these changes?' and I was like, 'No! I can't make these changes now, I've got to pick up my baby from nursery.' I remember them being, 'Oh, I'll do it then.' I felt like a problem, and I didn't get offered any more work from them.

Holly

> The line producer was younger than me, like 25, 26. And they didn't know how things worked. And then the knock-on of a job not being organised properly… that all filters down. And the crumple zone, if you like, are the people making it. It's not the money or the time, it's… the people are compressed to make it happen, not the process.

Martin

> You just end up with this rolling hoard of 21-year-old white men… I don't know where they come from, and everyone else is just disappearing. And I was like, where do they go? You know… so maybe I'm hitting that point of 'when does the void take me? At age 40?'

Cody

1.1 Research focus

Too many people are leaving the digital and creative industries. With a critical skills shortage in many of these industries (Carey *et al.*, 2017; McCallum, 2022; Screenskills, 2022a; Jones, Brereton and Swords, 2023), addressing the causes of worker attrition should be a priority. However, this has not been the case, with government focusing on 'pipeline' issues (HM Government, 2017, 2018), and industry only recently beginning to address the issue (Steele, 2022).

Exploring the statistics (Tables 1 and 2 below) gives an indication of the scale of the problem that needs to be tackled. ONS statistics show that for many digital and creative industries there is a dramatic decrease in workers over 35 years old compared to rest of the UK workforce (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

Key: Creative / Digital

	Whole Workforce	58 Publishing activities	59 Motion picture, video and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities	60 Programming and broadcasting activities	61 Telecommunications	62 Computer programming, consultancy and related activities	63 Information service activities	73 Advertising and market research	74 Other professional, scientific and technical activities	90 Creative, arts and entertainment activities	91 Libraries, archives, museums and other cultural activities	95 Repair of computers and personal and household goods
Age 16 to 24	12.7%	-3.3%	+2.5%	-5.4%	-5.1%	-6.0%	-1.1%	+0.1%	-4.2%	+1.8%	-2.5%	-2.1%
Age 25 to 34	22.2%	+7.7%	+11.6%	+12.2%	+3.3%	+7.7%	+12.6%	+13.9%	+4.4%	+4.9%	-2.5%	+1.6%
Age 35 to 49	36.3%	0.0%	-2.2%	+4.0%	+6.9%	+8.5%	-0.4%	-2.1%	+2.2%	-3.7%	-4.6%	-0.7%
Age 50 to 64	25.3%	-5.1%	-11.0%	-9.6%	-3.0%	-8.0%	-9.5%	-11.0%	-2.8%	-4.6%	+8.3%	+0.1%
Age 65 to 74	2.9%	0.4%	-0.8%	-1.2%	-1.8%	-1.8%	-1.5%	-0.8%	0.4%	1.2%	1.0%	1.0%
Age 75 to 84	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	-0.2%	-0.3%	-0.2%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%
Age 85 and over	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	-0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 1.

	16-19yrs	20-24yrs	25-29yrs	30-34yrs	35-39yrs	40-44yrs	45-49yrs	50-54yrs	55-59yrs	60-64yrs	65-69yrs	70 +
Average % in age ranges for **digital and creative**	5.65	9.92	14.77	19.64	14.17	13.98	13.19	11.95	9.31	6.72	4.10	2.71
Average % in age ranges for **total workforce**	4.98	11.08	14.21	14.19	13.54	13.96	16.71	15.86	13.05	7.70	3.74	3.68
Difference (%)	+0.68	-1.17	+0.57	+5.45	+0.63	+0.02	-3.52	-3.91	-3.74	-0.98	0.35	-0.97

Table 2.

Table 1 – Difference between whole workforce average and each age range in each industry.

Table 2 – Comparison of digital and creative and entire workforce.

More recent statistics explore this same issue. Workers in film and TV are young compared to the total UK workforce. Workers under 40 are overrepresented, those 40-50 are about the same, and those over 50 are considerably lower compared to the national picture – around 20% compared to 32.7% for total workforce (Steele, 2022). It is an even starker story in the games industry, with 61% of workers being under 35, compared to 33% in the overall workforce. Those over 51 are only 4% of games workers, compared to 32% for the wider workforce (Taylor, 2022). 22% of IT specialists are over 50, compared to around a third of workers across the whole workforce. Technical roles are skewed younger, with only 13% being over 50 (The Chartered Institute for IT, 2022a).

These headline figures can be broken down, revealing clear gender, race, and class disparities. For women in TV and film, age disparity begins earlier than for men with women leaving the industries from their mid-thirties, with a similar skew towards younger workers for workers from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds (Steele, 2022). Ofcom (2019) show there are less

women over 50 (14%) compared to men (19%) in broadcasting. Leung, Gill and Randle (2015, p. 53) discuss how women are 'haemorrhaging' from the industry in their late 30s and 40s, with statistics showing how those still in work are less likely to have dependent children, meaning that childcare is the likely cause of them leaving. The paper also points to the 'disposability' of women during shocks such as the 2008 recession, which has also applied in the pandemic (Wreyford *et al.*, 2021, p. 10). The female Games workforce is younger, with those age groups over 36 being more dominated by men than the headline figures, and women in senior roles being just 19% of the total. Ethnic minority worker numbers start at a low base, with 90% of workers in games are from White British or White Other backgrounds (Taylor, 2022). Women make up just 30% of website workers (The Chartered Institute for IT, 2022b). Older IT workers are more likely to be freelance and part-time making their employment conditions precarious, with higher levels of unemployment compared to younger counterparts (The Chartered Institute for IT, 2022a). Carey *et al.* (2020) find extraordinarily high attrition rates in the creative industries of between 73-83% over the years 2012 to 2019 (Carey *et al.*, 2020), with a breakdown of class background showing that those from working-class backgrounds more likely to leave, and less likely to progress to management roles or take part in training, indicating a limiting of their careers if they do stay.

These statistics are brought to life by a growing body of recent academic research which points to the reasons behind these attrition rates. Research has explored the experiences of workers by looking at issues around training (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011; Allen *et al.*, 2013; Kirton and Robertson, 2018; Harvey, 2019), hiring practices (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Hannák *et al.*, 2017; Kirton and Robertson, 2018; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Coles and Eikhof, 2021), precarious employment (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Schörpf *et al.*, 2017; Srauy, 2019; Xu, 2021), and long, intense, and inflexible working time (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015; Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015; Schörpf *et al.*, 2017; Cote and Harris, 2021; Swords *et al.*, 2022). This literature reveals the inequalities present in digital and creative work, which often lead to people being 'filtered out' of the industries. These inequalities relate to the need for the right mix of training, networks, money, and time to gain access to work and, once in work, the additional need to be able to navigate the 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) which are created by and for those of the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) who tend to be white, male, middle-class, and free of caring responsibilities (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). Those who lack these capacities and are not from these backgrounds first struggle to access work and are then subject to more stringent demands as they progress due to a lack of trust or outright discrimination (Carey *et al.*, 2017; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). Moreover, the literature shows how the demands of this work are often incompatible with

people's other needs and priorities over the life course. These include caring responsibilities (Berridge, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Dent, 2020; Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini, 2020), protecting wellbeing (Balderson *et al.*, 2020; Film and TV Charity, 2022), and focusing on non-work activities (Balderson *et al.*, 2020). In addition, ageism, which is often gendered, limits careers (Ursell, 2000; Hennekam, 2015; Bandias, Sharma and Drive, 2016; Steele, 2022).

Based on this research, is it reasonable to accept that, as Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini (2020) contend, there is a 'shelf-life' to digital and creative careers? Considering the evidence mentioned above, this seems a reasonable question. However, while there is a considerable drop-off of older workers from these industries, there remain people who manage to sustain their careers in the face of these challenges, and not just those of the 'somatic norm'. Yet, there is a lack of literature which seeks to explain this, with literature that focuses on the agency of older workers only concerned with the most privileged groups (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, chap. 10). The limited literature from the digital and creative industries that does consider work over the life course for marginalised groups tends to highlight the way their careers are limited (for example Dent, 2020; Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini, 2020), and not focus on the actions taken that allow workers to sustain careers. The literature that does take a more agentic view (for example Gascoigne and Kelliher, 2018) does not sit within the context of digital and creative work. Noting this gap in the literature, it is worth trying to understand what it is about the identities, experiences, and actions of workers in the digital and creative industries that has allowed them to continue working. Who are they? How have they done it? What is it about their lives and careers which has enabled their continued participation? Have there been any *enabling conditions* such as organisational support which has allowed them to continue where others have not been able to? Have they been able to do so in a way that has not had negative outcomes for career progression? Crucially, can they provide examples of the conditions that are required to sustain careers, offering potential ways forward to support more workers if these conditions can be scaled up? That is the focus of this thesis.

1.2 Research questions

In order to answer these questions and address a gap in the literature on sustaining careers in digital and creative work, it is important to contextualise workers' experiences so that we can make sense of their actions to sustain their careers, and the outcomes of these actions. As such, an understanding of workers' backgrounds and experiences of early careers, the challenges that

they have faced over their careers, and the actions that have been taken to attempt to sustain work is needed. To that end, the thesis' research questions are:

1. What are the demands of accessing and progressing in work, and how do these differ for people in different social positions? What do these differences mean for career progression?
2. What tensions do people experience when work intersects with other aspects of their lives at different points in the life course? How do these experiences vary for different people, based on their earlier career outcomes?
3. In what ways do people attempt to sustain digital and creative careers by taking action to resolve the tensions experienced over the life course? What allows them to take these actions? What are the outcomes of these actions, and how and why do they differ for different groups?
4. How can these research findings inform policy and practice to improve the outcomes for older workers in the digital and creative industries?

The thesis addresses these questions by focusing on three distinct but interrelated and increasingly convergent (Bolin, 2007) 'fields' of Video (TV, film, YouTube), Games, and Websites. These were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, my broad focus on both 'digital' and 'creative' had come from the steer for this PhD, dictated by funding from the now defunct 'Industrial Strategy' (HM Government, 2018). On this basis, I decided to include the broadly 'digital' Websites to complement the range of more 'creative' industries that are normally considered by researchers who variously study the 'screen industries' (Ozimek, 2020; Carey, Brien and Gable, 2021), 'Cultural and Creative Industries' (CCIs) (National College Creative Industries, 2022), or just 'The Creative Industries (The Creative Industries Council, 2022). Purely 'digital' work is not prioritised in this literature, despite being present in these industries, so research into Websites can enhance that literature. As further justification, the scoping interviews done prior to starting data collection showed the value of this broader focus as many workers cross boundaries between careers in TV and film, games, and the more digitally focused Websites. Finally, studying these related fields together can provide useful findings for a large portion of the UK economy, as Video and Games are worth £13.48 billion a year (Advanced Television Ltd, 2021), with Websites underpinning much of the rest of the economy. As they are shaped by similar political economic contexts including often being grouped together in government policy (HM Government, 2018),

have shared skillsets and, as a result, have a workforce which is able to move between the three fields, any policy recommendations will be of relevance to a large group of workers.

1.3 Methodological approach

This research has been conducted using a critical realist (CR) approach (Archer *et al.*, 1998; Elder-Vass, 2010; Bhaskar, 2014; Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). CR is well suited to address the research questions, concerned as it is with those relatively few older workers who have been able to sustain their careers in digital and creative work. That is because CR allows for data to be analysed in a 'theoretically pluralistic' way (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014), applying different theoretical lenses to understand the structuring forces that shape work for many (what I have called 'the rules'), and importantly, in a further stage of analysis, 'retroduction' provides an understanding of what I have termed the 'exceptions to the rules'; those older workers, especially from marginalised groups, who have been able to sustain their careers. In doing so, it points to the conditions which are necessary in order for more people to be able to sustain work over the life course, providing evidence for any interventions that might transform work in the fields of study.

The data collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 1989; Kvale, Brinkmann and Uwe, 2018). Interviews were 'theory-led' (Smith and Elger, 2014) which meant I shared my expertise on the research with participants in a process that looked to 'confirm or falsify and, above all, refine [a] theory' (Pawson, 1996, p. 299), while looking to participants as experts regarding their experiences. This approach allowed me to maintain a critical assessment of participant accounts by contextualising them and assessing their adequacy and completeness compared to other interviews and other sources of data (Smith and Elger, 2014, pp. 119–120).

Over the course of analysis, I developed a conceptual framework which utilised a critical realist reading of Bourdieusian capitals, habitus, and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990, 1996), and a common theme of 'time'. Levy and Bühlmann's (2016) development of life course theory considers people's participation in multiple social fields, which changes over the life course. This is complemented by Decoteau's (2016) work on 'reflexive habitus' where she outlines how, at the intersection of multiple social fields, we become reflexive, able to form cogent plans for action. I have considered the reflexive 'life course tensions' between work and non-work social fields as

the point at which people plan action to sustain their careers. Regarding time, it became clear over the course of the research that focusing on various elements of everyday time use, unequal time demands and their knock-on effects on career trajectories, the way time is experienced at work i.e., work's 'temporal consciousness' (Atkinson, 2019), and changes in people's participation in work, were all useful ways of understanding careers over the life course. This 'temporal turn' is a novel addition to understanding digital and creative careers, and could be applied more widely, suitable for any area of work with high time demands.

1.4 Main findings and original contribution

Findings show that for workers who have sustained their careers over the life course, a renegotiation of their participation at work has often been necessary. This is most often to reduce time at work in order to support other priorities, but has also been, for those later in life, to increase time at work if they are at risk of 'early exits'. Crucially, at the time that people need to renegotiate their time at work, their 'field position' (role and seniority), and wider social position, plays an important role in the amount of agency they have to make a change. This is important for understanding how inequalities operate in these industries. Those who have struggled to access and progress in work, first due to inequalities in society and then within the 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) that the fields of study represent, are not able to reach these strong field positions and are 'filtered out'. Furthermore, for those who have been able to reduce their time at work, new inequalities emerge as career progression and experiences of work suffer compared to those who have been able to continue to fully commit to work. Those workers looking to increase their participation later in life face (often gendered) ageism and will more likely struggle to avoid skills obsolescence. In an important additional contribution, the thesis explores a range of *enabling conditions* which have allowed some participants to bypass the worse effects of their industry's 'inequality regimes' and sustain work, providing examples of the conditions which need to be scaled up in policy in order to meaningfully address the labour shortage by retaining more older workers.

This thesis provides a number of original contributions. It offers two theoretical contributions: Firstly, the use of critical realism in creative industries research, which has been able to move beyond broad theoretical perspectives when understanding inequalities. The additional analytical step of retroduction has helped to explain the conditions of some participants' cases by considering their individual contexts in order to explain outcomes that appear to be the

'exceptions to the rules'. By doing so, this approach offers the potential to provide solutions to social problems by acknowledging the structures that exist (unlike some careers literature that are overly agentic (Arthur and Rousseau, 2001; Hall, 2004)), while bringing to the fore the conditions that are required to enable better outcomes, indicating ways to improve conditions for more workers. Secondly, the conceptual framework that I have developed to understand careers over the life course has applications beyond the digital and creative industries. Features include its central role of 'time' in understanding how inequalities shape career outcomes, including a conceptualisation of 'time' as an additional form of Bourdieusian capital, its use of a critical realist reading of Bourdieu to understand how tensions between multiple social fields (work/non-work) give rise to reflexivity and action (Decoteau, 2016; Atkinson, 2019), and its consideration of a renegotiation of someone's 'participation profile' (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016) between these social fields in order to sustain careers over the life course. This framework has applications for other careers that have high time demands and pronounced inequalities. For example, this framework could be used to study lawyers in and around London's 'Magic Circle' law firms, or with print journalism.

This thesis adds to empirical knowledge in a number of areas. Firstly, an exploration of early careers adds to the recent literature on inequalities in the creative industries. A key new contribution is outlining the mechanism of how inequalities result in extra time requirements to meet the demands of the field, affecting both day-to-day experiences and longer-term career outcomes. Secondly, the analysis of 'life course tensions' that arise as people compare the 'temporal consciousnesses' of work with those of non-work offers a novel way of understanding the tensions that participants have felt at different points over their life courses that goes beyond a simple analysis of 'work/life balance'. This work provides field-specific descriptions of the holistic nature of work in the industries studied, and of the life course experiences that participants have encountered. By exploring careers in this way, the thesis has added to literature on parenting, wellbeing, training, and ageism in the digital and creative industries, including how role and seniority affect the experiences of life course tensions. Finally, findings on the actions that older workers are able to take in order to relieve these life course tensions and sustain work provides a key contribution to the literature on digital and creative careers over the life course. These findings reveal the importance of two factors in the ability to sustain work. Firstly, that the agency required to act to relieve life course tensions and sustain work is gained form their role and seniority, shaped by their early careers and wider social position. This shows that inequalities are compounded over the life course. Secondly, the support of organisations is an important 'enabling condition', alongside workers' role/seniority and wider social position. This

organisational support, in the form of atypical help for part-time, job-shares, remote and/or flexible working, in-house training, and supportive organisational cultures, point to ways in which policy and practice can make a difference to more workers if this support is scaled up, addressing the skills shortage by retaining more older workers.

1.5 My positionality as a researcher

I have been motivated to conduct this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, I have a background in cultural and creative work, being a musician and a technician who still produces music, podcasts, and video. Many of my friends have been musicians and other creatives including authors and videographers, and I have seen how cruel their industries have been to them as they have aged. Moreover, as I began to research careers in my MSc at Southampton and then throughout this PhD, the inequalities that were evident galvanised my interest in producing research which could affect policy and improve conditions. Having been a campaigner for NGOs on social justice issues in the past, I want to use my research alongside this experience of activism to make a positive change for people that I feel close to.

While I am driven to do this work, it is fair to say that this is not because of personal experiences of marginalisation or exclusion. I am in a privileged social position as someone who is broadly well-served by both the industries being studied and academia. As such, it has been important for me to remain mindful of my privilege when conducting this research. As part of this, I have tried to avoid making assumptions about how people experience their lives, ensuring I listen carefully to their understanding of the world and convey that as best I can in the process of analysis. Above all, I aimed to show respect and gratitude to all participants, and made it known that I valued their expertise and the time they had given me.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

This section outlines the structure of the thesis and provides an overview of each chapter.

Chapter 2 begins by outlining the historical development of the fields which helps to provide context for the conditions which are then discussed. Literature reviewed focuses on the experiences of training, hiring practices, precarious employment, and long, intense, and inflexible hours, which together encapsulate the demands of fields in what I have termed the 'All-In' phase, where people *tend* to be younger, and able to prioritise work. This literature highlights how inequalities pervade work in these industries. Next, a brief look at how the organising logics of work, expressed as a field's 'temporal consciousness' (Atkinson, 2019) is introduced, which is later used in my analysis to understand how work and non-work come into tension. The literature on life course experiences, which come into tension with the 'All-In' phase, is then discussed, with much recent work on the transition to parenting complimented by other issues related to the desire to work less for non-care related reasons. Literature that considers the desire to work more in later life is also discussed. Together, these issues are shown to threaten the sustainability of careers. Chapter 2 concludes with a look at what literature there is that explores the strategies that workers have been able to employ in order to sustain their careers. This reveals a gap in knowledge when considering the digital and creative industries that this thesis addresses.

Chapter 3 on my methodology justifies my critical realist approach and the use of qualitative interviews to address my research questions. I discuss ethical considerations, explain my process of recruitment and sampling, and provide details of the process of conducting interviews. The process of analysis is discussed, including the evolution of my coding and my 'temporal turn' which led to the development of my conceptual framework, which is set out.

Chapter 4 is concerned with inequalities related to access and progression in work prior to when the majority of participants experience 'life course tensions'. I have termed this the 'All-In' phase of work, where people tend to act as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) committing fully to work in the fields of study. This chapter's focus was developed for two reasons. Firstly, it became apparent that inequalities prior to and during the 'All-In' phase of work had important implications for career progression, and consequent 'field position' (role and seniority). This, as explored in later chapters, has significant knock-on effects for the ability to renegotiate participation in work in order to resolve life course tensions. Secondly, an account of the demands of the fields of study in the 'All-In' phase provides a reference point to return to in Chapter 6 where I consider whether someone is able to continue to meet the demands of the field after they have renegotiated their participation profile.

Chapter 5 considers life course tensions through an exploration of competing 'temporal consciousnesses'. The first part of the chapter considers the experiences of participants in the 'All-In' phase to develop field-specific temporal consciousnesses for the three fields. Findings show how these relate to production practices, employment type, and inequalities. The rest of the chapter considers the narratives of participants who have discussed a variety of tensions that have arisen between work and non-work across the life course. This tension is framed in terms of Decoteau's (2016) 'reflexive habitus', as the logic of the work field is compared to that of another. Findings show that participants have variously struggled with wanting to work less due to childcare, stress, or too much time away from the home, or later in life wanting to work more as they face obsolescence or (often gendered) ageism. The field position that participants have been able to attain is shown to relate to how these life course tensions are experienced, indicating how inequalities in the 'All-In' phase continue to affect people over the life course.

Chapter 6 focuses on the extent to which participants have been able to employ strategies that have resolved life course tensions and sustained their careers. This is done through a consideration of how participants have renegotiated their 'participation profile' (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016). Once again, field position is shown to be key to having the agency to renegotiate participation in work, explaining how inequalities are compounded over the life course, leading to uneven levels of worker attrition. The chapter also considers the role of *enabling conditions* such as financial help from families and importantly, atypical support from organisations. Outcomes of these renegotiations are explored which reveals a number of issues. Firstly, for someone to continue to work there are often compromises. Participants can be forced to do a role at a lower level, a role that is less prestigious, or to move fields which potentially hampers their career progression. Secondly, relating to the demands of the fields identified in Chapter 4, a renegotiation of time can mean that participants are no longer able to meet the demands of the field, and careers suffer as a result.

Throughout these chapters, a theme of 'filtering' is evident. For workers in the 'All-In' phase, those without the right mix of cultural, social, economic, and time capitals to access and progress in work are 'filtered out'. As people experience 'life course tensions', those that, due to their field position, see no way to resolve the tension leave the field, representing another point at which workers are 'filtered out'. When participants act to resolve life course tensions, new inequalities

emerge which can lead to a 'filtering down' to lesser roles, 'filtered sideways' across fields, or 'filtering out' if they cannot meet the demands of the fields (outlined in Chapter 4). At each of these points, inequalities linked to gender, class, race, age, and caring responsibilities are evident. These findings address a gap in existing literature on digital and creative careers over the life course and highlight that although there are 'exceptions to the rules', the issues that result in such high levels of worker attrition continue to affect those that have managed to sustain their careers.

Finally, Chapter 7 outlines the theoretical contribution of the thesis, then brings together the findings chapters and shows how they have addressed the research questions. Doing so indicates how my findings have provided new contributions to knowledge on digital and creative work over the life course. Next, the chapter considers the finding's implications for policy and practice, with my recommendations regarding what the priorities for effective change should be in the face of a host of challenges to sustaining work over the life course. The thesis ends with a discussion of what future research opportunities the thesis has inspired.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, evidence shows that people leave the digital and creative industries as they age. This chapter explores a range of literature which indicates the various causes of this worker attrition. After providing some context on the history of the industries being researched, the chapter sets out the Bourdieusian approach this thesis takes and considers what has been written about the working conditions that demand so much of workers, often unsustainably. It also considers a body of literature that takes into account the organising logics of work and how these shape the 'experiences and meaning of time' (Atkinson, 2019). These 'temporal consciousnesses' encapsulate the holistic nature of the demands that the fields have on those who work within them. The chapter then goes on to explore literature on this work's seeming incompatibility with workers' other priorities or needs over the life course. Together, these bodies of literature indicate that sustaining work over the life course is often challenging. This is especially so for those without the right mix of cultural, social, and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 1990), as well as enough time. This tends to mean those people from working-class and other marginalised backgrounds. In addition, literature shows how gendered outcomes relating to childcare and gendered ageism compound inequalities for women over the life course.

In light of this literature, the chapter reflects on whether, as Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini (2020) contend, there is a 'shelf-life' to digital and creative careers, especially for those not in the most powerful and privileged positions; often those, known as the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001), who tend to be white, male, middle-class, and free of caring responsibilities (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). While acknowledging the challenges, this chapter questions to what extent this 'shelf-life' exists, considering that there are still older workers who sustain their careers across the life course. For those that do continue (not just those from privileged groups), what does it take to do so? In asking this, the chapter concludes by reviewing the limited literature on the strategies older workers use to sustain their careers before identifying the gaps in knowledge that this thesis aims to address, setting out the research questions to be answered.

2.2 The history of work in Video, Games, and Websites

Before exploring the literature on Video, Games, and Websites, it is useful to provide some context on how work in those industries has developed over recent decades, shaping working conditions. This context also indicates the barriers faced when attempting to improve the sustainability of work over the life course, revealing the structures which need to be addressed by any intervention that this thesis' findings might call for.

2.2.1 Video (TV, film, YouTube)

To understand current conditions in TV and film in the UK, it is important to understand the lasting impact of regulatorily changes in the 1980s and '90s which fragmented the television sector and weakened labour rights. Antcliff (2005) explains the move from vertically integrated production/broadcasting with salaried and unionised staff during the duopoly of BBC/ITV, to fragmented freelance working. The 1981 Broadcasting Act worked to dismantle the duopoly, ushering in Channel 4 as a broadcaster. Channel 4 was not permitted to make their own shows, instead having to commission competing independent companies to supply programming. This led to a proliferation of independent producers. Saundry and Nolan highlight the role of free-market economic thinking of the conservative government in the 1990 changes. The 1986 Peacock Report which preceded the Act took the view that the vertical integration and trade unionism were damaging to performance, suggesting that outsourcing would improve efficiency (Saundry and Nolan, 1998). The 1990 Act imposed a quota on the BBC and ITV to purchase a quarter of their programming from independent producers, and shortly after, the BBC developed an internal market, meaning producers could purchase resources from non-BBC sources (Antcliff, 2005). The Communication Act 2003 increased the demand for non-news output to be from independent production companies (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015). Importantly, a consequence of this fragmentation was the casualisation of employment relations, with many permanent jobs disappearing, and the rise of short-term, project-based working (Antcliff, 2005). The government later restricted the licence fee in the name of delivering 'value for money' and forced ITV companies to cut costs in order to fund a bidding war for their franchises, which also had the effect of further proliferating independent production. These financial contractions were happening at the same time as the rise of cable and satellite broadcasting who were bringing in increasing revenue, meaning the costs of acquiring the rights to broadcast films, sports, and good quality programming increased. All of this acted to squeeze costs at the expense of workers (Saundry and Nolan, 1998). Competition increased the rewards for companies to produce and

distribute content, representing a swing back to a form of vertical integration which was not the aim of the reregulation. However, the growth in channels meant fragmentation remained (ibid.).

Before the rise of streaming services, the UK television industry was dominated by many small production companies, and a few larger 'super indies' all of which relied on commissions from broadcasters (Skillset, 2007). The few larger companies took the lion's share of revenue, a 'bulge' of middle-sized companies made reasonable incomes, and a 'long tail' of smaller companies survived on a few commissions (Mediatique, 2005). Companies tended to have a small workforce, relying heavily on freelance labour (Skillset, 2007), in stark contrast to the employed and unionised labour force prior to deregulation. The BBC's move to Salford, and recent moves by Channel 4 to join ITV in Leeds has shifted some work outside of London, but the South East still dominates in terms of where work is situated (Hughes and Webber, 2023). With the introduction of tax relief for high-end TV production in 2013 and the rise of streaming services, the proliferation of commissions has grown the available work for production companies. This growth, coupled with the lack of employer support for training (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011), means the sector now has a critical skills shortage (Conlan, 2021; Screenskills, 2022a). Poor employment rights due to the regulatory changes discussed continue, with freelancers experience especially precarious employment conditions, as the Covid pandemic exposed (Wreyford *et al.*, 2021).

With the blurring of boundaries between high-end TV and film, and with similar tax relief to HETV, film – which has long relied on precariously employed freelance workers (Blair, Grey and Randle, 2001) – has seen a massive increase in 'inward investment' from large multinational corporations (BFI, 2023). These productions employ a similar pool of local freelance workers to TV, with film producers keen to take advantage of a cheap and un-unionised workforce (Pratt and Gornostaeva, 2011).

At the other end of the spectrum, streaming platforms like YouTube focus on sharing the mass production of 'creator labour' and the advertising income that can generate (Cunningham and Craig, 2019). This content is made with little division of labour, and the creators must work hard to generate a consistent output and promote their own content, allowing YouTube to benefit from this labour without any financial risk (ibid.). YouTube creators can also generate income via donations direct from viewers on platforms such as Patreon, sell merchandise, or promote live

shows. While having the potential to making access to audiences easier and avoiding gatekeepers in legacy media, only a tiny percentage of creators are able to make a living on the platform (Arthurs, Drakopoulou and Gandini, 2018).

2.2.2 Games

In contrast to the top-down development of TV, the UK Games industry sprung out of the 1980s' UK-based home computing industry, which included the Sinclair Spectrum and the BBC/Acorn (Kerr, 2012). Public funding through the BBC and universities provided initial support to the Games industry through their work on IT literacy, as people (mostly young men) could learn to code on these early computers. By the late 1980s, a cottage industry of individuals or small teams of hobbyists were selling games to the European market, before a process of acquisitions by foreign firms meant that, like film, the UK became a cost-effective talent pool and source of production locations. Alongside the rise of consoles in the 2000s, UK games studios and publishers rose and either fell, or were acquired by often US and Japanese multinationals (Kerr, 2012). The rise of mobile, online, and augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) gaming in recent years has brought new audiences and meant more people have been able to develop games, including those in other creative industries (Keogh, 2019). The proliferation of gaming on different platforms has opened up space for smaller indie studios to produce content serving marginalised communities, although the way that these small indies operate is shaped by larger studios dominance in the market (Ruberg, 2019). In the 2010s, increased state support for games development in South Korea, China, and Canada, alongside the now globalised games industry has threatened the sustainability of the UK games sector. In response, 2014 saw the government increase its support in the form of Video Games Tax Relief, aimed at games production that is 'culturally British'. This test is deemed to be meaningless by some, with nearly half of this relief going to multinationals (Dunnagan, 2021), although small developers have seen this as a lifeline (Holmes, MacDonald and Stuart, 2019). Whatever the merits of this argument, the outcome has been that Games remains an important part of the UK economy, employing around 24,000 people.

2.2.3 Websites

Finally, we turn to the youngest of the fields of study but the one that has quickly shaped all our lives. The mass adoption of the internet in the mid 1990s was facilitated by the ability for anyone

to build a website with tools like Geocities, and then make them more engaging with Javascript, Flash, and later CCS (Canva.com, 2019). Retroactively coined 'web 1.0', it consisting of 'read-only', 'brochure' websites (Wang and Zahadat, 2009). Just as with Games, hobbyists and enthusiasts were able to begin to make a living building and maintaining websites for a range of organisations. With the development of web 2.0, website workers increasingly moved from maintaining 'brochure' websites to making their sites interactive, developing sharing tools to promote content on a range of social platforms, and interacting with audiences (van Dijck, 2013). As 'web 2.0' and later cloud computing (Rashid and Chaturvedi, 2019) continued to encroach on all aspects of life, the need for more, and more specialised, workers meant work became more professionalised, requiring training, often in universities (Wang and Zahadat, 2009; López-Pimentel *et al.*, 2021). The rise of 'crowdwork' via platforms such as Amazon Mechanical Turk and Fiverr can lead to alienation and atomisation for the freelance website workers who rely on them (Irani and Silberman, 2013), as well as opening up work to a global talent pool which can drive down the price people in the UK can charge for their work (Beerepoot and Lambregts, 2015). Systems of surveillance and control shape the way people work as they are forced to go above and beyond in order to remain employable (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017; Wood *et al.*, 2019). In addition to developer roles, website roles include people who work on user experience and accessibility, and people who provide the content such as copywriters, editors, and specialist content such as insurance products. Due to the range of roles, locations of work (within organisations or remote), and modes of working, there is a more diverse set of experiences in the field of websites than Video and Games. Literature which explores the experiences of work in Websites remains limited, other than the literature focused on the experiences of crowdwork, which has had extensive recent coverage (for example Lehdonvirta, 2018; Woodcock, 2018; Wood *et al.*, 2019).

2.2.4 Convergence: Multimedia production companies

Changes in technology and consumer habits, as well as a spate of mergers and acquisitions, have meant that companies who once specialised in one field have branched out into two, or all three of the fields of study in order to capture more of an audience's attention (Bolin, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2015). In the UK, this means traditionally 'TV' companies like Sky, the BBC, and Viacom now operate extensive website and casual game operations, and promotions for films often include web and game elements, bringing UK freelance developers into the (often US) film ecosystem (Bolin, 2007). Games companies have developed online communities which extends their operations into Websites, employing workers in Websites but closely linked to the culture of Games. (Kerr and Kelleher, 2015). This *convergence* (Bolin, 2007) of the three fields means that

industry cultures are increasingly hybridised. Convergence provides further justification for studying Video, Games, and Websites together, illustrating their closeness within the wider 'digital and creative industries'.

This overview of the history of the of the fields of study has revealed what has shaped working conditions. The chapter now turns to explore those conditions, and the consequent demands on workers.

2.3 Experience of work

With an understanding of the context in which work in Websites, Games, and Video have developed, the chapter continues by exploring what literature has said about the experiences of working conditions in these industries, and consequently, what I have termed the *demands of the fields*, understood in Bourdieusian terms. In line with other recent research on inequalities in the creative industries (Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020), this thesis takes a Bourdieusian approach to understanding how workers operate in the fields of study, and in other social fields. Bourdieu's framework of capital, habitus, and field (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1990, 1996) is useful for this research as it provides us with a way of considering how someone's background and capacities are suited to operating successfully in a certain context. Someone's education and socialisation (cultural capital), networks (social capital), and financial resources (economic capital) shape their experiences and consequently their disposition (habitus). These capacities and dispositions make someone more or less able to operate and succeed in a particular social space (field), depending on who holds dominant positions in that field, and what capacities they value. When considering the literature that focuses on how a field operates (such as the hiring practices in TV for example) it is then possible to infer what capital demands (what mix of cultural, social, and economic capitals) are required in order to operate successfully within it.

This can be the case even if the literature does not utilise Bourdieu. For example, Foucauldian 'discourse' and its internalisation (Foucault, 1980), used by the likes of McRobbie (2016), Ursell (2000), and Dent (2020) in the literature reviewed, can be interpreted as 'doxic' (Bourdieu, 1990) *common sense* within a field, where people acknowledge and variously conform to the doxa of the field which they are operating in it. Their internalisation of discourses (common sense) can be

understood in terms of Bourdieu's *illusio*, or 'belief in the importance of the field's stakes' (Atkinson, 2019, p. 953). Discussions of political economy can be translated into how fields, being 'nested' in other fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Levy and Bühlmann, 2016), are shaped by material conditions, regulations, and market forces. This can, for example, show how a discussion of inequalities in a field is linked to how the field is nested within wider society which is itself rife with inequalities. Discussion of agency is related to the possession of capitals and consequent position in the field, and lack of agency by those that do not have access to it. This possession of capitals encompasses *embodied cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) which relates both to socially learned behaviours as well as physical attributes that are variously discriminated against in the fields of study (Friedman and Laurison, 2019, p. 14). In translating the various literature discussed in this chapter into a Bourdieusian framework, the locus of analysis can be the micro (people's actions), in the context of the meso, i.e., the organisations they interact with, which are in-turn nested within wider macro fields.

As the following literature shows, the historical development of the fields of study (discussed earlier) has most benefited those who are often elite, often white, often men, and who are able to act as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) committing all their time to work. This group has been termed the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001), with the concept being used by Brook, O'Brien and Taylor (2020), and adopted here. As such, the fields can be considered 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) because they work to exclude those who do not possess the appropriate mix of capitals, including embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For workers who experience marginalisation for not being of the somatic norm, the 'demands of the field' are different to more favoured groups as they have to overcome prejudice and lack of trust. For example, the need for women in TV to have extra formal qualifications (institutionalised cultural capital) to make up for a lack of social capital that elite men have (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Carey *et al.*, 2017). As the chapter progresses, I consider how inequalities are compounded over the life course. Early deficits in the appropriate cultural, social, and economic capitals acquired *outside* the fields of study impact access to the fields. Once in work, the 'inequality regimes' limit progression, impacting career trajectories. This has important implications for when workers move from what I have termed the 'All-in' phase, to when they experience 'life course tensions', and look to sustain careers over the life course by balancing work with other aspects of their lives.

The literature now reviewed is themed into four key areas, those of training, hiring practices, precarious employment, and long, intense, and inflexible working hours. This literature often

highlights the unequal nature of these features of work, which makes sustaining work over the life course a challenge for many. These inequalities are picked up again later in the chapter and throughout the thesis when discussing who is able to work in the fields of study, and who struggles to maintain a career. In addition, there is a useful body of literature which explores the way structures shape the nature of work in a more holistic way than thinking about individual capital demands, which Atkinson (2019) describes as its 'temporal consciousness'.

2.3.1 Training

A look at training, both when attempting to access the industries and as continued professional development, shows that inequalities play a role in career outcomes, even before someone's first professional role. As such, those who are unable to attain the right level of training (cultural capital) at the start of their careers and throughout risk not being able to access or sustain work.

Following the fragmentation of the industry, there is no set path into TV and film, although training is now most commonly done via universities (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015). However, higher education (HE) is recognised as not sufficiently preparing students for work (Randle, Kurian and Leung, 2007; Carey *et al.*, 2017). As such, the role of HE placements play a central role in the training required for employability (Carey, Brien and Gable, 2021). Allen *et al.* (2013) discuss the role of HE work placements in being an essential part of training for employability in the creative industries. Placements train students how to operate in work, and 'ease the transition' into the labour market. However, in the context of these placements being unpaid and the sector being dominated by middle-class 'norms, values, dispositions and ways of being' (Allen *et al.*, 2013, p. 422), the paper asks which students are able to benefit from work placements. Working class students struggle to gain 'good' placements due to a lack of the appropriate cultural and social capitals – in other works, not having existing ties to the industry through middle-class family and friends. Working-class students also find the time and money pressures of taking part in placement a burden, compared to the ease in which middle-class students were able to commit to them. Constructions of the ideal worker as white and male intersect with class to make experiences of placements challenging for those of a different habitus (Allen *et al.*, 2013, p. 447). As such, the paper argues that HE work placements are a realm where inequalities are reproduced, acting as a 'filtering site' that privilege the middle-classes (ibid.). The findings are echoed by Carey, O'Brien and Gable (2021), and illustrate one way in which the 'somatic norm' of the TV and film reproduces itself (Puwar, 2001; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). These issues

have knock-on effects for finding work, discussed later. Leung, Gill and Randle (2015) discuss how unequal hiring practices in film and TV relate to qualifications and training. They comment that although women are significantly better qualified than men in the sector – being more likely to have first and higher degrees, and industry specific training – they are paid 15% less on average, and less likley to reach higher positions. This indicates how the 'demands of the field' differ for different group; for women to 'get in', they are required to have more formal qualifications. However, this still does not compensate for sexist hiring practices, shaped by the prevelence of men in senior roles.

Once in work, training is done in an ad-hoc way, which Grugulis & Stoyanova (2011) discuss in relation to the UK television industry. The authors highlight how previous 'communities of practice' models have been undermined by the move to freelance working. Previously, communities of practice involved novices learning through socialisation with experts through a process of watching, assisting, and listening to stories in order to becoming full members (Lave and Wenger, 1991). However, these models assume that workplaces are 'coherent communities… where the skilful are available for novices to consult and observe' (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011, p. 343). The authors argue that the UK television industry is not devoid of communities of practice, but deregulation means on-the-job, in-house training has made way for the use of freelancers and small companies where communities are transitory with little space for skills development. There is now scant opportunity to learn from more experienced staff, and little cumulative and sequential development (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011, p. 344). Thynne (2000) considers how the shift to freelancing and multi-channel digital television reshaped opportunities for women. While there were more opportunities to work in technical roles (often on less prestigious low budget TV), little training was provided compared to when the research participants started out in-house with the large broadcasters. This left new entrants struggling to pick up the required skills, with gendered assumptions of what roles women can do meaning women were provided less opportunities to learn from those in-post. Eikhof and Warhurst (2013) consider how the labour market disincentivises employers from providing training to develop skilled workers, due to how project-based work makes use of short-term freelance contracts. As a result, those in entry roles – typically runners or assistants – have to learn on-the-job through observing others, without any structured training (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 498).

It is only recently, due to skills shortages becoming unsustainable, that training needs are becoming a priority for those benefitting from the labour (Netflix, 2022; Screenskills, 2022b).

While diversity schemes – aimed at supporting underrepresented groups to enter the screen industries – offer training as part of their programme, these are piecemeal and do not address the structural issues described above (Newsinger and Eikhof, 2020; Nwonka and Malik, 2021). For those without access to these schemes, the cost of any training is often prohibitive (Jones, Brereton and Swords, 2023), once again limiting opportunities for people of working-class backgrounds.

Over the past decades, training for Games has become more formalised, with 80% of Games workers now having a higher education qualification (Harvey, 2019). Harvey discusses how this has changed from previously informal entry points such as testing, modding, and networking, questioning whether the move to formal entry requirements represents a democratisation of access thus improving diversity, or one that removes alternative routes to careers previously used by marginalised workers. Moreover, the HE space is shown not to critique exploitative and exclusory practices, but rather helps to reproduce them (Harvey, 2019). The requirement to invest in a HE qualification is itself exclusory to many, with the maintenance of white and male norms further contributing to the perpetuation of a homogenous workforce. Once in work, ongoing training is done on the job, including via games jams which are ‘informal learning spaces [that] bring in new talent…, knowledge exchange, and skill development’ (Ozimek and Rueda, 2021, p. 4). However, they are typically organised outside of working hours, possibly late into the night or over weekends, meaning they exclude those with responsibilities outside of work. While there are efforts to change practices to be more inclusive, these are in their early stages (ibid.).

Similar to Games and with the same issues of reducing access, training into Websites has developed from hobbyists learning on early computers (Wang and Zahadat, 2009; Canva.com, 2019) to the need for computer science degrees which are constantly at risk of being outdated as technology quickly evolves (Alston, Walsh and Westhead, 2015). Older workers are less likely to hold a relevant HE qualification compared to younger workers (The Chartered Institute for IT, 2022a). As with the other fields, the training landscape is inequal, with women less likely to choose IT at school and university (Kirton and Robertson, 2018) or go on to have IT careers (Harmon and Walden, 2021). As Kirton and Robertson note, there is a general lack of sociological literature on inequalities in IT, including training, with much of the literature taking business orientated positions (Kirton and Robertson, 2018, p. 158). From my own efforts at trying to find relevant literature on training and other aspects of work in Websites, I concur. This thesis offers an opportunity to add to the literature in this area.

2.3.2 Hiring practices

The literature that explores hiring practices is relevant in understanding how people sustain careers over the life course. This is because it shows the inequalities that pervade the often-informal processes (reliant on the right kinds of cultural and social capital), or what is demanded of workers in order to progress. As will be discussed later, someone's seniority can be key to sustaining work, so for those whose employment opportunities have been limited and they have remained at a lower level, there is less chance that they will be able to continue over the life course.

Firstly, I address the central role that informal hiring practices plays for workers in fields of study, especially those in Video but also Games and Websites. Since the concept of 'network sociality' was outlined over 20 years ago (Wittel, 2001), the idea that creative work is dominated by practices of transactional networking has become somewhat axiomatic. However, it is worth setting out how and why networking is so central to many roles – especially those that are freelance – in the creative industries. Wittel discusses that network sociality is characterised by: individuality, where workers are nomadic, taken out of their contexts and thrown together with other creatives, meaning they have to actively construct their social network; the project based nature of work, meaning relationships are built through short-term, intense working, and later fade away as people move onto the next project; relationships that are no longer based on understanding each other's character but on knowledge of someone's resources and his/her position in the social field; the assimilation of work and 'play', where networking is done in a social setting, blurring the lines between work and private lives, thus intensifying work, and; the role of technology which enables these new networks to form (Wittel, 2001). Despite any changes in technology that date this article, the enduring structures of work mean that the importance of this commodified networking to gaining employment in digital and creative work remains.

Against this backdrop, other literature indicates the field-specific ways in which networks operate for freelancers. Carey, Brien and Gable (2021) consider how the consequences of 'good' placements (discussed in the previous section), result in the 'work-readiness' and importantly, the nascent networks that allow people to be hired in film and TV. However, getting these good placements, and developing the confidence to get future roles, is shown to be class-based,

requiring financial resources and the right cultural capital to fit in (Carey, Brien and Gable, 2021, p. 23). Even with the right mix of capitals, entry-level roles are still likely to be runner or researcher roles (Ashton, 2015), with workers having to start at the bottom and work their way up as they develop their networks. Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) and Blair, Culkin and Randle (2003) explore in more depth how networks develop with the film industry, where nepotism is often required to gain access to work, before a 'network sociality' based on short-term project work is required to sustain careers. A high proportion of participants reported that they get their break in the industry through family or friends, relaying on a recommendation rather than a formal interview. This form of entry represents a low risk to producers who know that the new entrant will work hard to help the recommender look good. Once in, networks develop on-the-job, with 'co-operative, information sharing behaviour' (Blair, Culkin and Randle, 2003, p. 628) being a form of transactional practice. This aids all parties in getting work done and helps people realise new opportunities, as those who have put the time into waiting for roles to become available are able to step-up into them. As careers progress, family and friends' recommendations make way for workers' own growing network from previous jobs, with ex-colleagues asking them onto jobs. Alternatively, a head of department might employ the same group of people (semi-permanent work group) or employ from a pool of people they know, or someone might mentor a more junior freelancer and get them work. Relatedly, Friedman and Laurison (2019) show how progression is often aided by a system of sponsorship that promotes favourites, meaning, thanks to the homophily of the industry, a broadly homogenous workforce is maintained, especially in more senior roles. As a result, those marginalised by not being part of this sponsorship system suffer a 'class pay gaps' and a 'class ceiling' which limits their progression (Friedman and Laurison, 2019, p. 85). Wyatt and Silvester compliment the findings of Friedman and Laurison (2019) when they argue that, while marginalised workers of colour (in this case managers) have to rely on knowledge of formalised career pathways, white managers 'are more likely to be passed a 'golden thread' to help guide them through informal channels, allowing them to progress more quickly to leadership roles' (Wyatt and Silvester, 2015, p. 1263).

Morris, McKinlay and Farrell (2021) argue that informal networks are not simply a by-product of the deregulation of the film and TV industry, but rather a neo-bureaucratic system of control that broadcasters use to de-risk their operation. Rather than broadcasters assuming responsibility for recruitment, they activate workers' social networks, starting with commissioners and executive producers, through heads of department, and down to freelancers. The performance of workers in this network are self-disciplining as reputation is key to future work. This not only relates to technical competence but also the possession of highly developed social skills that enable the

smooth running of a production. Overall, 'fast trust, mobilized in real time, is a precondition of a crew's effectiveness' (Morris, McKinlay and Farrell, 2021, p. 353). This has consequences for anyone who is looking at access this work, as those outside of trusted networks struggle, with the same issues of access and nepotism discussed earlier being recognised (p. 351).

These articles have highlighted the importance of networks for gaining work. While they allude to the plight of those who are excluded from networks, they fail to fully explore the inequalities present in the way that work is structured that limit the careers. However, others have addressed this, focusing on the role that cultural and social capitals play in perpetuating inequalities. McKinlay and Starkey (2004) consider how the move to freelance working in TV changed the social capital of the firm. Where once in-house productions allowed organisational social capital to develop over time, new fragmented employment practices mean that for a production to function effectively, personal social capital is required for good working relationships, and this social capital has to be of a particular type – one that allows people to get on with each other. When looking to understand what the appropriate social capital is and how it is developed, Lee (2011) argues that for people to fit in and get along, having the right social capital is dependent on possessing the right cultural capital – a function of class position. Lee echoes Blair, Grey and Randle (2001) and Blair, Culkin and Randle (2003) in emphasising the importance of 'strong ties' in getting in (existing social capital that, thanks to the nature of the industry, is a function of class), and the importance of 'weak ties' (that the strong ties give access to) to get on. However, compounding class inequalities, workers need to be successful at networking to develop these weak ties, and successful networking is about getting along with people, shown to be dependent on having the right cultural capital – for example having the 'required tone' – gained from 'patterns of middle-class socialisation and lifestyles' (Lee, 2011, p. 557). This means that, even for those working-class people who have somehow got a foothold in the industry, they will continue to struggle to access the networks required for work. Brook, O'Brien and Taylor (2020) highlight how this applies not just to class and education, but to not having the right embodied cultural capital (race, gender, accents, disability) i.e., not looking and acting like the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) of white, middle-class men. Lee (2011) also highlights the discursive shift towards networking that came with the shift to freelance working, with the 'network-extender' being the ideal. This acceptance of networking as core to success exacerbates problems for those, such as carers, who already struggle to meet the time commitments of work, as they are also expected to commit time to converting their social capital, through the act of networking, into new work opportunities. This is an important point – not only are people excluded if they do not have the

right class background, those that have the right cultural and social capitals are also excluded if they are unable to network.

Grugulis and Stoyanova (2012) also echo the literature above regarding how changes to the way work is organised has shaped how networks operate, and discipline workers. They concur with Lee's (2011) argument on the importance of cultural capital in developing social capital, and consequently work opportunities, but extend this to consider the plurality of networks that exist in film and TV, and how 'network quality' is important. People with certain cultural, and consequently social, capital may develop strong bonds with others, but these strong networks may not necessarily lead to economic capital because their form of social capital is only valued by poor, low waged or working-class people who do not have access to work opportunities. They state: 'It is not simply the existence of a network, but the resources that the network provides' (p.1314). Their findings show that white and middle-class men had the highest 'network quality' and that this is a result of their affiliations with the existing demographic of the industry. Those outside this group are discriminated against because they are not 'trusted insiders… not the 'right' gender or race, and they did not have the right accents, hairstyles, clothes or backgrounds to join the best networks' (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012, p. 1326). As a result, they are excluded from work.

Others have written similarly about how, in an industry imbued with risk due to limited time and budgets (Weststar and Legault, 2019), managers attempt to minimise risk by, for example: hiring people informally who they already know through working together on set (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 499; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Coles and Eikhof, 2021); hiring people who have a prestigious education, which is often a reflection of their class position (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, p. 270); hiring people they have an affinity with due to their similar embodied cultural capital (accents, skin colour, fashion style, mannerisms), where they feel they can trust them because they are like them (shared cultural capital), or from existing informal networks which offer a 'back-door' to the industries (Friedman and Laurison, 2019). These networks may be developed at university, excluding non-attenders, and at social events after work hours which favours the young and excludes those who are not able to take part in this system, such as those with caring responsibilities, especially single mothers (McRobbie, 2002; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Wreyford, 2015; Srauy, 2019; Ozimek and Rueda, 2021). These class-based, white, and male homophilic hiring practices mean that those outside of these select groups are less likely to pick up work easily (Wreyford, 2015), and therefore will likely need to spend more time and emotional

labour looking for work to kick-start their careers, with knock-on effects for (a lack of) seniority as careers progress (Antcliff, Saundry and Stuart, 2007; Eikhof and York, 2016; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Singh, 2021).

Moving onto the specifics of the labour market in Games, Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna (2015) highlight how hiring is constructed around the demands of the project, with freelancers being brought in for specific aspects of a game, and so-called permanent employees often being made redundant at the end of a project (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015, p. 573). Wright (2015) shows how, in the face of unstable labour markets, increasing numbers of freelancers have to engage in the same sort of networking to compete for work, as discussed above. Deuze, Martin and Allen (2007) discuss how the pool of Games workers often come from those people who identify as both consumer and producer of Games. This 'work as play' ethos, where people are 'doing what they love' means managers are able to coerce workers into very long hours, extended or 'perma-crunch'. There are negative consequences for those who try to resist or unionise (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015). Progression is often contingent on submission to this extreme working (ibid.), attendance at Games Jams where social capital is developed (Ozimek and Rueda, 2021), and the aforementioned homophilic networks. As a result of these working conditions, those that cannot submit to them, such as carers and those with illness or disabilities, suffer a penalty, and their chances of gaining work are more limited (Randle and Hardy, 2016; Ozimek and Rueda, 2021).

In comparable sectors to Websites, Kirton and Robertson (2018), drawing on a range of recent literature, discuss how the lack of women in IT roles is often not simply due to HR practices (which might be progressive), but wider sexist organisational cultures that can lead to marginalisation in hiring, or even a backlash by male workers. Progression reviews can be shaped around a male career trajectory which does not consider the gendered expectations of women as carers. They also highlight the continued existence of an old boys network which excludes women from hearing about opportunities. Masculine and sexist organisational cultures marginalise women, making IT workplaces unwelcoming. They highlight that informal networking could benefit women, but that these spaces are often a continuation of the sexist cultures of work meaning women are excluded. The role of female mentors to introduce women to new networks and to act as role models is seen as beneficial, although the lack of senior women to act as mentors is a barrier.

Freelancers using platforms might benefit from avoiding such inequality regimes (Fish and Srinivasan, 2012; Fabo, Karanovic and Dukova, 2017). However, they may have to compete for employment which hinges on positive reviews and visibility to potential clients, still shaped by old biases. Hannák et al. evidence racial and gender bias on the platforms TaskRabbit (odd jobs) and Fiverr (digital work). They find that gender and race are 'significantly correlated with worker evaluations, which could harm the employment opportunities afforded to the workers' (Hannák *et al.*, 2017, p. 1). Highlighting how platforms require biographies and headshots of workers, they find that these public-facing identities result in a continuation of social bias in the form of less favourable reviews and rankings, which for TaskRabbit also modifies the algorithm to make people less visible in searches, impacting future employability. These findings are similar to those of Beerepoot & Lambregts (2015) who focus on the global nature of platform work. 'Imperfections' in the platform oDesk allow for discriminatory hiring practices, and show that Western workers still get paid higher wages (Beerepoot and Lambregts, 2015).

For any employee today, but especially freelancers, self-presentation is vital, and the role social media plays has been discussed in relation to the accepted ideal types of worker which people are expected to conform to. Van Zoonen et al. (2016) and Huang & Liu (2017) highlight how people carefully curate their social media presence in order to portray their professional lives in a favourable light and connect with co-workers and other professionals to increase their networks and improve their employment prospects. Twitter is widely used by many creative professionals to promote their work, and LinkedIn has become a key place for employers to search for employees, and for people to directly apply for jobs advertised on the site.

This look at hiring practices indicates that not only is possessing the right cultural and social capital key to success, but the need to prioritise work over all else, to act as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990), is vital in many roles. As such, someone's ability to sustain their career over the life course will be under threat if they have to prioritise other aspects of their lives.

2.3.3 Precarious employment

Before we consider this aspect of work, it is important to distinguish between *precarity* and *precariousness*. Precarity relates to employment conditions that have moved from traditionally guaranteed, permanent employment to precarious conditions – those that are worse paid and insecure. Precarious*ness,* on the other hand, is a general ontological insecurity which can be caused by a lack of money, among other things (Butler, 2004; Neilson and Rossiter, 2006). This distinction is important. Different people can be subject to precarity in the workplace but those that have the security of their middle-class position will have a very different experience to those that suffer from the condition of precariousness due to their lack of financial safety net, or support from the state. With much of the work in the fields of study (particularly Video) being subject to precarious employment conditions, especially for freelance workers, the class background of workers is a key determinant for how work is experienced. For many, precarious employment conditions are a threat to sustaining careers. As will be shown, precarity is a central feature of early careers, and for those who struggle to progress it can remain a challenge over a career, threatening the sustainability of work over the life course.

Key drivers of precarity in film and TV were the move to freelance working, and practices of low/no pay entry-level roles. Entry-level roles in TV and film are almost always runner or researcher roles (Ashton, 2015). If paid at all, these roles are unlikely to support someone who might be required to move to an expensive city (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, p. 202), pay for their own equipment, and possibly travel to locations (Oakley *et al.*, 2017). Due to the freelance and project-based job market in Video, any role is likely to be short-term and there is the likelihood of periods of unemployment between jobs. The average number of jobs per year is only around 5, typically lasting 50 days, although with great variability (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 498). The poor pay and sporadic nature of work is often unsustainable for people without the ability to subsidise themselves with other employment, or 'wait' for work by having the financial resources to do so (Xu, 2021). Thomas and Einarsdóttir (2023) reveal how aspirant screen industry workers from working-class backgrounds struggle to start careers due to their lack of economic capital. Despite support from diversity schemes that provided paid placements and bursaries for driving lessons, challenges such as having to buy a car, or stay in different cities for shoots meant that a career in TV was often out of their reach. Even for those with high levels of economic, cultural, and social capital, it can be a struggle to build a reputation that keeps them in work. Eikhof and York (2016) explore how, despite a middle-class background, Oxbridge education and fortuitous route into her first role, the subject (York) struggled for years to get to a position where

she felt in any way secure. Regarding career progression, people not able to 'fit in' (Friedman and Laurison, 2019) because they don't possess the right cultural and social capital (discussed earlier), or their embodied cultural capital (race, class, gender, disability) is not of the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001), are less likely to progress as far or as quickly (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). This lack of progression (and continued precarity) means people become disaffected and opt-out (Nwonka and Malik, 2021), or struggle to sustain work due to continued poor pay (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, p. 188).

Entry-level roles in Games are low pay or zero hours quality assurance, localisation, or community manager roles (Bulut, 2015). More widely, Srauy (2019) discusses how games studios work on a project basis similar to TV and film, often relying on freelancers who are poorly paid. Srauy highlights the lack of unionisation, and the extra risks that are experienced by those from smaller independent studios who look to produce content that deviates from industry norms (ibid.). The lack of unionisation and the continuation of precarious employment practices has been linked to people's acceptance of insecure and poorly paid conditions due to their hopes of making it in an industry they are passionate about (Deuze, Martin and Allen, 2007; Chia, 2019). Bulut (2015) discusses how even 'above the line' creative roles such as producers, designers, programmers, and artists are now subject to precarity as outsourcing, financialisaton, and deskilling make these roles less secure (Bulut, 2015, p. 194). While a proportion of Games workers are 'employed' and not freelance, the project-based 'cycles of hiring, firing, and reallocation' (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015, p. 573) mean these roles are inherently precarious. Wright (2015) considers how uncertain market conditions lead to unstable labour market conditions with workers having to engage in self-exploitation in order to survive. While the mobile games market has provided more opportunities to sustain careers as big studios become less reliable employers (moving from in-house to freelance contracts to de-risk), these workers often operate in micro-firms of just a few employees. Workers often have to work for free to get started, and then work with the hope of a share of future profits, rather than take a salary. While findings show that this can work when people are able to live off income generated from previous games as they work on the next, this precarious practice can prevent people starting out, and leaves the workforce vulnerable.

Roles in Websites are varied, and conditions can vary depending on which industry people are employed in (as websites are now ubiquitous). However, the literature on platform work highlights its potential for precarity. Divided up, deskilled, and piecemeal nature of crowdwork (Isler, 2005), coupled with a global labour pool meaning pay is driven down (Beerepoot and

Lambregts, 2015), and the need to work longer hours than are renumerated in order to maintain a reputation and remain employable (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017; Wood *et al.*, 2019), all indicate that platform work is inherently precarious.

2.3.4 Long, intense, and inflexible hours

Finally, a consideration of the time commitments required in the industries being researched is key to understanding the ability for workers to sustain careers. As previously alluded to, the organisational cultures which promote long, intense, and inflexible working practices can exclude many, and stigmatise those who remain. While Bourdieu's 'capitals' does not incorporate 'time' explicitly, this capacity is key to understanding success in the fields studied, and this theme will be returned to later.

Eikhof and Warhurst discuss how the political economy of the TV and film industry leads to project-based work, making long and unsociable hours the norm. Drawing on data from Skillset, they outline data that shows that freelancers having the longest working hours, with the majority of people in film work more than 11 hours a day. More recent statistics show one in six people working over 60 hour weeks, with 78% of TV and film workers saying work intensity is affecting their mential health (Film and TV Charity, 2022). Due to location filming or commutes to studios which are situated in a handful of 'creative hubs' (Gill, Pratt and Virani, 2019), these hours are in addition to travel time or staying away from home (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 499; Oakley *et al.*, 2017). Eikhof and Warhurst point out how these conditions exclude people who can't work in this way, in line with the arguments of Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan (2015) who explore the gendered outcomes of these working practices. Ursell (2000) highlights that the move to freelance led to increased exploitation including working longer than contracted for, and more recent research highlights that these issues are still endemic. Swords *et al.* discuss how budgetary restraints mean ever-tighter schedules that result in longer hours, normalised through buy-out clauses, stressed management who pass pressure down to workers, and shrinking budgets mean 'too-tight' shoots run into unscheduled overtime (Swords *et al.*, 2022). These intense working practices have been shown to lead to burn-out and disaffection, especially for those not able to operate as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990; Gill and Pratt, 2008; McRobbie, 2016; Swords *et al.*, 2022), exacerbating labour shortages. Issues of exclusion for those that cannot work as the ideal worker are picked up again in more detail in Section 2.4.

Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna (2015) look at work intensification in Games, arguing that the way Games work is structured, i.e., as intense project work involving periods of 'crunch' to meet deadlines, is not essential for the production of games products, but rather a system of control that resists challenge. Management create competitive and insular project teams which place the needs of the project above personal considerations. Precarious employment conditions mean workers are trying to outdo each other to stay employable, with anyone resisting these practices being stagmatised (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015, p. 579). The authors highlight the gendered outcomes of Games operating in this way, with 85-90% of programmers being male and women performing the emotional and reproductive labour to support them, and that their data shows '[n]umerous references to young workforces and having no children [showing] that success in this industry is built for a particular type of worker who has no other commitments' (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015, p. 581). Similar findings are presented by Wright (2015) who identifies that unstable labour markets have led to workers being forced into entrepreneurial activities, spending time in addition to work networking, working long hours, often for free or for deferred payment (with second jobs to support their precarious career in games), and as a consequence of long hours, having to shape their wider lives into the rationale of work. Once again, these conditions exclude those people who cannot commit to this level of engagement. These working practices, shaped by the 'iron triangle' that requires high-quality products in the context of limited time and budgets (Weststar and Legault, 2019) are so engrained in Games (as they are in other digital and creative work) that they shape the whole industry. Indeed, Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna highlight how independent studios are subject to the same pressures as AAA studios in order to compete (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015, p. 574).

Cote & Harris (2021) discuss how unsustainable working practices are maintained through an internalised discourse that 'crunch' – the period of intense working leading up to a deadline in the games industry – is a necessary feature of games production. If seemingly more progressive organisations continue to opt for voluntary (good) crunch to meet deadlines, there is little space to reimagine labour practices where this unsustainable working is not required (Cote and Harris, 2021, p. 2). Ozimek & Rueda (2021) and Kerr et al. (2020) address how gaming events such as game jams, important to attend for career progression and to develop knowledge about game making, are historically informal spaces shaped by young, white men without caring responsibilities, which have the ability to exclude marginalised groups. They are also inherently

time intensive as they occur in addition to the working day, with games jams usually lasting for 48 hours over a weekend. This excludes those with caring responsibilities, often women, causing a barrier to long term participation in the games workforce (Kafai *et al.*, 2011; Harvey and Shepherd, 2017).

While forms of labour organising have been present over the past 50 years through professional bodies, exposés of working conditions and fights for gender equality, nascent union organising has only recently been formalised in the UK, with a culture of recrimination for those who get involved (Weststar and Legault, 2019). This means that fighting to oppose long and intense working hours is challenging.

Schörpf et al. (2017) illustrate how the design of platforms and management strategies structure the relationship between platforms, clients, and workers in a 'triangularised' employment relationship (Helfen, 2014, cited in Schörpf et al., 2017). Bureaucratic rules and surveillance on the platforms as well as client ratings and other means of control impact on the workers' use of time, income, and creativity, which in turn affects their working and living conditions. The paper highlights how 'to gain positive reviews, [workers] have to meet the individual demands of clients and subordinate their private lives under the logics of this particular labour process' (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017, p. 44). This combination of controls means workers have to 'accept constraints on their private lives', do unpaid labour for good reviews, and be available for long hours. In addition, wages are driven down by global competition, meaning people may have to work more in order to avoid precariousness (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017).

Structural factors indicate that across the three fields, the theme of long, intense, and inflexible work is getting more extreme over time as the level of work in times of 'crunch' or with tight project deadlines becomes normalised (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, 2005; Farrell and Morris, 2017; Balderson *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, due to the precarious employment conditions of project-based freelance work, there is a pressure to agree to this form of working, and to take on multiple jobs as there is a fear that work could dry up (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Farrell and Morris, 2017). As is discussed later and supported by this thesis' findings, these time pressures are understood to be a major cause of workers leaving the fields of study over the life course.

2.3.5 'Temporal consciousnesses' of work

The literature discussed above regarding experiences of training, hiring, precarity, and time use are, of course, not experienced separately. The capital and time demands of each theme interact to form an overall experience of work in a field. As such, it is fruitful to consider what has been written about how work shapes people's experiences from a more holistic perspective. This will be especially useful due to this thesis' focus on careers over the life course, where experiences of work and non-work often come into tension. There is a body of literature that takes into account the organising logics of work and how this shapes the 'experiences and meaning of time' to construct a 'temporal consciousness' (Atkinson, 2019, p. 955). This literature recognises that time is socially constructed; 'a cultural framework, 'interweaved by both collective imagination as well as subjective interpretation, through which human activities and actions are organised and enabled' (Cheng, 2014, p. 388). The structures that shape work; the field's 'rhythm and pace', shape the experience of time in that work. Structures produce 'cycles'; fields' inherent cycles such as the shape of the working week and expectations around socialising, and cycles outside the field which shape the field, such as production schedules, release dates, or accounting periods (Atkinson, 2019). Building on what Bourdieu said about the experiences of time and linking his work to literature on intensification of work and increased connectivity, Atkinson considers the way that modern capitalism shapes work in order to get workers to be more productive and to work to tighter deadlines. He argues that the 'doxa, illusion and dynamics of the economic field… [has] bled into other fields… [including] the media field' (Atkinson, 2019, p. 957). Furthermore, the shrinking of distance thanks to faster transportation and more importantly, technology, has sped up the way fields evolve (Atkinson, 2019, p. 958). This might be, as Atkinson says, through communication tools like twitter, but also could be how streaming services and mobile gaming have rapidly altered consumption habits, demanding more of producers.

The chapter now turns to other literature that considers the 'experiences and meaning of time', shaped by neoliberalism, technology, and globalisation. This adds to Atkinson's contribution and has relevance to the experiences of digital and creative work discussed above. Similar to Atkinson, Sugarman and Thrift (2020) identify 'Neoliberal time', constituted by modern capitalism's commodification of ever more aspects of our lives in order to expand consumer markets, puts more pressure on producers to deliver ever more cultural products. Writing about academic work, Noonan (2015) argues that with the move from public to private funding, 'thought time' is threatened in favour of 'money time'. Noonan contends that 'money-time' is fatal to 'free work activity', as it 'disrupts the inner temporal unity of human activity by dividing it up and parcelling

it out according to the precisely measured sequences, routines, and deadlines capitalist production requires, not for the sake of improving the quality of the activity so segmented, but in order to make it more productive' (Noonan, 2015, p. 111). Pace of development is not determined by the task at hand, but rather by a deadline. The result is that the time needed to reflect and allow 'creative intelligence' to emerge is curtailed. This concept seems relevant to the creative industries which demand a similar 'creative intelligence' in order to produce innovative and affective products. However, with limited budgets and increased demand for outputs (Fuchs, 2014; Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015; Cote and Harris, 2021), time is squeezed meaning this money-time/thought-time tension will be felt by digital and creative workers.

Considering the role of technology, Hassan (2003) argues that the logic of network time is constructed to serve globalised, networked capitalism, and we, the human, are the weakest link. Technology has broken down the boundary between work and life, and we are bombarded with information. In order to manage, we have developed 'a form of 'abbreviated thinking' to help cope with overload and make life seem in some way manageable' (Hassan, 2003, p. 239), and this deeply affects the way knowledge is constructed. Moreover, the subversion of clock-time means we no longer experience time with our colleagues in a way that develops meaning and gives us space to organise. We are even more atomised than when clock-time capitalism was predominant. While written nearly 20 years ago, this experience of time has only become more engrained, and reaches more people with the shift to working from home over recent years. For those workers in Websites and Games who work via a computer, and all workers in this study that use mobile communication to keep in touch with work, 'network time' represents endemic 'abbreviated thinking, while contributing to the by now well-acknowledged blurring of work and non-work.

Fuchs (2014) discusses how time is used within capitalist social media. A blurring of paid and unpaid labour that is typical of people's curation activities on social media extends the working day into leisure time. In the case of the article, this is referring to social media use, or 'prosumption', which is 'consumption that is productive and creating economic value and commodities' based on advertising (Fuchs, 2014, p. 111). This includes YouTube and the creators that develop content. YouTube has high time demands due to the nature of the content, with very little chance of financial return. Those that do make money are at the mercy of an algorithm which favours regular content and high engagement from viewers (Arthurs, Drakopoulou and

Gandini, 2018), making this work both long and intense for many, alongside significant emotional labour directed towards matching the algorithm's criteria for visibility (Bishop, 2018).

Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan (2015) conceptualise work that involves long and intense hours as 'extreme' work. They and Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenn (2015) show how the organisation of work, particularly team-based project work which typifies Video, Games, and much of Websites, encourages long and intense hours and penalises those that resist it. This 'project time' is considered all-compassing, with the goals of the project and the team superseding personal priorities. Any consideration of balancing work with non-work such as caring or wider career aspirations is curtailed or made impossible, which has highly unequal gendered outcomes, discussed more in Section 2.4. Related to the conditions of project work, Piasna (2018) finds that work intensity can be related to the timing of work. Long hours, unsociable hours, or unpredictable shifts make work more intense. Balderson *et al.* (2020) finds that those without control over their working hours lose the ability to make the most of their time off, adding to feelings of intense working. This is especially relevant to those workers in Video who are subject to the schedule of the production they are working on, with little to no control over when they work.

Looking at 'temporal consciousness' from a careers perspective, Banks (2019) considers the challenging conditions faced by those in lower positions versus those in more senior positions. Drawing on Adkins' (2013) idea of 'event time' where people struggle to meet the daily demands of work and are unable to plan for the future, Banks contrasts this with those who can operate in 'biographical time'. Those in biographical time are able to maintain a sense of career trajectory *and* a sense of biography. This is done by offloading working practices that enforce 'event time' to those who are subordinate to them, making those workers' careers contingent and precarious while managers 'steer the ship' from a position of relative security (Banks, 2019). This indicates that seniority plays a role in sustaining careers. In literature previously discussed, seniority is a function of unequal structures, further highlighting how the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) come out on top, while others, the so-called 'creative majority' (Wreyford, O'Brien and Dent, 2021), struggle.

While not all of the literature in this section is focused on digital and creative work, it is of some relevance to the ways of working outlined in the chapter so far, being situated in similar contexts.

Moreover, Bank's (2019) comparison of 'event' and 'biographical' time is useful when thinking about not just the structures of work, but the workers' place in the field, and how this relates to someone being able to sustain their career. This thesis can enhance this body of literature by exploring the extent to which time is experienced in these, and other ways, in Websites, Games, and Video.

2.3.6 Summary

Exploring the literature on four key areas of work has been important because it provides us with a strong indication of the demands of the fields; It tells us what cultural, social, and economic capitals (Bourdieu, 1990) are needed, and what time demands are required, in order to succeed in first attaining and then sustaining this work. There is ample evidence throughout this literature to indicate that the three fields of study are sites of 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) which favour those with the right education, connections, financial resources, and who can operate as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). The evidence in the literature supports Brook, O'Brien and Taylor (2020) who argue that these people, the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001), are often white, male, middle-class, and without caring responsibilities. Those other than the somatic norm are subject to marginalisation or discrimination based on class, gender, race, caring responsibilities, and disability, which limits their ability to attain and sustain careers. In addition, a consideration of a field's 'temporal consciousness' has provided a way of encapsulating the nature of the demands that the fields have on those who work within them in a more holistic way. While not specific to the fields of study, the literature provides us with a starting point to explore how people experience their time at work.

These bodies of literature are important to this thesis because they provide the context in which people go on to have 'life course experiences'. In other words, as people move through the life course, either looking to shape their biographies as they see fit or having events thrust upon them, this literature provides a large part of the context in which they are doing that. For those who cannot/cannot continue to meet the demands of the fields or operate within a field's temporal consciousness, they are at risk of not being able to sustain their careers. The chapter now moves on to explore what literature reveals about life course experiences for those in digital and creative work, and other relevant fields which might explain why someone could not continue to meet the demands of the fields. This further helps us to understand how work and non-work

interact over the life course, providing more evidence as to why people might leave these fields as they age, the key social problem this thesis is looking to address.

2.4 Life course experiences

2.4.1 The 'All-In' phase

The experiences described in the previous section can be conceptualised as being descriptions of work at what I have termed the 'All-In' phase of a career. This is because work in these fields is set up for the people who are unencumbered by other responsibilities or demands on their time (Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015) and not yet burnt-out or disenchanted (Ursell, 2000), both situations which often coincide with people in their 30s and above (Conor, Gill and Taylor, 2015; Dent, 2020; Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini, 2020). From the evidence reviewed so far, I suggest that experiences in the 'All-In' phase *tend to* represent those of someone either at the transition from education to work, or, importantly, the 'ideal worker' who remains 'unencumbered' throughout their careers, i.e., the traditional middle-class man, supported by a partner to carry out the reproductive labour needed to support the household (Acker, 1990). Even when people are older when they establish their digital and creative careers, the demands tend to be the same as those of younger workers at the same stage (but are not always, because for example, people having more financial security from partners).

2.4.2 Life course tensions

Literature discussed in the following sections illustrates the ways different people's situations change over the life course, and how this variously affects people's ability to continue their careers as demanded by the way work is structured in the 'All-In' phase. I have termed these issues 'life course tensions'. Before exploring that literature, a synthesis of life course approaches suitable for this study is set out.

Levy and Bühlmann (2016) provide a practical application of life course theory which is highly suited to this study, using an adaptation of Bourdieu's field theory which contends that we operate in multiple social fields. They explain that as we move through life, we participate in several different fields at different times. As young children we are fully in the field of 'family' but later we are in the field of education, then work, and very often this is accompanied by a number of social fields and continued participation in the family field. At any one time, this can be considered a 'participation profile'. Over the life course, we can consider a sequence of participation profiles. We transition between participation profiles at different times, for example when we leave education and start work, or when one goes part-time to look after children. Borrowing from Fligstein and McAdam (2012), Levy and Bühlmann explain that fields may be dependent on other fields (similar to how work fields are nested within markets and the economy), or interdependent such as a work field and home field, which often overlap and have spill over effects. 'Participation' in any field encompasses an *amount of time* spent in the field (participation), the *role* someone has in the field (division of labour), and the (hierarchical) *position* in the field. As time is finite and people operate in multiple fields, there is a balance that needs to be struck (Hochschild, 2005) in order to successfully operate in a specific role in each field. Successful operation requires the right mix of economic, social, cultural, and time capitals, as already discussed.

Over the life course, there are conflicts between participation in these multiple social fields. While social norms around leaving education and the home, getting married, buying a house, and having children were previously more standardised and are no longer structured to the same degree (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016, p. 33), it has been argued that the socially constructed institutional norms that people are subject to still provide templates for people to follow (Hunt, 2017) despite any process of individualisation (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994). These institutions may vary but likely include family, the state, religion, organisations such as work, and the media. Their conventions influence when is appropriate to do things such as buy a home, have a child, or retire, and as will be explored, often shapes one's ability to do those things. Importantly, these institutions are imbued with assumptions and norms. For example, state support for maternity leave being more generous than paternity or shared leave shapes how the division of labour is assigned for parents, resulting in gendered career trajectories. Workplaces that valorise long hours and presenteeism (Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015) shape how people view any life course change that takes them away from full participation in work, with consequences for those that cannot participate fully for reasons such as ill-health or caring responsibilities. This interacts with gendered attitudes to parenthood, for example those workplaces that favour male partners

over their female partners when the couple have a child (Dent, 2020). Competing institutional norms, and one's proximity to them in terms of their identity and everyday practices, can create tension. Familial norms might clash with work cultures about 'the right time' to have children (Alwin, 2012). Moreover, people do not have one single life course trajectory, but several co-existing ones which might be in tension with each other; work and personal lives intertwine as people participate in multiple social fields (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016, p. 34).

Complementing this approach, with a particular emphasis on the institutional and organisational factors that enable or limit any renegotiation of participation profile, is Tomlinson et al.'s (2018) work on flexible careers over the life course. The authors explore how the institutional environment (macro), organisational policy and practice (meso), and an individual's social position (micro) all contribute to the ability of workers to realise 'flexible' careers at different times over the life course. First, the authors highlight five key aspects of institutional environment (macro) that enable or inhabit flexible careers over the life course. These are: education and training systems, worker voice, working time and leave regulations, welfare support for parents and careers, and retirement systems. Having already outlined the political economic context of the fields of study of this thesis, it is evident that there is relatively poor support for flexible careers from each of these institutional elements. The article provides a relevant example of this when discussing working time and leave regulations. It highlights how with either strong worker voice or government regulation, flexible working is made available to most workers. However, when these protections are weak (as they are in the fields of study), 'unilateral' arrangements, set by the employer, mean workers have less control, with only these in strong positions being able to negotiate more control over their working time (Tomlinson et al., 2018, p. 13). Similarly, different levels of welfare support for parents and careers affects workers' ability to navigate the transition to parenthood and other care requirements, meaning that in the UK context, poor support limits options for flexible careers. Second, considering organisational-level policy and practice (meso), the authors argue that organisations are the place where broader rules and norms around flexibility – from the institutional environment – are 'brought to life, mediated and enacted' (Tomlinson et al., 2018, p. 14). For example, they highlight how organisational policy is infused with norms around the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) which lead to gendered outcomes around care as women are penalised for accessing flexible working arrangements, and men are discouraged from making use of them. Even when flexible working arrangements are available, the dynamics of teams or the whims of managers can mean they are not accessible in practice. Finally, the authors argue that institutional and organisational contexts need to be considered alongside a life course approach that incorporates an understanding of social position (micro), where at key transitions, different people have differing access to institutional and organisational

support to make decisions and act around flexible working. Importantly, this speaks to how someone's position (seniority) in the field indicates the support they will get in any attempt at a 'flexible' career; those in stronger field positions will have more support, especially from organisations they have built a reputation in.

By complementing Levy and Bühlmann (2016) with Tomlinson et al.'s (2018) analysis of what limits or enables flexible careers, we can more readily take into account both the 'field position' of workers (from Levy and Bühlmann) and the institutional and organisational context – the 'nested' fields (Bourdieu, 1990; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012) – that people are operating in. Moreover, we can look to understand how someone's social position dictates their access to supportive institutions and organisations at different points in the life course. As a final point, it is important to note that Tomlinson et al. focus on the experiences of workers *employed* in organisations. As the authors invite, I am working with and extending their theorising by also considering how the issues raised affect freelancers – how macro conditions are mediated through the sites of work where freelancers operate.

Having explored the tensions and challenges that life course experiences across different social fields brings up, Decoteau (2016) provides a useful way of conceptualising how these tensions are thought about, and the process that can lead to action. Like Levy and Bühlmann, Decoteau adapts Bourdieu. Bourdieu has been criticised for being deterministic and not allowing for reflexivity (for discussion, see Faber, 2017). However, in Decoteau's (2016) critical realist reading of Bourdieu, she argues that people develop a 'reflexive habitus' at the intersection of different social fields. As someone compares the logic of one field to another, they become reflexive and are able to plan for action (Decoteau, 2016, p. 318). This can take two forms. Firstly, when someone compares different contemporaneous fields, such as the 'work' field with the 'parenting' field, where the organising logic of earning money is in tension with that of always being available for your children. Secondly, she argues that one's habitus is temporally layered because it has developed over different formative times in our lives, and as such, people become reflexive when they make comparisons 'across layers of temporal sedimentation within the habitus' (Decoteau, 2016, p. 316); people can become reflexive as they perceive differences between the aspects of their habitus that developed at these different times, within the context of the field(s) they are operating in (Decoteau, 2016, p. 316). However, as is explored in Chapter 5, this process does not necessarily have to rely on comparison to another social field that someone is or *has been*

involved in, but can provide the spark for exploration of different *imagined future* fields (Williams, 2018) such as the possibility of leading a less stressful life, or starting a family.

Having provided a framework for how this thesis will consider life course tensions, literature that addresses a number of different tensions is now explored. Evidence of how tensions are shaped by institutional and organisational norms, as well as how someone's social position interacts with these macro and meso structures, are evident throughout.

2.4.3 Parenting

There is now a substantial body of work in the creative industries literature which considers challenges to sustaining creative work in the transition to parenting, some highlights of which I include here. Considering how changes to the structures of the fields of study (discussed at the beginning of the chapter) create challenges for those who need flexibility and support including women and mothers, Thynne (2000) outlines the consequences of the fragmentation of the TV industry. Small independent production companies mitigated financial risks by limiting their permanent workforces and making wider use of freelancers. This meant they avoided having to pay for training, pensions, sick leave, holidays, and National Insurance (p.70). Moreover, as they could not afford to run HR departments, hiring increasingly relied on networks for crewing up (discussed earlier). Milner and Gregory (2022) highlight how freelancing means 'an absence of parental rights, lack of time autonomy, lack of training, development, and promotion opportunities (p.290). Percival (2020) discuss freelancers' lack of flexibility, with workers having to operate as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) 'willing to drop anything and say yes to anything that comes up' (p.421). In the context of these labour conditions, Percival (2020) discusses the gendered reasons for leaving a career in TV. Indicating how employment practices, the gendered division of childcare, and hostile organisational cultures around motherhood, 49% of women (compared to just 3.7% of men) cited incompatibility with parenting as the primary reason for leaving, with 68% citing it in some way as the cause of their exit. The expectation to be the ideal worker presents problems for mothers as 'with kids you can't be that person' (p.421). On top, attitudes towards motherhood are poor, with participants saying that maternity was viewed 'almost as a secret, a source of guilt which once revealed would damage career prospects' (p.423). However, they do highlight exceptions where employers have attempted to support mothers. This is of interest to this thesis, as it looks to understand how people that stay in the industry in the face of structural inequalities do so.

While noting that motherhood is not the sole explanation for gender inequalities in the creative industries, Brook, O'Brien and Taylor (2020) explore the reasons why the transition to parenthood is a key time when women leave the sector. The tension felt for women who are considering having children is said to stem from the incompatibility of freelancing with the financial security required for parenting, long and unsociable hours, alongside organisational and wider societal assumptions about the 'riskiness' of employing women beyond junior roles (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, pp. 224–5; Coles and Eikhof, 2021). Similarly, Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini (2020) reveal that mothers experience an 'impossible career dilemma' (p. 188) when they are faced with continuing their careers under these conditions, or being present for their children. Both these pieces of research stress that despite interviewees reflexively understanding that the work field was hostile to their circumstances, they tended to feel the tension between work and parenting as an burden on themselves, attributing their difficulty in balancing work and care as a personal failing, as opposed to realising that they 'bear the burden of cultural occupations' failure to support them as mothers' (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, pp. 226, 243). Contrastingly, Berridge (2019), finds that rather than mothers internalising structural challenges, participants are able to identify and complain about the conditions of work being incompatible with mothers. However, they stop short of demanding structural change, and do not make the link to feminist struggle. Whatever the emphasis is on who is to blame for the challenges experienced, the tension in the literature between work and caring remains. Brook, O'Brien and Taylor's findings show that the demands of motherhood are socially stratified, as those from more privileged backgrounds were less concerned about the effect of being a parent, presumably due to their ability to outsource childcare responsibilities, or their more senior positions in their field (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). This supports Banks (2019) who argues that those in more senior positions are able to maintain a sense of biography and career, in contrast to those in lower positions, and echoes the framework set out by Tomlinson et al. (2018).

Leung, Gill and Randle (2015) discuss the persistence of a gendered division of labour within the creative industries which creates unequal career outcomes. They consider two issues; the difficulties mothers have balancing work and childcare, and the discrimination women face because of assumptions about their parental status. Lack of suitable, affordable childcare and the precarity of work are cited as the main work/life balance challenges. The discrimination experienced takes a number of forms. Firstly, the belief that women would be less able to commit to work, even if they don't have children. This translates into the norm of 'reasonable' or

'understandable' sexist hiring practices, affecting women who have taken time out to have children and are looking to re-enter the workforce. It also affects women who are child-free but assumed to be a similar 'risk'. Secondly, it is assumed that mothers (but not fathers) will not have the same drive to succeed or have the same creative energy. Both these issues make talking about having or wanting children 'unspeakable' as doing so could affect women's careers. As a result, issues around lack of support or inequalities are not raised, individualising the problem, and preventing change. These same issues are identified by Milner and Gregory (2022) who consider the role of gendered assumptions of parenting, looking at the horizontal and vertical segregation of roles in TV production. In addition to the homophilic promotion practices (discussed earlier) that lead to vertical segregation of roles, horizontal segregation occurs when women – presumed to require flexible working even when without caring responsibilities – are steered towards lower paid roles that can be more flexible, while men remain on course to be better paid directors. They argue that without a change to often opaque organisational structures that perpetuate gendered outcomes, little will change. The authors cite the Covid-19 pandemic as an inflection point that might have allowed us to 'build back better' but there is little evidence of this happening since (Wreyford *et al.*, 2021). Assumptions about women and parenthood were also found by Dent (2020). Dent also explores white middle class mothers' gendered position, and dispositions, in the creative industries. While participants' social position allowed them initial access to the creative industries, this middle-class-ness, and associated discourses of motherhood i.e., of self-actualisation through 'intensive mothering', creates tension between work and care. There is shown to be a strong desire to be present with children, which is at odds with much work in TV and film. Outcomes are revealed to be a devaluing of women by patriarchal organisations, which contributes to precarity and encourages women to put their husbands' creative careers ahead of theirs.

Considering those women who are mothers and work, Maher (2009) argues that caring time of mothers is not separate from work, but instead, new hybrid temporalities exist where work and care time intermingle. However, the extent to which this is possible is dictated by the demands of work, and the ability to mix work and care (however challenging this is) is not always possible in the roles being studied in this thesis. This means there persists a separation of paid work and care, leading to a tension between the temporal consciousnesses of work and the 'fluid temporalities of caring labour'. Halford (2006) discusses the rise of home working for fathers with young children, showing how fathers express pleasure in having extra time with their children when they might have been commuting, and the fact they can 'be there' when needed. While Halford highlights how gendered parental roles persist, with fathers' time being in addition to the

caring role of mothers, the article indicates the benefits to fathers of working from home. Those roles in this thesis' fields of study that allow this kind of working are likely to be in Websites, whereas the demands of Games and Video mean that fathers in these fields are likely to miss out on this enhanced work/family time, potentially creating tension between work and family life. Burnett *et al.* (2013) reveal how men's paternity is often ignored in organisations. Taking on Halford's point that men are presumed to be breadwinners, they discuss how parental schemes are assumed to be for women. The research finds that while men find the transition to fatherhood to be profound, fatherhood at work remains invisible, with organisations reluctant to afford the flexibility that mothers have (often to the detriment to mothers' pay and career prospects). The paper illustrates the tension that fathers feel between work and parenting, and the problems they have when attempting to negotiate their time between work and caring.

Literature specific to Games and Websites strongly reflects findings discussed above. The project-based 'extreme' work of Games leads to gendered outcomes (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015). Wright (2015) explores how unstable labour market conditions in Games leads to the need for self-exploitation and the rationalisation of privates lives into the logic of work. This results in long hours, often with no guarantees of income. As a result, those that need stability and a balance between work and caring roles struggle to participate in these careers, despite the mobile games market opening up new opportunities. Moreover, the need for networking at informal events challenges participation because they are dominated by young men who do not consider the needs of those with caring responsibilities (Ozimek and Rueda, 2021). Work in IT, with its 'long hours, frequent travel, and 24-hour availability' (Kirton and Robertson, 2018, p. 159) results in the same stigma and marginalisation for those who cannot participate as discussed above. This has been described as 'consign[ing] women to an informal 'mommy track'', limiting their careers (ibid.).

2.4.4 Desire to work less

The desire to work less can be for reasons other than childcare, with some of those reasons explored here. In a thorough review of extant literature on work/life balance, Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva (2019) critique the restricted conceptions of 'work' and 'life'. 'Life' has meant caring for children (in middle-class, dual earning, heterosexual partnerships), and 'work' has taken the form of full-time permanent employment. They argue that we need to consider contemporary employment patterns such as zero-hours contracts and freelancing, and for those with multiple

jobs (all relevant to the thesis' fields of study), and that 'life' needs to include the needs and interests of those without children such as hobbies, education, religion, volunteering, and adult care. The paper calls for more research on these expanded conceptualisations of 'work' and 'life' and how employers are able to accommodate workers' diverse needs. This thesis will play a role in filling this gap with reference to the working practices of the digital and creative industries. Balderson *et al*. (2020) review literature and carry out original research on people who have chosen to go part-time in order to de-centre work. They discuss 'push factors' which drive people away from work. These include excessive workloads leading to stress and mental exhaustion, a lack of control over time, the need for time to rest and recuperate from increasingly intense working practices, and the lack of autonomy that full-time work brings. 'Pull factors' (towards a rejection of full-time work) include life events such as bereavements which prompt people to refocus their priorities, and the desire to develop skills and subjectivities outside of work, including pursuing hobbies (Balderson *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). In summary, time for wellbeing, time for passion-projects, and time for family are all evident in this research, potentially clashing with the demands of work and 'temporal consciousnesses' identified earlier. In efforts to negotiate reduction in working hours and tasks, Gascoigne and Kelliher echo Tomlinson et al. (2018), highlighting the challenges that are faced, including stigmatisation from those colleagues still operating as the 'ideal worker', and the inflexibility of employers. Renegotiation can lead to detrimental career outcomes, or an intensification of work as time to complete tasks is compressed (Gascoigne and Kelliher, 2018). This is discussed in more detail in Section 2.6.

2.4.5 Desire to work more

Not all the literature is focused on reducing workload, and a lack of work also threatens the viability of their careers. As already discussed, motherhood presents challenges to sustaining work over the life course, including as mothers look to return to work after a break. This is because they lose access to the networks required to gain work, suffer from having out of date technical skills and no means to require them in a freelance environment, or experience stigma for needing flexible hours (Thynne, 2000; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Wright, 2015; Mercer, 2017; Percival, 2020; Milner and Gregory, 2022). Others also face challenges remaining employable with issues of needing the right training, and the issue of (often gendered) ageism. Maintaining the required skills to remain employable is a concern for Hennekam and Bennett (2017) who highlight the need to remain 'protean' i.e., needing to 'change shape', to avoid under- or un-employment in technical roles that pervade the fields of study. Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow (2018) consider

the importance of IT skills in entrepreneurship. Both papers highlight the cost of training and fast pace of change as being barriers to maintaining up-to-date skills.

Studies show how ageism, often intersecting with sexism, limits options for older workers wishing to remain employed. Hennekam (2015) and Platman (2004) find that older creative workers are pushed towards self-employment as a result of age discrimination. Bandias, Sharma and Drive (2016) discuss how female ICT workers, despite their qualifications and experience, face discrimination, and diminished career advancement and promotion opportunities as they age into their 50s, and are also pushed into self-employment. Relevant too to the organisational cultures of Video and Games, Brodmerkel & Barker (2019) address age discrimination in the context of the Australian advertising industry. The paper argues that this ageism can be equated with how gender bias is felt, being 'manifested as a subtle, pervading atmosphere rather than as an easily identifiable, concrete set of practices', and this means it is rendered 'somewhat unspeakable' (Brodmerkel and Barker, 2019, p. 12). Ageism regarding on-screen representation of women in film is discussed by Raisborough *et al.* (2022). They explore the gendered ageism that erases women from our screens more than men. However, they do not discuss behind-the-camera roles. Ursell (2000, p. 816) discusses how older TV workers, less willing to be exploited, are 'discarded' in favour of a large pool of cheap newcomers. Steele (2022), in his look at the retention problem in UK TV and film, considers data on what conditions would be necessary for those who have left the industry to come back. These include flexible hours, working from home, work fitting around caring responsibilities, and permanent rather than freelance work. This shows that in addition to ageist practices, those workers who wish to work more are unlikely to be able to due to the conditions of work in the sector which are incompatible with the needs of older workers.

There is a lack of literature on ageism in Games and Video, and little qualitative data in literature relevant to Websites. I infer from literature which speaks to those fields that for those looking to work more as they move through the life course, the barriers of ageism and inhospitable working conditions mean this is a challenge. This thesis will add to knowledge on the challenges that people face as they look to increase their time at work over the life course.

2.4.6 Summary

When negotiating the transition to parenthood and then back into work, looking to work less for reasons of wellbeing and pleasure, or when trying to remain employable through continued professional development and in the face of (often gendered) ageism, this literature has shown that multiple challenges remain when looking to sustain a career past the 'All-In' phase on work. I argue, in agreement with Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini (2020), that far from early careers being the most challenging, careers in the fields of study get increasingly difficult to sustain over the life course. The demands and holistic natures of the fields discussed earlier do not go away but are experienced *in addition* to the challenges met in this section. This argument is supported by the statistics on workforce attrition explored in Chapter 1.

2.5 Careers over the life course: Is there really a 'shelf-life' for digital and creative work?

The literature reviewed thus far has explored the demands of work in Video, Games, and Websites, shaped by the way the fields have historically developed and the political economic context in which they sit. As already argued, those without the right mix of cultural, social, and economic capitals, and sufficient available time, suffer from limited access to, and progression through, these digital and creative careers. In line with a number of papers already discussed (Acker, 2006; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Carey *et al.*, 2017; Kirton and Robertson, 2018; Milner and Gregory, 2022), I argue that the fields of study are 'inequality regimes'.

Moreover, a consideration of 'life course tensions' has indicated how in addition to the challenging conditions of the 'All-In' phase, the ability to sustain work over the life course becomes increasingly difficult. Evidence from the creative industries literature suggests this is largely due to the gendered demands of parenthood and the stigma experienced by mothers and other women. However, other factors have been identified as challenges, including issues of work/life balance and wellbeing, maintaining the right cultural and social capital, and (again, often gendered) ageism.

Taking into account the challenging conditions of the 'All-In' phase and the difficulties encountered over the life course, it might be reasonable to conclude that, for many, Wallis, van

Raalte and Allegrini's (2020) suggestion of a 'shelf-life' for media careers is valid. However, what of those workers who do manage to sustain their careers? Despite the evidence of worker attrition, there are older workers, not just white middle-class men, who continue to work in the fields of study over the life course. Much of the literature on digital and creative work focuses on the structures that marginalise and exclude workers, rather than on the conditions which allow people to continue. The exception to this is the research into the somatic norm, illustrating how the 'inequality regimes' are working for them (e.g., Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, chap. 10). There is, within the bodies of literature reviewed in this chapter, little to be said about the other people who sustain careers over the life course. This represents a gap in knowledge. This thesis looks to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the strategies that older workers from a range of backgrounds use to sustain work in the fields of Video, Games, and Websites, understanding the context and personal circumstances that have allowed this to happen (see discussion of Tomlinson et al. (2018) above), and what the outcomes are for career trajectories.

The final section of this chapter looks to literature which considers the strategies people use to sustain work. What literature there is from the digital and creative industries is supplemented with relevant literature from other fields to provide an indication of how different workers plot a course through the challenges of work over the life course, and what support or barriers there are in them doing so.

2.6 Sustaining work: strategies used by older workers

Despite the large recent body of literature on structural inequalities in the digital and creative industries, there remains relatively little research regarding what it is that enables older workers to sustain their work across the life course. Within a working environment which has pushed the responsibility for career development firmly onto the worker (Antcliff, 2005; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011; McRobbie, 2016), is it the agency that workers have been able to establish that allows them to carve out a career, or is it the help of institutions and organisations (Tomlinson et al., 2018) which still support workers, or a combination of the two? This thesis looks to fill this gap by researching what actions older workers have taken in order to sustain their careers, and what it is that has enabled them to do so. It does this so that these examples can indicate ways the digital and creative industries can move forward to benefit more people.

This final section considers what literature there is that explores how people negotiate work and non-work social fields, identifying gaps which this thesis will contribute towards filling.

2.6.1 Strategies: a framework

Hochschild (2005) identifies five different strategies employed when trying to balance work and parenting. While she refers specifically to motherhood, these ‘ideal types’ are useful for considering other forms of life course tension. ‘Endurers’, or those ‘just getting through’ with no end in sight, are people who are simply trying to make work viable and have renounced the idea of meaningful or joyful times with their families. ‘Deferrers’, as the name suggests, defer their valuable family time in light of the current situation. This deferment might be a day, the length of a project, or even until retirement. ‘The busy bee’ is described as packing both meaningful work and home life into the time they have, absorbing the *rationalisation* of time into their identity and making shorter, ‘hollowed out’ periods of time work for them, and attempting to make it work for their families too. Deferrers and busy bees are said to not adjust their working schedules and instead prioritise the logic of ‘market culture’ in being efficient in the ‘home’ field alongside the work field, i.e., they take the ‘temporal consciousness’ of work home with them. ‘Delegators’, having the resources to do so, outsourcing care to nannies or childminders so that they can continue to work, and these roles take the place of parents’ love at times. Finally, ‘Resisters’, who are identified as being the happiest. Instead of adapting to the work schedule they attempt to alter the work schedule itself. They do not prioritise, and sometimes actively resist, the ‘market culture’ of efficiency at home and make compromises with their work in order to have joyful and meaningful home lives. Hochschild describes them as middle-level workers, not consumed by career ambition on the one hand or financial hardship on the other. These five ‘ideal types’ of strategy to manage work and home life, with their consideration of how the logic of the work field bleeds into the home field, is very pertinent to this thesis, and can apply beyond parenting. This framework, which despite being nearly 20 years old is still relevant, is used when analysing participant’s action to sustain their careers.

2.6.2 Identifying strategies in the literature

Mapping other literature onto those categories, the 'endurers' are either those that are forced to operate in what Adkins' (2013) describes as 'event time', struggling to continue their roles due to the challenging conditions of work, which might cause poor mental and physical health and affect familial relationships (Hochschild, 2005). Alternatively, 'endurers' could be where people live as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) where this type of work is perceived as a good person-environment fit and thus unproblematic (Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015, p. 458). 'Deferrers' might be expanded to consider those who delay the transition to parenthood (van Wijk, de Valk and Liefbroer, 2022) in light of the inhospitable conditions in the fields, previous discussed. The 'busy bee' chimes with the idea of 'leaning in', coined by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and discussed in Rottenberg (2014) as representing a neoliberal feminism that internalises market rationality into the work/life (care) calculation. It 'disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing… inequality, [accepting] full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care, which is increasingly predicated on crafting a felicitous work–family balance based on a cost-benefit calculus' (Rottenberg, 2014, p. 420). The 'hollowing out' of meaningful time which Hochschild says typifies the 'busy bee' is taken on and somewhat refuted by Maher (2009), who argues that women overcome (but not without conflict) the work/care tension by forming 'new temporalities' of care where 'time for care' can be done in the midst of 'time for work' (Maher, 2009, p. 236), where caring-working experiences are shaped by the demands of labour, but where mothers integrate care work within that time (p. 237). Whereas Hochschild says 'busy bees' portion out time for care amidst work time, Maher argues there are simultaneous 'industrial temporalities of employment, and 'fluid temporalities of care' happening at once (Maher, 2009, p. 237). Moreover, the act of working is in fact another act of care, as the accumulation of income helps the family to grow, just as regular feeding cycles drive towards a goal of growth. This take on time use critiques the separation of work and care as being overly simplistic and based on old norms. This appears especially relevant to those parents who work from home, as boundaries between 'work' and 'home', and the 'temporal consciousnesses' which accompany each, are likely to conflict. The extent to which Maher's hybrid temporalities exist for home workers will be explored in the thesis. 'Delegators' who outsource their childcare responsibilities might be considered to fit with the classed carer trajectories that Banks (2019) discusses, able to craft a career from a strong position in a field, replete with the financial rewards and thus the ability to outsource care. This does of course chime with the gendered outcomes of childcare, so whereas Hochschild is discussing mothers, it is more often than not the fathers who are delegating parental responsibility to their partners. There may be some degree of 'delegation' even for people who are child free, such as outsourcing domestic duties like cleaning and cooking. When

this isn't outsourced to a partner, this would need to be paid for, again suggesting a classed outcome.

The final category, 'resisters', can be considered to represent strategies that cover any renegotiation which goes against the norm in an organisational setting. While Hochschild writes about parenting, 'resisters' can be found elsewhere (Balderson *et al.*, 2020). Gascoigne and Kelliher (2018) explore the practice of idiosyncratic- or 'i-deals', which are negotiated by workers and managers to the benefit both parties. They show that for professionals, these involve renegotiation of both schedule and of tasks. The research finds that initial renegotiations for what tasks are done within the time available are often unsuccessful, requiring a degree of 'job crafting' which can end up having serious disadvantages for career outcomes. Either people reduce networking and professional development tasks to focus on the core workload, or they maintain previous commitments, adding to intensification of work which can be unsustainable. Where successful compromise is achieved, this was often down to the individual worker's pro-active efforts to enlist colleagues to share the load. The importance of maintaining networks and training (social and cultural capitals) to stay employable in the fields of study means that the options available seem limited to fitting these aspects of work into reduced timeframes if their careers are not to suffer. More importantly, with both the prevalence of freelance working and the high time demands of project work, these types of employer-employee deals are of limited applicability to work in the fields of study. The thesis will explore the extent to which these are used. This article offers a clear example of where, with a lack of worker voice and government regulation, 'unilateral' arrangements, subject to the whim of management, are used to try and achieve 'flexible' careers – and are often only available to more valued colleagues (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Moreover, the pervasiveness of norms around the ideal worker leads to stigmatisation of flexible working (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018; Milner and Gregory, 2022).

As alluded to previously, outcomes over the life course are often dependent on position in the field and wider social position. Ozimek and Rueda (2021) highlight how, having taken a step back to have children, parents then have to be able to afford to 'delegate' care to paid carers so that they can attend the informal games jams and networking events which are necessary to develop the skills and networks required for career advancement. This indicates the need for economic capital. Dent (2020) talks about positions of seniority in the field which allow for part-time work in TV/film once women have children. This links with Banks (2019) who describes where people have the ability to craft a career that support biography, rather than fighting to stay employable

as in ‘event time’. However, there remain gendered outcomes for the privileged women in the study, as Dent finds that those that are able to sustain part-time work did so on a reduced or downgraded role, whereas male partners (who were all in similar roles) continued as before. The study did highlight that while part-time work is possible, some interviewees struggled to find part-time work that was compatible with childcare needs (Dent, 2020, p. 546). Moreover, organisational cultures were found to be discriminatory, as mothers were devalued in monetary terms, as well as being excluded from networking opportunities which, as already discussed, are vital for the continuation of careers in Video (Dent, 2020, p. 547). Echoing this, Brook, O’Brien and Taylor (2020, p. 242) discuss the poor long term outcomes for mothers who previously went part time to have children. Now in their 50s, the interviewees are unable to get back into full time work due to lower professional status that was a result of time out for motherhood.

Little else from the literature on digital and creative work has commented on outcomes for those looking to work less. It will be of interest to find the extent to which the experiences discussed above are the same in this thesis’ sample. For example, Dent’s focus on middle-class (white) subjectivities can be contrasted with those from different social positions.

So far, these strategies have considered attempts to maintain time at work, or to work less. However, as identified earlier, literature highlights life course tensions for workers who wish to work more in the face of technical obsolescence, and (often gendered) ageism. Hennekam and Bennett (2017) discuss attempts to keep up with technological change through continued professional development. However, challenges in the forms of cost, time-pressure, and rapid technological change are identified (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017, p. 77). Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow (2018) indicate that technical training is only part of what is needed to be employable, showing that other capacities, i.e., the right cultural and social capital, are required for successful employment. Brodmerkel & Barker (2019) explore the ‘identity work’ performed by older advertising creatives in order to attempt to fit into an industry characterised as young and hyper-competitive. To counter ageist cultures, older workers position themselves as embodying both ‘youthful creative exuberance’ and ‘mature strategic experience’ in order to keep themselves employable. Despite these attempts, some participants were forced to set up their own agencies or go freelance, making a ‘virtue out of a necessity’. Hennekam (2015) finds that older creative workers are pushed towards self-employment as a result of age discrimination, having to find strategies for success which make the most of their experience and networks. Similarly, Platman (2004) shows that in the face of ageism in the workplace, older workers in the

UK media industries (it is not made clear which industries these are but does include IT) can opt to go freelance to market their experience in a flexible way. However, tight budgets and cultures of work which were weary of 'the old ways' of doing things limit their success. Similarly, as a response to ageism in ICT roles, women in their 50s opt to become self-employed in order to keep working (Bandias, Sharma and Drive, 2016). It is unclear from this literature what the outcomes are for those who set themselves up as freelance, and this literature is only relevant to those who are 'employed' initially, as those roles which are already freelance have nowhere to go. Hennekam (2015) also finds that those older workers having to supplement their income from their struggling creative careers had time taken up with that additional work, further pushing them away from doing what they want to do. Moreover, they struggled to manage their identities as creatives and as entrepreneurs focused on earning. This chimes with those discussed earlier who did not have the economic capital to 'wait' for creative work (Xu, 2021). The limited literature on ageism in Video and Games does not indicate any strategies used in order to sustain work, representing a gap in knowledge.

While the literature reviewed in this section covers a range of strategies and outcomes, there remains work to be done in understanding how those who remain in the fields of study do so past the point that statistics, discussed in Chapter 1, show many people drop out. How are experiences shaped by inequalities? How are experiences shaped by the support, or lack of support, from institutions like the welfare state, and organisations, as Tomlinson et al. (2018) suggest? Moreover, what needs to be understood from any action that better balances the work/non-work preferences and needs of workers is whether people are still able to meet the capital demands of their field of work. Due to the pervasive structures that shape the fields described throughout this chapter, I suspect that these demands remain the same as those of the 'All-In' phase of work described in Section 2.3, other than when seniority changes the division of labour. This thesis will look to establish whether any actions to balance work and non-work allow people, for however long, to continue to meet the demands of work. This will therefore help to determine what the 'shelf-life' of the older workers studied really is.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has set out the context of work in the digital and creative industries, explored the demands of attaining and sustaining careers, and discussed how the context and demands shape the industries' 'temporal consciousnesses'. It has examined what has been said about how work

and non-work come into tension which can lead to worker attrition over the life course. Finally, it explored the more limited literature about the strategies people use to attempt to sustain work in the face of these tensions – by balancing work and non-work social fields – and what the outcomes might be.

It has been highlighted throughout that the demands of work differ for different people due to the fields of work being 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006). These regimes discriminate along class, gender, race, age, and caring responsibilities, meaning a range of marginalised workers are less able to sustain work at the same level as those of the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) and are more at risk of poor pay and status, or unemployment. This is especially so when considering how life course tensions compound these issues.

While there is a much-needed focus on the structures which shape inequalities, what is broadly missing from the digital and creative industries literature is an exploration of what it is that people can do in order to attempt to sustain work over the life course in the face of the challenges highlighted. What ability people have to exercise agency over their choices for continuing their careers, and what the enabling or limiting conditions that people are operating in as they move through their careers and their lives, needs to be further explored if future interventions to address the skills shortage in the sector are to be effective. This thesis addresses this gap.

2.7.1 Research questions

Looking to address the gap in knowledge around how older workers sustain their careers in digital and creative work, the thesis' research questions are as follows.

For people working in the fields of Video, Games, and Websites:

1. What are the demands of accessing and progressing in work, and how do these differ for people in different social positions? What do these differences mean for career progression?
2. What tensions do people experience when work intersects with other aspects of their lives at different points in the life course? How do these experiences vary for different people, based on their earlier career outcomes?

3. In what ways do people attempt to sustain digital and creative careers by taking action to resolve the tensions experienced over the life course? What allows them to take these actions? What are the outcomes of these actions, and how and why do they differ for different groups?
4. How can these research findings inform policy and practice to improve the outcomes for older workers in the digital and creative industries?

The following chapter explores how this study has addressed these questions. It outlines the thesis' methodology, exploring the critical realist approach, it discusses the decisions I made in the process of conducting qualitative research, and it sets out the conceptual framework that is used to analyse the findings.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Having established the gap in knowledge and set out my research questions, this chapter outlines my approach to the research and the methods I have used. I outline my justification for taking a critical realist (CR) approach, discuss the ethical considerations of the research, and explain in detail how I carried out the data collection and conducted my analysis before laying out the conceptual framework which was used to develop the findings chapters. Next, I reflect on the choices I have made throughout the research including as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how my positionality as a researcher, both in terms of my social position and my politics, have informed the study. I finish with introducing the key findings as they are laid out in the rest of the thesis.

3.2 Methodological approach

Critical realism is a useful approach to this research, concerned as it is with those relatively few older workers who have been able to sustain their careers in digital and creative work. That is because CR allows for data to be analysed in a way that can apply multiple theoretical lenses to understand the structuring forces that shape work for many (what I have called 'the rules'), and importantly, in a further stage of analysis, understand what I have termed the 'exceptions to the rules'; those older workers, especially from marginalised groups, who have been able to sustain their careers. In doing so, it points to the conditions which are necessary in order for more people to be able to sustain work over the life course, providing evidence for any interventions that might transform work in the fields of study.

Critical realist approaches differ from constructivist approaches to sociological research in that they do more than interpret the subjective experiences of participants that are gathered as interview data. In addition, they look to *explain* the causes of behaviours by finding or theorising the hidden causal mechanisms and structures that have the capacity to cause things to happen (Archer *et al.*, 1998; Elder-Vass, 2010; Bhaskar, 2014). CR claims there is a reality outside of human experience. It understands there to be a stratified ontology (reality) of: the 'empirical' (our experiences of events), understood to be fallible and partial; the 'actual' (events that occur), and;

the 'real' (the potential causal mechanisms and structures that *might* interact to cause events). It understands that the world is an open system made up of social and non-social/natural structures which exists before (individual) human experience, but that the world can be shaped by human agency (Archer *et al.*, 1998). CR claims that despite the fallibility of our experiences of events (which positivists discount and constructivists emphasise) we can attempt to *explain the causes of events* (the 'real'), through analysis of data (in the 'empirical' realm) that we have gathered about events (the 'actual'). Because CR understands there is a reality separate from experience it considers both subjective experiences (interview data for example) *and* context, considering data from a range of sources, triangulated in order to better attempt to understand the causes of events (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). Discussed in more detail later, analysis is 'abductive' i.e. a more generalised and abstracted re-description of data presented in terms of 'a characteristic causal mechanism or process which serves to explain it' (Bhaskar, 2014, p. vii), and 'retroductive', which is an inference about the conditions of the world that must exist for those causal mechanisms to have happened, made through the analysis of existing theory and contextual data around what is being researched (Bhaskar, 2014).

Critical realism is a suitable approach to answering my research questions as it can address what works for whom, when, under which conditions, and why. It can also consider what doesn't work and why. Through this research, I have sought to understand the causal mechanisms and structures leading to events (or a sequence of events over a career), and the outcomes of those events. This has been done elsewhere in the study of organisations (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2004; Leca and Naccache, 2006), and specifically within the digital and creative industries (Hesketh and Brown, 2004; Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow, 2018). For me, as I have researched the choices of various actions chosen by older workers in the digital and creative industries over their careers, I have been able to *explain* the causal mechanisms and structures which led to and enabled those choices, as well as the outcomes of those choices. These differ for different groups in different industries under different conditions of employment, and with different personal circumstances.

The following sections explain how the data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, and recruitment and sampling were approached from a CR perspective before I outline the critical realist/Bourdieusian conceptual framework that I developed to answer the research questions.

3.2.1 Qualitative interviews

The data collection method was in-depth semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 1989; Kvale, Brinkmann and Uwe, 2018) of digital and creative workers in the three fields of Video, Games, and Websites. Qualitative interviews taking a critical realist approach are appropriate for addressing the research questions because interviews are useful in being able to *explain* the causes and consequences of action of people as they attempt to sustain careers in digital and creative work. They do this by revealing the causal mechanisms and structures which generate these 'events' i.e. the choices of actions and the outcomes of these choices. For example, one causal mechanism might be 'actors' understandings and rationales for action', which an interview is particularly suited to reveal (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 116). In practice, this meant that interviews revealed data about people's context, capacities, and dispositions which shaped their choices of action. For example, one participant (Martin) gave a description of poverty affected his attitude towards risk, which then shaped his decisions about how he could afford to work less intensively.

The 'theory-driven' interviews (Smith and Elger, 2014) utilised relevant concepts and theoretical lenses from literature which were shared with participants. This meant the choice of a well-ordered sequence of questions in the form of a semi-structured interview (Smith and Elger, 2014) was important in providing clarity and developing trust and shared understanding. The CR approach assumes that I as the researcher remain the expert about the issues being investigated as I was conducting interviews to 'confirm or falsify and, above all, refine [a] theory' (Pawson, 1996, p. 299). However, this was not intended to replace the 'active interviewee'. Participants co-produced knowledge though negotiation and dialogue where 'theories' of both interviewer and interviewee, who each possessed different kinds of expertise, were shared. I as the interviewer had the theoretical overview of the field of research, while the interviewees were the experts regarding explanatory mechanisms related to their personal reasoning, motivations and choices (Smith and Elger, 2014, drawing on Pawson, 1996). By explicitly involving participants in a process of knowledge co-production that 'theory led' interviews allow, I showed that I valued their subjective experiences. At the same time, this approach allowed me to maintain a critical assessment of participant accounts by contextualising them and assessing their adequacy and completeness compared to other interviews and other sources of data (Smith and Elger, 2014, pp. 119–120).

This approach to interviews has certain implications to consider. The researcher should share their conception of the research with the participant as they conduct the interview. This can help participants to understand the types of questions which are being asked of them, and the way things are being framed in line with theories being used, which are not necessarily how the participant sees them. If this is the case, it might be necessary to spend time making sure participants can equate the researcher's framing with their understanding (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 118). Where participants have well-formed understandings of their situation (such as the structural and personal reasons they have chosen to make certain career decisions), the interviewer can ask participants to clarify their position in relation to a specific context or in relation to competing theories proposed elsewhere, which may help them better reflect on their experience (Pawson, 1996, p. 266-7, cited in Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 117-8). Smith and Elger draw on Archer's (2003) suggestion that conducting interviews in this way can reveal participants' 'reflexivity, individual reasoning, and their grounding in the "inner conversation"' (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 123) which are 'causally efficacious' i.e. they will be making choices through the process of reflecting on themselves in relation to their context (ibid.). This is in line with how my conceptual framework understands reflexivity at the intersection of multiple social fields (Decoteau, 2016). The use of elaborating on interview questions is a standard interview technique which can be used in conjunction with the theory-led approach (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 118), and was done organically in interviews.

Smith and Elger highlight that researchers must be careful not put participants off or to bias the conversation with an over-bearing focus on their theories. Instead, it is possible to use these tools to help the participant appreciate 'the different aspects and the distinctive layers of the social processes the researcher is seeking to understand, and to do this in terms that both can recognize so that interviewee responses can throw maximum light on these features' (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 118). The potential to be too theory-heavy is a concern I shared when conducting interviews, especially as I am in many respects an 'outsider' interviewer (Silverman, 2013) and would not want to impose my provisional thinking on participants, potentially damaging rapport (see later discussion on my positionality in Section 3.7). My approach was to allow for participants to discuss their subjective understandings of experiences and use this 'theory-led' method at points of reflection and in summary in order to clarify that participants have communicated their perspectives as best as they can. This worked well in eliciting useful data and did not adversely affect the rapport that was built throughout interviews.

3.2.2 Critical realist analysis

As mentioned earlier, critical realism can explore the structures that limit action, and the 'exceptions to the rules' which represent how those older workers how have been able to sustain their careers in the face of 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006). I outline in this section how CR analysis can do this, then provide an example of how this occurred in my analysis.

Critical realist analysis consists of 'abduction' and 'retroduction'. Abduction is a more generalised and abstracted re-description of data presented in terms of 'a characteristic causal mechanism or process which serves to explain it' (Bhaskar, 2014, p. vii), and 'retroduction', which is an inference about the conditions of the world that must exist for the those causal mechanisms to have happened, made through the analysis of existing theory and contextual data around what is being researched (Bhaskar, 2014). Abduction begins much the same as thematic coding done in constructivist research (Silverman, 2013; Flick, 2014), in that 'issues and ideas raised by respondents are interpretatively abstracted into 'themes' or conceptual categories, representing the perspective of social agents, as would be usual in an orthodox hermeneutic approach' (Rees and Gatenby, 2014, p. 140). However, a CR approach does not stop there as it moves beyond the responses of participants to apply a set of theoretical categories developed from the literature (ibid.). CR approaches are theoretically pluralistic, which means 'multiple theoretical lenses can be considered for what they tell us about the various and stratified influences that are affecting the things we observe' (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, p. 18). As an example, I have considered the experiences of women in Video (specifically TV), from different angles to help me understand their situations. I have done this by looking at the capital demands of this work such as having the right training and networks to progress, 'the temporal consciousness' of 'project time' that is often incompatible with caring responsibilities, and a consideration of TV as an 'inequality regime' that has gendered assumptions about childcare. Each of these lenses indicate, from different perspectives, that the challenges faced by women in TV if they have children mean they will be 'filtered out'. However, at this stage, analysis is only at the 'theoretical-deductive' stage which can talk about a general conception of a social problem but which lacks specific context (Rees and Gatenby, 2014, p. 140). In order to reach the goal of CR analysis, retroduction is needed. This involves attempting to explain the conditions of the social phenomena (each individual participant's case) being researched by bringing in contextual information to better understand the actions of participants, and 'searches for connections between subjective interpretations, actual events, and deeper causal explanations' (Rees and Gatenby, 2014, p. 141). Continuing the example about women in TV, I went through a process of retroduction when

looking to understand how, within the context of gendered outcomes around childcare in Video (Dent, 2020), one participant (Ester) managed to renegotiate her role to be part-time and avoid travelling away home. Where the lenses mentioned above were not be able to fully explain this 'exception to the rule', the process of retroduction could. In this example, Ester was only able to change her participation profile because of the atypical organisational support of the production studio that she was freelancing for. This was the case because of her strong abilities, her personal relationships with the owners, and the success of one specific TV show. This information from Ester's career history, her discussion of the context of the field, alongside other participants' interview data which confirmed the lack of flexibility in the field, meant it was possible to infer how exceptional this situation was. A strength of CR is that it uses this example and other 'exceptions to the rules' to show the limits of 'the rules'. For our example, in what instances do production practices and 'inequality regimes' *not apply* in the same way. What are the *enabling conditions* (or 'causal mechanisms') required that present ways forward for more women in the field? From there, we can see what needs to change in order to scale up the conditions which would be required to support more mothers to sustain their careers.

Having justified my critical realist approach to this research, the chapter continues with a consideration of the ethical issues involved, and the practicalities of the research.

3.3 Ethics

Ethical practices are an essential consideration when conducting social science research, and this study was designed with that in mind. Key to this research are issues of consent, anonymity, confidentiality, disclosure, power relations between researcher and participants, and commitment to the wellbeing of participants.

3.3.1 Participant consent

Before interviews commenced, participants were sent the participant information sheet (PIS) and consent form. The PIS informed participants that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, that their participation will be treated as confidential, and that to the best of my abilities their interview data will be anonymised. However, the PIS stated that there is the potential that their identity may be revealed by their responses as they may be in positions that are unique to them. This eventuality will be avoided as best as it can by, for example, withholding

job titles or descriptions. However, the participant needed to be aware of this possibility. The PIS also informed participants that their interview data will be anonymously archived with the UK Data Service. Archiving data raises the issue of participants not having control of how their data will be used in the future (O'Reilly, 2010). There is a specific part of the consent form which deals with archiving data, and participants could decide to not have their data included if they are concerned about its future use. This has happened on a number of occasions within my sample. Before an interview was conducted, participants were required to return the signed consent form, and were given the opportunity to discuss anything about the process. The main points of discussion were issues with anonymity, which I have discussed above.

3.3.2 Interviews

As discussed above, the 'theory-led' approach (Smith and Elger, 2014) to worker interviews I have taken means that I sometimes asked participants to reflect on their responses to questions, including the suggestion of theories which might challenge their beliefs about their experiences. This element of my research is ethically contentious as it has the possibility of making participants feel attacked for holding certain opinions. This concern was at the forefront of my mind as I conducted interviews. I worked hard to ensure that interviews were sensitive to participants' wellbeing by regularly checking they understood and were comfortable with the questions and picking up on any cues regarding emotional responses, that a safe and supportive atmosphere was maintained, and that any challenge to their responses was explained as being done to help them reflect on their positions and better elucidate the reasons for people making certain choices (Pawson, 1996, p. 266-7, cited in Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 117-8). As these interviews discussed potentially sensitive aspects of people's personal and work life, it was important to be able to sensitively manage any distress that arose. I planned so that if participants became distressed, I would ask if they would like to pause or stop the interview and offer them comfort where I could. If distress continued, I would highlight other forms of support that I have identified on the PIS such as GP services and support lines such as the Samaritans and Remploy. At no point in any interviews did this situation arise.

3.3.3 Anonymisation

I am committed to maintaining the anonymity of participants, and to that end have pseudonymised their names and removed specific location details, as well as removing the names

of most organisations. However, I opted to continue to refer to the BBC due to its outsized influence on many participants careers across the fields of study, along with the fact that the move from London to Salford is so identifiable that pseudonymisation would be fruitless. Other major broadcasters' names were removed, accept when talked about in a general sense. With participants names, I used a website which shows what names were popular in what year and chose birth-year appropriate pseudonyms with the same first letter. I have done my best to make choices appropriate to the backgrounds of participants.

One participant is especially concerned that she remains anonymous as she is the only Black women in her role, seemingly in the entire UK, and therefore very identifiable. As such, any identifiable information about her has been excluded from findings including details of her role. As a result, her data is used less in a biographical sense and more as expert opinion about inequalities in her industry.

3.3.4 Data storage

All interview data including audio recordings and written transcripts are kept secure in password-protected folders on University of Southampton OneDrive servers. There are no issues with carrying data around on memory cards etc, as all data collection and transcription is being done on the same computer, which was either at my home during lockdown or at my office at the University of Southampton. Once the research is complete, a copy of the data will be kept by me for any potential future research use. This will be done on a secure cloud server with Apple which is password and biometrically protected. Data is intended to be archived with the UK Data Service in an anonymised format. As previously mentioned, participants were asked to consent to their data being stored in this way, having been made aware in the PIS that they will not have control over how this data will be used in the future (O'Reilly, 2010).

3.4 Recruitment and sampling

3.4.1 Recruitment process

Recruitment was done firstly through an existing network of contacts and online via Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, and later through snowball sampling (Flick, 2014) achieved through those already interviewed. While at first I interviewed people as they volunteered, at later stages I focused on achieving a sample of diverse voices who could act as 'key participants' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 136), able to provide data about their experiences which are a function of their minority or marginalised status. This was done with the aim of achieving a sample of participants so as to meaningfully address the aspects of my research questions that relate to inequalities across gender, race, and class. While successful in reaching women and a number of male participants from working class origins, the sample is heavily skewed towards those from white and middle-class backgrounds compared to the general population. However, rather than this representing a failure in recruitment, I assess that it represents the prominence of these groups in the fields of study (Ofcom, 2019; Taylor, 2022).

While working hard to try and ensure I recruited a diverse sample of participants, the actual process of recruitment was simple. Firstly, I asked an existing group of people I knew to be interviewed, and to ask their contacts if they would also be interested. This garnered 4 interviews initially (although two are not used in this study as in retrospect they fall outside of the three fields). These interviews led to a further one interview through snowball sampling. I also created two short recruitment videos which I have shared on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The first one featured me speaking to camera, while the second was much more succinct, used music and text, and focused more specifically on attributes of the participants I still needed to recruit. These two videos were most successful on Twitter, where they were viewed a total of 2373 times, and shared 81 times. Participants recruited in this way were also able to provide information, and sometimes introductions, to other participants. Using LinkedIn achieved one interview and Facebook two, although these were not usable as, in retrospect once again, the fell outside the fields of study. The final push to get to 30 interviews was done through targeted approaches either on twitter or via YouTube's channels contact details as I required more participants from Games, and those that use YouTube as a medium.

While social media was a very successful recruitment tool, at times it was challenging to establish the precise job roles of potential participants, and to manage their expectations as to whether they were suitable for interview. Politely declining their offers was something which I had to

carefully consider. I ensured I did this via private message and not on the public forum, and communicating my gratitude for their offer was important in order to maintain professionalism and a good reputation for the study. At times I entered into a longer email conversation about what they and I wished to gain from the interview process, with a number of initial offers not reaching interview due to unsuitability. However, on balance I think this recruitment method, within the conditions enforced by the pandemic, has been very successful and I would do the same again.

3.4.2 The sample

I purposively sampled participants (Silverman, 2013) in order to achieve a suitable sample of older workers who can best help address my research questions. This is not intended to be a statistically representative sample as due to the relatively small sample size (30), this would likely miss important voices. Rather, I worked as best I could to ensure that a range of diverse participants were recruited in the three fields of study so that different reasons for action can be understood, based on background and context, as well as why outcomes differ for different people. As discussed in Baker and Edwards (2012), the answer to how many interviews are enough is 'it depends' on a number of factors. Some are practical such as the resources and time available, but others relate to epistemology and breadth of study. With my CR approach I am comparing the experiences of participants along with using contextual information in order to be able to explain why strategies work or don't work for older workers. To do this, I need to have purposively sampled key participants across the fields I am researching. As my range is quite broad, I require sufficient diversity of perspectives (Brannen and Nilsen, 2011). This diversity in my sample includes a range of ages from 'younger older' (35) up to around retirement (65), a balance of employment statuses (employed, freelance) a balance of genders, a range of class backgrounds, a range of ethnic identities (although as mentioned, this was challenging due to the lack of diversity in the digital and creative industries). It would have been desirable that I reached 'data saturation' from the sample, where no new trends were being found as more interviews are conducted (Silverman, 2013; Flick, 2014). However, while strong themes were apparent which echoed existing literature, alongside new findings, there is still much that is unique in each participants' interview data. With the relatively small final sample of 30 participants across a range of fields, this is expected. It is impractical within the time available for data collection for me to continue until data saturation is achieved.

Descriptors for my sample feature below.

Pseudonym	**Field**	**Role**	**Employment status**	**Age**	**Class Identity (self-described)**	**Gender Identity**	**Ethnic Identity (self-described)**
Douglas	Websites	Programming	Employed	38	Working class	Male	White British
Adam	Websites & video	Digital comms & content creation	Employed	46	Working class	Male	White British
Kanvar	Websites	Marketing	Employed	39	Working class	Male	British Indian
Natasha	Games	Kids games design	Employed	39	Lower middle class	Female	White British
Neil	Video	Digital animator	Freelance	46	Middle class	Male	White British
Rosa	Web then Games	Game producer	Freelance	50	Middle class	Female	White British
Cody	Websites	UX, accessibility	Employed	36	Middle class	Non-binary	White British
Cathy	Video then Websites	Website editor	Employed	57	Middle class	Female	White British/French
Ruby	Video	Producer	Freelance	37	Middle class	Female	White British
Holly	Video	Producer	Opted Out	42	Middle class	Female	White British
Charles	Websites	Digital comms	Unemployed	50	Middle class	Male	White British
Ophelia	Web then Games	Game producer	Freelance	43	Middle class	Female	White British
Judith	Video	Script editor	Employed	41	Middle class	Female	White Irish
Erica	Video	Shooter/director	Freelance	35	Middle class	Female	White British
Max	Websites	Web design	Employed	47	Working class	Male	White British
Erik	Web and Games	Games design	Freelance	44	Middle class	Male	White Australian
Ester	Video	Producer	Employed	41	Middle class	Female	Jewish
Austin	Websites	Programmer	Opted Out	38	Working class	Male	White British
Philip	Websites	Programmer	Freelance	43	Lower middle class	Male	White British
Alicia	Video	Withheld for anonymity	Freelance	48	Middle class	Female	Black British
Michael	Games	Quality assurance	Employed	41	Working class	Male	White British
Justin	Games	Games designer	Employed	45	Middle class	Male	White British
Rhonda	Video	Director	Freelance	55	Middle class	Female	White British
Jess	Games	Games designer	Employed	36	Middle class	Female	White British
Gray	Games	3D Animator	Freelance	40	Middle class	Non-binary	Chinese / White
Rachel	Games	Producer	Employed	41	Middle class	Female	White Canadian
Kristen	Games	Digital comms and community manager	Employed	42	Middle class	Female	White British
Dennis	Video	YouTuber	Sole trader	52	Middle class	Male	White British
Martin	Video	Graphic design	Freelance	37	1st Gen Middle class	Male	White British
Roger	Video	YouTuber	Boss	65		Male	White British

Table 3 – Personal attributes of sample.

3.5 Conducting interviews

3.5.1 Video interviews

Due to the pandemic lockdown, all interviews were conducted via video call software Zoom. A number of recent papers have addressed the use of video call technology for qualitative interviews, and while they mention that technological difficulties can be an issue, they report that both researchers and participants find the use of video calls for interviews to be comparable with face-to-face interviews in terms of rapport and comfort (Archibald *et al.*, 2019; Irani, 2019; Mirick and Wladkowski, 2019). My participants were all technologically savvy and had become increasingly used to video calls during lockdown. As a researcher with prior experience of face-to-face interviewing I felt the interview medium was of no detriment to the quality of the interview, and in many cases the fact that participants were in their own homes helped to put them at ease.

3.5.2 Piloting interviews

I conducted one pilot interview with a friend in a related field i.e., IT network maintenance. This experience helped me primarily in rehearsing how I would phrase questions so that they did not sound overly officious or repetitive. It also helped me in managing the technology involved in video calling.

3.5.3 The interviews

A topic guide (See Appendix B) ensured that I asked a standardised set of questions suitable for eliciting data to address my research questions, in a way that means responses could be compared and contrasted. However, some participants had certain areas of expertise, or particular passions, which meant that there was variation in the content of the interviews. What was consistent was a focus on biographies, points of tension between work and life course experiences, and discussion of the field(s) that people operated in. Interviews took between one hour and one hour 45 minutes. Length of interview tended not to be a function of chronological age of participants, but rather their varied work histories along with life course events which have impacted their careers.

Questions were designed so as to be appropriate for my CR approach which places importance on context as well as personal narratives. To that end, I first ask some demographic questions about age, nationality (and when came to UK if applicable), gender identity, ethnic identity, class identity (self-declared), disability status, and geographical location of home and work. These questions elicited responses which later helped to assess how participants' experiences were shaped by 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 1990) and other things such as geographical inequalities.

Next, a discussion about education was had in order to gain an understanding of cultural and social capital relevant to the field of work, after which a participant-led career history was requested, going from the transition from education to work up until the present, focusing on transitions, renegotiations, and barriers to progress. I took notes during this time and asked for clarifications if necessary. Having heard this account, I used my notes to pick up on certain transitions that interested me, including bringing in aspects of theory in order to aid further reflection for participants. This revealed 'actors' understandings and rationales for action' (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 116) including their 'reflexivity, individual reasoning, and their grounding in the "inner conversation"' (Smith and Elger, 2014, p. 123) which are 'causally efficacious'. From descriptions of transitions, I was able to probe about the varied outcomes of any renegotiation in participation, including how changes in time spent at work affected their success. Finally, I asked about any future plans they might have, alongside questions about the future of their industry in order to try and understand their plans in the context that they understood them. For example, why plans for retraining into a related role were important because the current programming language being used was becoming obsolete (Philip).

Balancing the 'theory-led' aspect of interviews with the importance of supporting participants as reflexive 'active interviewees' meant that I worked to ensure a balance of structure and explanation about my interview style with space to allow the subjective experiences of workers to be expressed in participants' own terms, before bringing in questions to facilitate knowledge sharing and reflexivity. In the interviews it was clear that many participants were already highly reflexive about their careers, with existing (not necessarily academic) theories about their place in their wider context. I felt that the majority of participants also welcomed the opportunity to speak about their experiences in terms of the theoretical lenses I brought up. I judge that the use of theory in asking participants to reflect on their experience did elicit good data which would otherwise have gone unsaid.

3.5.4 Recording and transcribing interview data

I recorded the audio from all video interviews using either Adobe Audition, which I then post-produced to improve the sound quality, or my iPhone's 'voice recorder' app which is encrypted by facial recognition. These files were then saved onto the University of Southampton's OneDrive server in mp3 format. Transcription was done either by myself (15) or through a professional transcription service (15) which was paid for from funds available to me from the University/ESRC. I needed to outsource this work because Covid lockdowns and childcare restricted my ability to work for many months. I experimented with automated transcription, but this was of limited quality at the time so required too much editing for it to be time effective. When I did do my own transcribing, the act of listening and interpreting the audio was very valuable for the transcriptions that I did myself. Anonymisation of names and locations (either by using pseudonyms or generalising places to regions where appropriate) was done initially in transcripts, and then throughout the writing process to ensure that no-one's identity can be worked out.

3.6 Analysis

This section outlines the process of analysis using qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, and an account of my experience analysing the data. I then outline the final conceptual framework that I used in the analysis.

3.6.1 The process of analysis

Once all interviews had been conducted and transcribed, I began data analysis with the assistance of Atlas.ti 9. Atlas.ti is a piece of qualitative data analysis software which I found to be of use in a number of ways. Atlas.ti allows for thematic coding that is not necessarily organised hierarchically. Instead, codes can be linked in a variety of ways such as 'is a part of', 'contradicts', or 'is a cause of', or you can assign your own relationship between codes, which gives more freedom than code trees in NVivo. Atlas.ti assists effective visualisation of conceptual frameworks and coding relationships through its 'network' tool, which I found to be useful when beginning to make sense of the findings. The software allows each transcript to be assigned a set of 'attributes' based on the characteristics of the participants. This was very useful when used in conjunction

with codes for comparing the experiences of different participants based on things such as class origin, gender, age, caring responsibilities, and level of education. The full list of attributes is available in Appendix C. Finally, memos were used to keep track of my thinking throughout the analysis process.

Initial thematic coding (the first step of CR 'abduction') was done with *a priori* codes developed from the literature that covered issues related to the digital and creative industries and a consideration of life course phases and transitions, and then with codes that emerged from the process of reading the transcripts. Codes focused on a number of areas:

- Codes that spoke to the political economic and organisational contexts of work in the three fields of study, taken from the reading I have done (discussed in Chapter 2). These codes were important because they placed the participants and their actions in context, meaning it is possible to make sense of their actions.
- Codes related to life course events, phases, transitions. For example, 'LC_Phase_Establishing Career', or 'LC_Event_Buy Home'. These allowed me to see each participant's key experiences or compare experiences across participants.
- There were lots of descriptive codes that emerged from the interviews, and many themes were developed from these. For example, descriptions of how people trained on the job turned into the temporal consciousness of 'training time'.
- 'Feelings' codes (include feelings, perceptions, pressure, realisations, values) were co-coded with descriptions of work, work transitions, or life course transitions. These codes were the basis of the findings related to 'life course tensions'. They often linked to the codes on good or poor mental and physical health.
- 'Push' and 'pull' factors were coded, much like Balderson et al. (2020), although these were developed independently of that article.
- 'Strategies' were coded, which were the thoughts and actions related to making changes to work in order to sustain a career.
- Outcomes were coded as good or bad, mixed, or unclear. I then considered the reasons for these by thinking about the context in which these feelings were taking place i.e., what led to these opinions.
- There are codes related to Bourdieusian capitals, indicating a participant's ability to operate successfully in a field.

- There are codes on inequalities related to age, class, gender, race, LGBTQ+, disability, and geography that ended up falling under the banner of inequality regimes once I had made the connection between these issues and the historical formation of the fields of study.
- Codes for 'age' were used when people discussed how their age played a role in their experiences.
- Future plans were coded with 'future' or 'retirement' and provided an indication of participants' ability to plan long-term.
- Finally, 'awesome quotes' were identified as particularly useful for including in the write up.

3.6.2 My 'temporal turn'

Once I had coded the transcripts and spent some time thinking about the way that careers changed over the life course, it became apparent that there were many aspects of the findings which related to time:

- Inequalities related to the time required to access and progress in work, affecting field position (both in terms of roles and seniority). This can be termed 'time inequality'.
- The quality of time at work, which corresponds to Atkinsons' (2019) 'temporal consciousnesses'.
- The balance of time between work and non-work fields, and the quality of time (temporal consciousnesses) in both those fields. This led to a consideration of life course tensions.
- The way field position affects the experiences of life course tensions, linked to 'time inequalities' in someone's early career.
- Crucially, the actions that led to a renegotiation of time between work and non-work as a way of alleviating those life course tensions.
- Finally, as a result of this renegotiation of time in the work field, whether people could still meet the demands of the fields.

Once I had established this 'time' analytical framework, I was able to use the existing codes by thinking about the way that career trajectories developed over the life course, utilising the codes that suited each phase. Firstly, people's formative years at home and in education. Then the time they worked to establish their careers and make progress to more senior roles if possible.

Following that, the 'life course experiences' codes were used alongside descriptions of people's roles and seniority, and the 'feelings' and 'push' and 'pull' codes, to understand how life course tensions arose and in what conditions people experienced these. Codes related to 'strategies' were used to explore the ways people acted to alleviate (or not) their life course tensions, which in the vast majority of cases involved a renegotiation of time at work (details of which were already coded descriptively). Finally, 'outcomes' codes revealed the way that these actions affected the life course tensions, and career trajectories. At all times, the codes that provided the context of participants' experiences were key in assessing how the structures and inequalities in the fields shaped actions and outcomes.

Throughout the time taken to develop my analysis, my understanding of the subject deepened, especially as a wealth of new research emerged while the research took place. While invaluable in informing my work, this did lead to some anxiety about others producing similar research. However, my approach and focus appear to have remained unique within the creative industries literature. Having explained the process of my analysis, I now present the final conceptual framework which I have used to explore the findings.

3.6.3 Conceptual framework

Informed by both literature and my research data, my conceptual framework was developed prior to and throughout data collection and analysis in a process of deep learning about the ways that digital and creative careers are navigated over the life course.

As set out in the literature review, the *demands of the fields* and the fields' 'temporal consciousnesses' (Atkinson, 2019) are used to understand how people experience work, and what work demands of them. They allow for an exploration of inequalities both in terms of societal inequalities which affect people's access to the training, networks, and money needed to access careers, and once within the fields, they are useful to understand unequal career progression within what can be considered the 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) of Video, Games, and Websites.

The use of 'temporal consciousness' goes on to be especially useful when considering participants' 'life course tensions'. Adopting Levy and Bühlmann's (2016) contention that we operate in multiple social fields (including work, home, and social fields), and Decoteau's (2016) work on the 'reflexive habitus' that is generated as people compare the logic of one social field with another, I analyse how the conflicting organising logics of different fields, i.e., their temporal consciousnesses, have caused reflexivity and led to any 'well-articulated plans for transformation' (Decoteau, 2016, p. 318) to resolve these life course tensions.

Levy and Bühlmann's three-part understanding of 'participation' in any field is used to understand participant's ability to act to resolve life course tensions. For Levy and Bühlmann, 'participation' encompasses an *amount of time* spent in the field (participation), the *role* one has in the field (division of labour), and the (hierarchical) *position* in the field. Understanding the amount of time spent in work (shaped by the demands of the field and its temporal consciousness), the role that people do, and their seniority/reputation, allows me to understand why it is that participants can or cannot act to resolve their life course tensions.

Levy and Bühlmann continue to be useful when considering the actions that are taken to resolve life course tensions. This is because these actions have involved a renegotiation of someone's 'participation profile' i.e., the balance of time spent between work and other social fields. This concept is bolstered by Hochschild's (2005) 5 strategies for managing parenthood, which I have adapted and extended to cover the different strategies for sustaining careers used by the participants, which often involve a renegotiation of time at work. Outcomes of these strategies for renegotiation are considered in relation to the demands of the fields, circling back to a focus on Bourdieu; For those who look to work less, are they able to continue to meet the demands of the fields and sustain their careers? For those who want to increase their time at work, do they possess the right mix of capitals to be able to do this?

Finally, Tomlinson et al.'s (2018) consideration of the enabling or limiting role of institutions (often the state), organisations, and someone's social position in being able to realise 'flexible careers' is utilised to understand how participants' particular context shapes their experiences, often revealing the 'exceptions to the rules' that have enabled them to sustain their careers where others have not.

3.7 Further reflections

3.7.1 The impact of the pandemic

The pandemic hit just as I had gained my original ethics approval for organisational case study research. However, access to organisational workplaces was made impossible due to the lockdown. In addition, the willingness of gatekeepers to support such research, even in a remote capacity, was judged to be lacking. This was later confirmed by replies to email correspondence I had sent prior to the pandemic, dismissing my request for access out of hand:

> Needless to say, we are managing the Covid-19 situation which understandably has overtaken daily business for now and for the foreseeable.

Therefore, I changed my methods so that I could still conduct my study using the same CR approach while necessarily shifting focus from the organisation to the individual. This change in methods was straightforward. I simply limited my data collection to semi-structured in-depth interviews with workers, ensuring I gained as much information as possible about context such as details on organisational cultures, participants' opinions about the industry they worked in, and any personal information which would speak to individual circumstances, useful for the 'retroduction' stage of analysis.

While the change in methods was straightforward, the implication for the focus on the study was profound. The study was no longer focused on organisational case studies, but rather is centred the individual worker, with the macro context and mediating role of organisations being less prominent in the data collected. While making for a different PhD, the data collected was suitably 'thick' (Geertz, 1973) for a PhD study, allowing for an exploration of the experiences of digital and creative workers, while taking into account the context of the field of study, meaning some wider conclusions could be drawn.

Much emergent research is looking to assess the impact of the pandemic on working practices (Kaushik and Guleria, 2020; Kniffin *et al.*, 2021). However, as my research was taking place during and soon after the lockdowns and asking people to reflect on their work prior to the pandemic, it was not possible to judge the impact of the pandemic, other than immediate issues, in the interviews.

3.7.2 Positionality

It is of course important to recognise my own positionality (Qin, 2016) in conducting this research, which has at times resulted in an imbalance of power between myself and the participants of the study in various ways. While for many of the interviews I have been either 'researching across' to people in similar class positions to myself, or 'researching up' in terms of the high-knowledge or high-power positions which participants hold (Aguiar and Schneider, 2016), I understand my position as a 41-year-old middle-class white male who is claiming to be an expert in the field of research may have affected the dynamics of interviews with people who are historically structurally discriminated against in the UK, and in the workplace. The power dynamics evident in the workplace are very similar to those within academia, with the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) being close to my appearance and background. It is important for me to be aware of this and be mindful of any assumptions I have about how people experience their lives (Mason, 2002). Another key point of inequality in this research is age, and this was at the forefront of my mind in interviews and later when analysing data. For those between 35 and 45, I felt on-par with them when discussing age, but I felt that those who were older may have different experiences than my age cohort, and I was mindful to take any differences of perspective seriously regarding age and their position in the field/wider society. Above all, I aimed to show respect and gratitude to all participants, and made it known that I valued their expertise and the time they had given me.

When considering the extent to which I am an 'insider' or 'outsider' researcher (Silverman, 2013) in the fields I am studying, this has varied with the industries that participants have worked in. I have an affinity with creative workers, especially in sound and visuals which stems from my undergraduate music technology degree, teaching career, and music performance background. I currently produce and present podcasts, so I do share current experiences with some participants, although not in terms of needing to make a living out of the work. I have the least similarities with those in technical roles in Games and Websites as I do not have a passion for this work and have no personal experience working in that way. It has been evident to me that these differing

sympathies for the field of work has an effect on how the interviews have gone, and the data I have elicited. Rapport was easier to build with those in Video and the content creation side of Games and Websites, whereas I had less in common and less ability to connect to those who work on the technical side. However, many of these people expressed similar political values to me which did help open up communication. Overall, my relationship with participants could be described as being somewhere between a 'peripheral member researcher' where I do not take part in the group's activities, and an 'active member researcher' where I am involved in (some of) the central activities, without fully committing to their values and goals (Adler and Adler, 1987). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest this 'space between' being an insider and an outsider researcher can have its advantages because while from my own experiences I can know the experiences of the participants to some extent, I am able to maintain the professional distance of an academic. Dwyer and Buckle argue that as academics who have read a great deal about the research area, researchers could never be complete insiders 'fully affiliated' to participants experience (Adler and Adler, 1987), but rather (where I am interviewing a range of people) closer to an insider position with some participants than others (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

3.7.3 Politics

Unlike a researcher who might share a marginalised status with those in the industries studied (or within academia) it is a fair criticism that I cannot fully understand the stakes for those that do suffer marginalisation and discrimination. However, my political position when approaching this research has always been that I hope to produce research outcomes which enable workers to overcome structural/cultural barriers to their success. No aspect of someone's background and identity should impede careers as workers should be judged on their merits not on their social position.

Thesis findings are explicitly delivered from this normative position, with the intension of making a difference to the lives of marginalised groups within the digital and creative industries. I hope to be able to leverage my findings in such a way as to influence government and organisational policy. In my current role (since June 2022) as an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion researcher at the University of York, I am fortunate that my PhD and subsequent research will be able to have an impact as I am working closely with organisations in the screen industries (TV, film, games).

3.8 Introduction to the findings

This final section of the methodology introduces the themes of each of the findings chapters.

Chapter 4 draws on Bourdieu to consider the inequalities present in the 'All-In' phase of careers in the fields of study, looking at the capital requirements, as well as the time needed, in order to access and progress in work prior to when the majority of participants experience 'life course tensions'. The 'All-In' phase of work, where people tend to act as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) committing fully to work in the fields of study, is the chapter's focus for two reasons. Firstly, it became apparent that inequalities prior to and during the 'All-In' phase of work had important implications for career progression, and consequent 'field position' (role and seniority). This, as explored in later chapters, has significant knock-on effects for the ability to renegotiate participation in work in order to resolve life course tensions. Secondly, an account of the demands of the fields of study in the 'All-In' phase provides a reference point to return to in Chapter 6 where I consider whether someone is able to continue to meet the capital demands of the field after they have renegotiated their participation profile.

Chapter 5 considers 'life course tensions' through an exploration of competing 'temporal consciousnesses'. The first part of the chapter considers the experiences of participants in the 'All-In' phase to develop field-specific temporal consciousnesses for the three fields. Findings show how these relate to production practices and employment type. The rest of the chapter considers the narratives of participants who have discussed a variety of non-work 'temporal consciousnesses', and the tensions that have arisen between work and non-work across the life course. This tension is framed in terms of Decoteau's (2016) 'reflexive habitus', as the logic of the work field (its temporal consciousness) is compared to that of another. Findings show that participants have variously struggled with wanting to work less due to childcare, stress, or too much time away from the home, or later in life wanting to work more as they face obsolescence or (often gendered) ageism. How these life course tensions are experienced is shown to relate to the field position that participants have been able to attain, indicating how inequalities in the 'All-In' phase continue to affect people over the life course.

Chapter 6 focuses on the extent to which participants have been able to employ strategies that have resolved life course tensions and sustained their careers. This is done through a

consideration of how participants have renegotiated their ‘participation profile’ (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016). Once again, field position is shown to be key to having the agency to renegotiate participation in work, explaining how inequalities are compounded over the life course, leading to uneven levels of worker attrition. However, in addition, a range of *enabling conditions* such as family support and the role of supportive organisations play a key role in helping people renegotiate their participation profile, which points to ways that such conditions could be replicated to help more older workers sustain their careers. Outcomes of these renegotiations are explored which reveals a number of issues. Firstly, for someone to continue to work there are often compromises. Participants can be forced to do a role at a lower level, a role that is less prestigious, or to move fields which potentially hampers their career progression. Secondly, relating to the demands of the fields identified in Chapter 4, a renegotiation of time can mean that participants are no longer able to meet the demands of the field, and careers suffer as a result.

Having outlined the structure of the findings, the thesis now moves to the first of those chapters, the experiences of work in the ‘All-In’ phase of work as people look to establish their careers in the three fields of Video, Games, and Websites.

Chapter 4 Early career outcomes in Video, Games, and Websites

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the experiences of early careers (the 'All-In' phase) within Video, Games, and Websites, assessing how inequalities shape early- and mid-career outcomes prior to the 'life course experiences' that often demand that participants focus on things other than work. This is done because, as shown in subsequent chapters, someone's 'field position' (role and seniority/reputation) at the time of these life course experiences has a big effect on how they are experienced, and the actions that people are able to take to resolve any tensions that arise.

Taking a Bourdieusian approach to understanding the extent to which participants are able to succeed in the fields of study, the chapter builds on the literature from Chapter 2 by exploring the demands of the fields related to training, hiring practices, precarious employment, and high time demands. Analysis reveals how inequalities related to the possession of cultural, social, and economic capitals, *and time*, affects participants' ability to meet these demands in order to access and progress their careers. Access is affected by participants' 'deficits' in capitals and time, with them finding it hard to compete with more advantaged workers for entry into the field. These deficits represent inequalities that existed *prior* to entering the field. Being able to sustain work and progress a career is affected by these deficits, as well as the *unequal demands of the field.* By this I mean that due to discrimination and marginalisation, those who are distant from the somatic norm (Puwar, 2001) of white, middle-class men without caring responsibilities, have to possess more experience or formal training, and make more effort to access the networks required to gain work. These are inequalities within the 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) of the fields of study, interacting with wider social inequalities.

Exploring these inequalities reveals the mechanism for how inequalities result in unequal career outcomes. For those participants with deficits of cultural, social, and economic capitals, access and progression *takes more time* to achieve compared to more advantaged workers. This 'time inequality' manifests in two ways. In the short-term, accessing the right training and networks, or gaining enough experience, takes longer to do. As a result, longer-term career progression takes

longer, affecting the role/seniority that participants are able to achieve by the time 'life course tensions' arise.

In the process of exploring unequal career outcomes in the 'All-In' phase, the chapter develops a number of additional contributions. Firstly, findings provide a reference point for understanding the capital and time demands of the fields. This is used in later chapters when considering the extent to which the actions that participants have taken to sustain work over the life course allow them to continue to meet these demands. Secondly, in service of this later analysis, I show how it is fruitful to conceptualise 'time' as another form of capital. Data shows that 1). Time capital is in a dynamic relationship with the other forms of capital; the more time someone has, the more cultural and social capital they are able to develop. Contrastingly, the less time someone has, the less they are able to commit to developing these capitals. This includes where someone has to spend time earning money elsewhere to make ends meet, they will have less time to commit developing the capitals required on them. 2). Time demands are not just about having *enough time*, but about needing this time to be committed *at the right time* (analogous with cultural capital needing to be of the appropriate sort for the field). This has implications for those who can only work at certain times due to other commitments. 3). Time availability (someone's time capital) shapes their habitus, and that someone's habitus will consequently be more or less suited to the way the field operates (explored in-depth in Chapter 5). Finally, findings indicate that for workers who are unable to meet the demands of the fields in the 'All-In' phase, a 'filtering out' occurs. This is the first point in the thesis that people are considered to leave the industries.

The chapter is structured as follows. Descriptive sections consider the four key aspects of working in the digital and creative industries, explored with reference to research data and literature to reveal the nuances of the different fields of study. Following this there is a discussion of how inequalities have shaped the experiences of participants. Bringing these discussions of inequalities together, I argue that inequalities in training, hiring practices, and precarious employment can be considered in terms of 'time inequalities', both in day-to-day working, and in longer-term career progression. Next, based on the previous discussions, the case is made for understanding 'time' as an additional form of capital, and how this relates to inequalities, both in what has been covered in this chapter and looking ahead to careers over the life course. Finally, conclusions are drawn about how the demands of the field and inequalities affect early- to mid-career progression, which the thesis argues is vital to understand when assessing how workers experience tensions

between work and other aspects of their lives, and the extent to which they are able to go on to resolve them to sustain their careers.

4.2 Training

Acquiring the right cultural capital to enter the workforce, in the forms of both skills and the 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1977), has been done with a combination of formal and informal learning depending on the field, role, and when someone entered the workforce. Ongoing training, done to maintain the required cultural capital to succeed in the field, has been done either on-the-job, in spare time outside of work, or with a return to formal (often university) education. This section sets out the various ways that participants in the three fields of study acquired and maintained the cultural capital needed for their careers in the 'All-In phase', followed by a look at the inequalities that have affected this acquisition. Understanding the challenges faced during training provides us with an indication of inequalities in the accumulation of cultural capital both prior to entering the field, and within the field. Both of these issues affect career trajectories, relevant for understanding how people are able to sustain work over the life course.

4.2.1 Video

Many Video careers in the sample have been trained for initially via university, where an understanding of the TV and film industries has been developed, and placements have given participants valuable experience (Erica, Holly, Ester, Judith). These experiences strongly echo the literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Randle, Kurian and Leung, 2007; Allen *et al.*, 2013; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Carey, Brien and Gable, 2021). As discussed later, in addition to the development of cultural capital through this training, the networks that are developed are key to accessing early roles. This seems to be much more important than in the other fields of study, reflecting the literature from the field (Blair, Grey and Randle, 2001; Morris, Farrell and Reed, 2016; Morris, McKinlay and Farrell, 2021). Experience gained at university can lead to work during studies, and Martin dropped out of his course because he felt working would be more beneficial than finishing his course. However, he later had to complete a privately run course in order to begin work in the art department. Despite the emphasis on university training, it is possible to start in junior positions and learn on the job before attending formal education in a relevant subject to progress (Alicia). Producers have come into Video with non-specialist degrees, using

their subject-specific knowledge and transferrable skills to produce niche content (Rosa, Ophelia). Ruby came from publishing into production, using transferrable skills and taking advantage of a broadcasters' training scheme. Neil learnt animation on a short course in his transition from Websites to Video. Both Dennis and Roger developed their YouTube channels through ad hoc learning they had picked up in previous roles. These alternative routes were not discussed in any detail in the literature reviewed and represents and interesting addition to knowledge. Once in a role in TV, many participants have learnt as they have gone along, for example developing camera and sound skills in order to be employable on small-budget factual programming (Holly). This is expected to be done by workers, with no institutional support, in line with Thynne (2000), Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011), and Eikhof and Warhurst (2013). As production practices change over time, the need to keep up with training needs is a challenge for participants, especially those that contemplate time away from work (Erica). This is discussed in later chapters as a barrier to sustaining careers.

4.2.2 Games

Findings corroborate Harvey (2019) who highlights how historically, there have been a variety of routes into Games. In the sample these include via less formal routes such as Quality Assurance (QA) and localisation which could be accessed as entry-level roles. Participants have then trained up to specialise in QA or to do other roles while working in industry (Michael, Gray). Justin taught himself games design at home having done an unrelated degree. Formal training via university has been the route in for Jess, and in order to specialise in animation, Gray had to return to university to complete an MA. Those participants in producer roles have transitioned from other fields using transferable skills, discussed in later chapters. Formal ongoing training in Games has been funded or part-funded by employers (Gray, Justin), while others have had to do ad hoc training in order to perform their roles (Erik, Justin). In contrast to the literature (Ozimek and Rueda, 2021), there was no mention of games jams playing a role in ongoing training, with many participants feeling supported in their training needs within the working time. This finding may be a result of the sample, of which the majority have worked for supportive studios, possibly explaining their longevity in the industry.

4.2.3 Websites

In line with Wang and Zahadat (2009), the trend for training into Websites (and Games) has been increasing formalisation over time. When Websites were in their infancy, participants' accounts reveal that they transitioned into this work from other related fields such as advertising (Adam, Kanvar), print editing (Charles), or IT training (Max), developing the skills to do web-based roles in an ad hoc, self-taught manner. These roles tended to be generalist roles due to the lack of complexity in the early days of Websites. Later, increasing specialisation meant that younger participants have needed to complete undergraduate degrees to develop the skills required (Douglas). As will be discussed in later chapters, the increased specialisation of training has proven to be a barrier to sustaining careers for some of those early generalists, with ongoing training often being at the time and expense of individuals, without support from employers. However, at the time that they entered the workforce, there appeared to be few barriers in terms of cost or accessibility of training.

4.2.4 Inequalities in training

While useful in fleshing out the literature, these descriptions of training in the fields of study do not sufficiently illustrate the experiences of participants which, for their initial training, has often been shaped by the availability of economic capital before entering the field. This relates to their class background, their willingness to acquire debt, or the availability of grants. Different experiences of training, and the consequent social capital that is developed alongside training, is of relevance to understanding early- to mid-career progression. Training inequalities once within work are signposted in this section and are picked up in more detail in later chapters.

For 26 of the thirty participants, university has been the way to gain the skills necessary to start their careers. Holly explains the value in having a work placement as part of her university degree:

> It included a work placement which was quite key to actually getting started in the industry …we basically all did six months unpaid work placements as part of our degree, so it was a four-year course.

Judith highlights the importance of her university placement for learning about the industry and being better placed to find work:

> Leaving uni… I had a CV and that was a just tremendous advantage. I had a researcher credit on a BBC1 primetime blue-chip series… That was a massive boon coming out of university because you'd been in the industry, and you knew what you were trying to get into.

Even when a university course has not been directly relevant to a role, the middle-class disposition that a graduate expresses and the institutionalised cultural capital gained is important. Ophelia studied an unrelated subject at Oxford, and coupled with private schooling, this prestige likely helped her to get into the BBC (which she mentions only as being unproblematic). These experiences echo Allen *et al.* (2013) in so far as all participants except Alicia and Martin conform to the description of 'resource-rich middle-class student' (2013, p. 447), being able to navigate both university and the work placement experience which favours such a habitus. Findings also echo Lee (2011) who discusses how having the right cultural capital – based on a middle-class disposition – will facilitate gaining work through 'fitting in'.

Some participants completed master's degrees in subjects that helped them get their first jobs (Rhonda, Jess), either by developing additional skills, achieving institutionalised cultural capital through certification, or by the continued development of networks. The extra time afforded to people in this additional pre-career training period has been important because it helped them develop a suitable habitus for the field. Some participants have gone on to do postgraduate higher education courses that have aided their career trajectories later on, demonstrating an undergraduate education's lasting importance for workers in the fields of study. Ophelia and Cody's comfort within academia meant they were later able to complete master's degrees which aided their later careers. Similarly, Gray studied languages which initially helped them get into Games through localisation, later studying an MA in 3D animation which allowed them to change roles.

A commitment to postgraduate study requires not only a willingness to stay in education, but the financial resources to do so; Ophelia and Cody could only study at postgraduate level with the financial help of their partners. Jess lived at home and worked part-time while doing her master's in order to afford it. Rhonda was only able to do her masters due to a scholarship:

> I never had any financial backup… I couldn't go and ask my mum to borrow ten grand to go and do my MA… she just didn't have it.

With the proliferation of higher education and consequent 'credential inflation' (Allen *et al.*, 2013, p. 448) which devalues undergraduate degrees, alongside the increased specialisation of roles, having a master's is more important than ever for attaining and sustaining work in the fields studied. For those from private education/elite universities, there is a link to relatively early seniority in the field, and consequent high degree of agency compared to other workers, discussed in Chapter 5. Allen *et al.*'s (2013) contention that university acts as a 'filtering site' that privileges the middle-classes appears evident in the sample. They are majority middle class, able to pay for (or be willing to acquire debt for) their education. They also possess, and continue to develop throughout their studies, the appropriate habitus for working in the middle-class spaces of their industries.

Conversely, those without the disposition or resources to study in the same way are at a disadvantage. In line with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Harvey, 2019), for the population that have not attended university, access to, and progression within, this work is harder. Those in the sample that did not attend university got into the roles via atypical routes. Michael got his first junior testing role in Games through a friend. Max took a sidewards step into an IT training role at a council. Roger got into acting through amateur productions, only much later moving into YouTube production. Cathy had a private school education and went to the BBC as a legal secretary before making her way into production through an internal application process. The degree to which her social position aided this is unfortunately not discussed in the interview. Early Website workers, i.e., those that started at the beginning of mass adoption of the internet, entered via related fields of IT support (Max), graphic design (Adam), editing (Charles), and CD-ROM resource development (Rosa, Erik), when there were no degrees widely available to train in web development. Today this is not the case (Wang and Zahadat, 2009; Alston, Walsh and Westhead, 2015), and with the normalisation of 'specialist' as opposed to 'generalist' roles in Websites, either an HND or degree is required for these roles (Prospects.ac.uk, 2022). In summary, there are few 'standard' (contemporary) routes into the roles encountered in this thesis that do not require some form of higher education.

Where university has not provided sufficient skills or accreditation for roles, the ability to fund additional courses becomes important. Martin had to sell everything to pay for a training course, in contrast to others on the course:

> I had four weeks of eBay-ing everything I owned. I got rid of everything to scrape the money together. Because… there were grants available, but I didn't time that right. And that course was really sold as 'if you do this, you'll get in'.
>
> …A lot of the kids there, their parents are paying for them to go, because they'd gone to uni, they wanted to work in film, and they had parents who could put 5, 6 thousand pounds, and a car, and accommodation towards it, and as a result they could go.

This shows the disparity in access for a course that acted as an alternative entry point into industry, revealing how economic capital can be converted to cultural and social capital. For those without money or access to funding, overcoming this barrier to training is challenging. However, Ruby's experience of doing a paid training scheme with a national broadcaster after having children is an encouraging sign of the sort of progressive intervention needed to overcome inequalities in access. Yet, just as with diversity schemes which train people from underrepresented backgrounds (Ozimek, 2020), her example represents a drop in the ocean compared to the standard mode of entry. As such, it acts to highlight the challenges faced by most compared to the few 'success' stories, of which Ruby is one.

Inequalities in ongoing training relates to employer support, economic capital, being in work in order to train, and concerns about taking time out of work leading to out-of-date skills. Some employed participants have had full or partial help to train where ad hoc on-the-job training has not been possible (Gray, Douglas, Cody). However, freelancers and those in roles without organisational support have to find money and time for ongoing training, a concern for a number of participants (Max, Charles, Philip). Workers in TV and film have all discussed their experiences learning on-the-job. A number of participants discuss the struggle they have had in picking things up while working, often while 'blagging' their way into and through roles by over-promoting themselves and hoping they will not get found out. This indicates a lack of institutionalised training (where 'communities of practice' support trainees through access to experts), supporting the research from Grugulis and Stoyanova (2011), and also Thynne (2000). In terms of inequalities, these experiences indicate the fact that in order to maintain relevant training, people need to be in work; those unable to pick up work (discussed in the next section) will also suffer from a lack of training opportunities. A concern by those considering taking time away from work is that the skills they have always learnt on-the-job will become obsolete (Erica, Holly). These themes are picked up in detail in later chapters.

4.3 Hiring practices

Interview data shows that hiring practices in Websites, Games, and Video vary depending on field, with (contemporary) Website and Game jobs tending to offer formalised routes, and Video (specifically TV and film) being more informal and based on access to networks. However, these are not hard-and-fast rules, especially because there are people in the sample who accessed work in the early days of Websites and Games where, just as with training, hiring practices were less formal. The hiring practices described below can be understood to be along a continuum of formal to informal, featuring at one end a bureaucratic and equitable application process, and at the other, nepotistic, opportunistic, or based on building reputation through out-of-hours working and socialising.

4.3.1 Video

In line with the literature in Chapter 2 (Lee, 2011; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; for example Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Wreyford, 2015; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020), Video, specifically TV and film, have been typified by reliance on informal networks, continuous working (as 'crewing up' on future projects is done while on-the-job), and a focus on reputation where the adage 'you're only as good as your last credit' (Erica) dominates many people's experiences.

Initial access to work can be challenging for those without an exceptional existing body of work and an agent (Rhonda). Even with experience from university placements, participants spent many months trying to break into the industry in entry-level roles (Holly, Ester, Judith, Martin), in line with research from York and Eikhof (2016). This is picked up again later when discussing precarious employment. Participants have talked about 'luck' or 'a lucky break' which has either hidden exceptional talent (Rhonda), or been used to obscure someone's privileged position of having the time and resources, or family support (Ester) to stick at something until their 'lucky break' comes along, echoing what Xu (2021) has said about economic capital providing time to 'wait' for the right roles.

Lots of work is picked up on-the-job as one production rolls into another and recruitment is done based on who the recruiter knows. This closely echoes how Morris, McKinlay and Farrell (2021) describe the way networks in film and TV use networks as neo-bureaucratic forms of control over the workforce. In addition, a number of participants (Cathy, Holly, Erica) have discussed how a culture of drinking after work has been part of work culture and key to maintaining social networks. These practices perpetuate homophilic hiring practices. Informal hiring and networking are returned to in later chapters as the need to maintain social capital is strongly linked to the time people are able to commit to work, a core theme of this thesis. Finally, career progression is closely linked to risk (for the production) and trust (of the worker), where managers will not promote people until they have proven they can do the role (Holly, Judith). This once again results in homophilic hiring, and a reluctance to entertain things such as job sharing for those with caring responsibilities (Swords *et al.*, 2022). This therefore leads to the reproduction of the somatic norm in senior roles. Those that have been able to progress while balancing other aspects of their lives have done so due to the (atypical) support of production companies (Ester, Judith), echoing what Tomlinson et al. (2018) say about the importance of organisational support for flexible careers.

4.3.2 Games

While a couple of participants were able to get their introductions to Games through friends (Michael, Justin), most took formal roots in, using either formal or informal training to prove their competence. Rachel transitioned from an IT role, and Rosa, Ophelia, Natasha, and Jess transitioned to Games with some experience in Video or Websites, where their transferrable skills meant they were suitably qualified. Many of these stories are picked up in later chapters. As highlighted by Ozimek and Rueda (2021), having entered the workforce, career development can become reliant on developing reputation within the norms of the industry, often involving participation in ‘crunch’ which are linked to long, intense, and out-of-hours working. Resisting this practice has resulted in marginalisation by employers (Michael). Due to these time pressures, continued employment over the life course has, especially for women in the sample, only been possible as a result of supportive organisational cultures that has supported their employment while doing less of these out-of-hours activities. This again echoes Tomlinson et al. (2018), and is picked up in detail in later chapters. Jess has highlighted how career progression is shaped by a ‘clique-iness’ based on gender and class, which echoes discussion in Harvey (2019).

4.3.3 Websites

Early Websites roles arose for Charles, Max, and Adam due to happenstance. Adam was temping at a utilities company and was able to offer his nascent computer-aided design skills to gain work. Charles was working for a friend in publishing when websites took off and he transitioned over by learning the basics of web design in an ad hoc manner. Max was asked by his council employer to do IT training as they knew he had an interest in computers. However, most roles in websites have been via formal routes. Douglas, Kanvar, Cody, Austin, Philip, Erik, Rosa, Ophelia, (and later in their careers, Charles and Max) have all attained roles through formal application processes when working as employed members of staff. Some of these people have later gone on to freelance working which has required the leveraging of reputations and networks to garner work (Rosa, Ophelia, Philip, discussed in later chapters). Austin has relied on short-term 'piecework' (Lehdonvirta, 2018) via platforms to make additional money on top of his longer-term contracts. While he was subject to the demands of platform labour (discussed in Chapter 2), he found that having this to fall back on provided employment in the gaps between more traditional fixed-term contracts. This use of platforms as supplementary to more traditional forms of work is an interesting addition to the literature. Cathy was able to move into Websites from TV while working at the BBC, leveraging her reputation (discussed in later chapters).

For many in Websites and Games, hiring practices did not feature prominently in their accounts. The exceptions are for those in Websites who have struggled with maintaining employable skillsets, and those in Games who have had to renegotiate their time commitments. Both of these issues are picked up in later chapters. In contrast, those in Video have focused much more on hiring practices, illustrating how dominant this issue has been for them.

4.3.4 Inequalities in hiring practices

As already alluded to in the descriptive work above, inequalities in hiring practices are more widespread when informal hiring practices exist. Data indicates that these inequalities are linked to who can convert their cultural capital (both formal education and their class-informed behaviours) into the social capital required to pick up work, and who has the ability to maintain social capital through being present at work or at social occasions, i.e., acting as the 'ideal worker' who can prioritise work above all else (Acker, 1990). For career progression, a consideration of who is trusted with more responsibility is needed. In line with the literature, this trust is

dependent to whether someone can operate as the 'ideal worker', and who is in possession of the right cultural capital, including embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Puwar, 2001; Lee, 2011; Wreyford, 2015; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020) which is converted to social capital. Time use is explored in detail in the section on high time demands later in this chapter; This section focuses on inequalities in the development of social capital for employment. These issues are now discussed in more detail.

4.3.4.1 The importance of university placements for acquiring social capital

In addition to the skills learnt on placements (discussed earlier) and the 'credit' achieved by working on a show, data shows how university work placements are useful for accessing work in Video through the conversion of cultural capital into the social capital needed to pick up work in the highly informal hiring environment. Ester explains how her university industry placement got her work, revealing how recruitment works in TV by 'crewing up' for new projects on current ones:

> Then I did a couple of follow-up things because I didn't have to go up to uni. Whenever you're on a job, everyone's talking about what the next job is, and so I got asked to do a couple of things afterwards, so I earned a bit of money after doing the work placement.

Erica also benefitted from her placement, getting a job at the same place after hearing about an opening while there:

> I had to interview and apply for the job. I think there were about seven of us who applied, but if I hadn't had done my work placement at [channel], I… maybe wouldn't have found out about the job. So, yes, absolutely helped me.

Placements that can lead to future work, offered at universities which specialise in broadcast studies and have very competitive entry requirements, are only available to a small number of people each year. For the majority of entrants, these 'good' placements are not available, and as Allen *et al.* (2013) have shown, are dependent on the ability of students to gain access to them and be able to commit to them instead of supporting themselves through paid work, both of which are a function of class position. In an effort to widen participation, some diversity schemes also offer paid placements, but schemes such as these are limited in size and subject to the whims of funders (Ozimek, 2020; Nwonka and Malik, 2021), making their impact on the industry negligible.

4.3.4.2 Socialising around work

With the benefits for gaining work that come with out-of-hours socialising, those who cannot attend due to other commitments, or who feel out of place, suffer. Erik rides a motorbike to work and lives in the suburbs, meaning he has not been able to fully participate in the drinking culture in his old company:

> I think that my business would have been bigger and more successful if I spent more time going to industry drinks. I have no doubt that would have made a difference.

While Erik suffered due to his own work/home preferences, Ophelia discusses how drinking after work is a youthful endeavour, indicating how older workers end up marginalised:

> At [company] there was a really heavy pub culture, you know, go out every night after work at six o'clock. I didn't really take part in that that much, partly because I already felt a bit older than most of the team. Me and my boss were in our 30s and everyone else was 25; we weren't old, but it just felt, you know…

Jess discusses how her previous experiences of drinking culture highlighted the gendered expectations of caring, and how her doing this now she has children (discussed in detail in the following chapters) seems unthinkable:

> When I look back to when I was in my 20s, we used to have a culture of going down the pub every Friday, without fail. And I could do that in my 20s and that was fine, but I can remember looking back and like, the guys used to come with us, the older guys that had kids, they still came with us! It was seen as, 'yeah that's ok, the wife's at home, she'll look after the kids'… I can't imagine being able to do that every Friday night, just being able to go out and leave my daughter with my partner.

Not being able to develop the social capital required to gain work disadvantages those who cannot partake in these social activities. This issue only becomes more important over the life course, as will be explored throughout the thesis.

4.3.4.3 Proximity to the somatic norm

Interview data supports the literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Wreyford, 2015; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020), revealing participants' perceptions of the creative industries as nepotistic, having homophilic hiring practices that favour certain groups. Those within or close to these groups (the somatic norms for the industries) have advantages when it comes to being hired, either because they have existing contacts with people in power, or their background and education lends them a trustworthiness that gets them hired. In contrast, those distant from the somatic norm are overlooked or not trusted. Martin discusses how access to networks and thus work is often related to knowing someone already in the field:

> There are quite a few famous family dynasties within the art department… So, if you know them, you've got a way in… Half the people in the industry will probably say that they had a friend working there, or a relative working there. They've got them in as work experience, and it just turned into a job…

Erica's account supports this, explaining how informal hiring practices are as a result of an industry imbued with risk where people tend to work with those they feel are trustworthy. As a result, the same exclusionary hiring practices that developed as the industry developed are perpetuated. Erica explains:

> People hire people they know. People hire people they've worked with before… that they feel they trust… I think that's where historically in television, it's the boys' club, it's the Oxbridge club, it's the private school… because they were the people there in the beginning… They're all white men, so they bring more white men in…

Holly echoes this, while also adding nuance with her comment on the ability for certain women to be included in senior positions if they have the economic or social capital:

> There are quite a few women in telly. They are upper-middle-class women who've maybe had those resources for a nanny or started higher up the chain because of connections.

This culture at the top is echoed at entry level, as revealed by Alicia. She says that anyone seen as an unknown is overlooked, and unless interventions are put into place to overcome this, the system continues in this way. Alicia explains this when asked why there are very few Black floor managers in TV:

> Because they've never been told [from diversity initiatives] that they have to be diverse… It's about who you know, and if all you know is people who look like you, then… it's recruitment in your own image, essentially. They didn't know me… I was some bird who just turned up, as far as they were concerned.

Jess' discussion of class and nepotism in Games echoes that of TV/film, with those who went to private schools, the same universities, or previously worked together helping each other out:

> There's a lot of that in the games industry. It's a lot of hiring your mates and promoting your mates into roles and stuff like that.

The somatic norm in Games and Websites is largely male, affecting attitudes and hiring practices. Rachel discusses the lack of women in Games and the attitudes towards representation when she started:

> I was the only woman when I joined my first company… The early 2000s were real rough. Like, no one cared about representation in games. Everybody thought that games was a meritocracy… which is garbage.

While she and others say that this has improved as the years have gone on, there are still gendered attitudes to hiring. Michael discusses gendered hiring and seniority in the Games, arguing that the industry excludes women:

> [T]he games industry [is] heavily male-dominated, and it's a huge problem… When I was working in localisation [a junior role] that's actually more skewed towards female, just because I guess languages are more balanced or something… It's male-dominated within management… There are lots of women who could work in this industry very easily and are probably qualified and are probably applying for roles, and just don't get them because a male applies.

Participants in Websites have highlighted a gender imbalance, especially in technical roles. While they are quick to identify the problem, no one has been able to pinpoint why this is the case, other than pointing to wider cultural issues: 'I assume there's something stopping women from wanting to kind of go to university to learn software engineering, which is quite sad' (Douglas).

This discussion of the variations of the ‘somatic norm’ indicates the barriers that exist for those distant from it. Data revealing the experiences of those marginalised by these hiring practices are now discussed.

4.3.4.4 Navigating unequal hiring practices

Those participants who are removed from this somatic norm in some way share their experiences and express the ways in which they feel they have to compensate. Discussing accents, Judith, a white Irish woman, highlights how her accent has helped her bypass issues of class in TV:

> I recognise that there is an awful lot of Southern, well-spoken white males in the industry. I remember that very vividly at the very start of my career…
>
> One of the big things that I think has been a massive advantage to me in my career, and I really do not underestimate this, is my accent being unknowable! [People] don't know how to read me… They don't know what my background is… They cannot get the class thing, so I've really recognised that that's an advantage that I have that lots of English people don't have.

This has also been the case for Erik (Australian accent) and Ester (Scottish accent). While accents have worked to obscure class for these people, Kanvar and Alicia, both people of colour, have had different experiences which extend beyond their accents to their ethnicity. Alicia discusses her situation as a Black woman in TV:

> [T]here have never been any Black women [in this role] as far as I know. I've been asking around… and no one can give me a name. I think because of that, people think because they haven't seen one, they don't think that one exists, therefore I can't be a [role].
>
> I've had it on [show]… there's me and three other white guys… The white tech assistant literally ignores me and goes up to [one of the white guys] and asked a question about something which pertained to [my role]. They very sheepishly go, 'You want to speak to Alicia'. They turned around and were like, you can see it on their faces trying to work it out. It's like, 'Why do I want to speak to her for?'

The experience of being the only Black woman to do her role has shaped the way she is received, making her everyday interactions a site of struggle. Talking about the ways she has to compensate for this sort of reception, Alicia says:

> I have to be better than everybody else, or at least try to, but it's very difficult when you're new and you haven't been given the experience or the opportunity. You can only get better by doing something, and if you're not given the opportunity, how do you get better? That's the thing I have to fight with all the time.

Complementing Carey *et al.* (2017), Alicia's evidence extends the same issues of unequal treatment of women; that men are promoted on the basis of potential and woman on the basis of performance, to also include race. Despite working harder than others to show her abilities, she is still not given the chances to prove herself, which has impacted her career trajectory.

As someone from a working class migrant background, Kanvar talks about the barriers that exist for someone without the appropriate embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and related class position:

> You can hear it in people's voices… they have all gone to the same school, so they all know the same people. They know so-and-so and such-and-such. They've all been to the same holidays. These are all experiences I cannot relate to and I can't tell stories about.

He discusses the strategies he has had to employ to develop networks with those people who would open up job opportunities, representing extra work and emotional labour:

> [I]t's hard to enter those conversations. But after a while you kind of adapt to it and you think of conversation starters and other things. You know if you can pick up the Evening Standard on the way to an event, you will be able to find a 'witty story' of the day to drop into the conversation… there are little things, little bits which make it easier... [Y]ou're not taught them. You have to figure them out yourself.

As an indicator of how the fields of study act as 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006), these descriptions of how proximity to the somatic norm aids access and progression in work, and the

challenges faced by those distant from that norm, are important to this thesis. Those close to the somatic norm have more chance of developing the appropriate social capital required when informal hiring practices prevail, meaning they are more likely to progress to more senior roles, and/or more trusted to devise new forms of working. This is in line with a range of literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Lee, 2011; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Wreyford, 2015; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). As later chapters show, the seniority and consequent agency they have translates into more favourable experiences of life course tensions, more choices of how to alleviate them, and better outcomes for sustaining a career.

4.4 Precarious employment

Precarious employment practices are a feature of many digital and creative industries. As discussed in Chapter 2, themes of deregulation, financialisation, the move to freelance working, and short-term production projects (Saundry and Nolan, 1998; Antcliff, 2005; Deuze, Martin and Allen, 2007; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Bulut, 2015) means many workers are subject to short-term and insecure employment conditions that impact their ability to secure viable employment and then make plans for the future, especially those in more junior positions (Banks, 2019). However, there is no homogenous experience across the three fields of study as workers in Websites, and to a lesser extent Games, seem to benefit from more secure conditions. Differences across the three fields of study are important to acknowledge, as later chapters show how this is relevant for the way participants have moved between the three fields across the life course. Descriptions of employment conditions are discussed, followed by how they interact with inequalities in economic capital to shape experiences for workers.

4.4.1 Video

Video is a site of pervasive precarious employment, due to low pay in junior roles, and precarious employment practices throughout someone's career. The primary driver of precarity is short-term projects that rely on freelance workers. All but two participants in TV and film have been freelance for the majority, if not all, of their careers. Representing something not seen in the literature, Ester and Judith have been unusual as the companies they were freelancing for extended periods of time eventually employed them in-house. As will be explored in the following chapters, this has had important consequences over the life course. While entry-level roles are very poorly paid and a cause of 'filtering out' of workers (discussed below), more senior roles

have paid enough so that most participants have not had to work year-round. YouTube content creators are the most precarious of all workers, especially in the early stages. Income can only be generated through advertising once certain subscriber and views thresholds have been reached. Alternatively, creators can ask people to donate via platforms such as Patreon, or run paid promotions. While Roger's channel takes advertising revenue donations, Dennis has eschewed advertising on his channel for ideological reasons, meaning he is entirely reliant on Patreon. The need to regularly publish content or lose income has consequences for time demands, discussed later.

4.4.2 Games

Michael's early experience, whilst employed, involved working with many zero-hours-contract workers, indicating their prevalence in below-the-line positions, as described by Bulut (2015). Early roles for Justin and Gray were entry-level and short-term, offering no security. Gray was made redundant twice in short order, which meant they left the industry for a while. Once established however, those in the sample have benefitted from long periods of in-house employment. Nevertheless, data suggests that Games workers, while benefitting from employed status, are more at risk than Website workers as when a project has completed, studios will make people redundant (with redundancy pay-outs) rather than move them to another project (Michael, Justin). This is in line with findings from Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna (2015, p. 573).

4.4.3 Websites

A number of participants in Websites have benefitted from secure employment throughout their early, 'All-In' career phase (Douglas, Cody, Charles, Max, and at times Erik, Austin, and Philip). However, freelance Website workers, especially those in platform work, do not have the same security or opportunities to be paid well. Austin and Philip support the literature that shows the challenges faced when competing against other people in bids for work. They discuss the need to offer competitive prices without a full understanding of the work involved, leading to being underpaid for the time commitment required to do a good job and, for platform work, achieve the 'rating' required to secure new work (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017). This is picked up again later when discussing high time demands.

4.4.4 Inequalities within precarious employment

Experiences of precarious employment – and possible precariousness (ontological insecurity due to a lack of money or support) – are shaped by someone's access to economic capital. Martin talks about how a lack of money affects people at the start of their careers in Video:

> The key thing for me was having money. If you do the first year of working for free, not only are working for free, but you need to have a car. There's an expectation that you will have a decent computer… And you'll be paying for the Adobe software. So, not only do you have to go to work for free, you have to be able to bring money to the job. Which is horrific, really. Especially if you end up doing what I did, which was starting on the crappy features, where there's no budget for expenses or anything. You are bringing everything to the table.

Jess, in Games, highlights how economic support from family can affect experiences of precarious employment:

> [Y]ou meet a lot of people who have just been trying for years and years… just trying to get jobs as interns and stuff like that. If you come from a well-off background, then usually you can get away with that because you can stay living with your parents… they're maybe not charging you rent… But if you're from a working-class background… your parents just can't afford for you to mooch off them for a long time…

This quote speaks to the themes in Xu (2021), where privilege buys you time to commit to breaking into a career. Without economic capital available to fund entry to these industries, people have had to do other work to make ends meet. Martin had to work two jobs:

> [M]y very first job was [show] from years ago, when I was doing model making for it. I was working part time in an Apple store, and I finished the Apple store at 7pm, and I would go to my friend's pub where I worked upstairs on the models until 3 in the morning… I was having to just do both to survive.

He reflects on how this need to work two jobs affected him:

> [It] probably put me in the mindset that I had for years, of double jobbing, always doing things, even if I didn't need to. But that was my way in, just sort of scabbling to survive, basically.

The precarity/precariousness experienced early in Martin's career has affected him since, as explored over the coming chapters. Similarly, Holly and Judith had to do long stints in unrelated temporary jobs while trying to get into TV, and Jess maintained a part-time job while trying to get into Games. This echoes other research about entry to creative careers (Eikhof and York, 2016).

The discussion of discriminatory hiring practices in the previous section is linked to precarity/precariousness. In line with Nwonka and Malik (2021), Alicia highlights that if people are passed over for promotion and remain in poorly paid roles, they are more likely to leave to find more security elsewhere.

Once established, concerns about the precarious nature of employment do not end. The insecurity of freelance work shapes attitudes towards the future. Judith discusses how despite pay being good once a career has taken off, the sporadic nature of freelance work is a cause for concern:

> Once I got into it, I felt like I was always paid well enough to have that little buffer of money to keep me ticking over, but I think lately as life gets more serious, those things do become more of an issue… whenever you're talking about mortgages and children and childcare and longevity across your career, yes.

This theme is a focus in the next chapter.

Precarious employment, with a lack of economic capital to weather these conditions, either while accessing work or over the life course, is a cause of 'filtering' of workers that is linked to class position and related issues of racial disparities and gender roles, indicating how the perpetuation of the dominance of the somatic norm is maintained. These issues are picked up throughout the thesis.

4.5 High time demands

The final aspect of work in the fields of study is high time demands. Once again, workers in Video and Games are subject to the most demanding requirements, in this case the 'extreme' time pressures of project work (Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015). Participants in websites, in contrast, have had less experience of high time demands, with some exceptions from freelancers and platform workers. While revealing less about inequalities in the 'All-In' phase of careers, these descriptions have particular relevance for the rest of the thesis; The extent to which people can balance work with other aspects of their lives while continuing to meet the demands of the field is one of this thesis' key contributions to knowledge.

4.5.1 Video

Productions schedules demand long and intense hours over sustained periods. Rhonda provides an indicative example:

> A working day for me… would be getting up at 5:30, getting to set for 7. Talking to people before we have to get on set at 8, shooting until 7 in the evening, then going home and prepping for the next day. And in bed by 10:30. That's a realistic day. And when people were filming 6 days a week, and you're doing that for months on end, it's pretty hardcore. And also, if you're working away from home…

Working away from home adds an extra time consideration, taking someone away from normal life. For those working in factual TV such as Holly, Erica, and Alicia, filming follows irregular hours. These participants have stated how this adds to the feelings of 'time intensity', corroborating Piasna's (2018) research. Erica's account outlines the experiences of many in the sample:

> In my world, when you're doing observational documentaries and if you're doing access projects. I've worked in a lot of hospitals over the years. I've worked with the police, so I've done a lot of shift work. You're constantly adjusting your body clock. You're going from a night shift to a day shift. You're not really having much time off because on their rest days, you're shooting your master interviews with them. It's relentless, the hours. I remember just crying to my mum at the thought of doing 19 days straight. That's normal. It shouldn't be.

Martin echoes Balderson *et al.* (2020) discussion of increasing intensity of work, here in the context of increased production demands and labour shortages:

> [My] mate used a phrase: 'miracle drift'. Where if you perform a miracle that would normally take 5 days, and you can do it in 3 days, that's not a miracle, that's the new standard. So, the next time you pull it off, it goes from 3 days to 2 and a half days, then 2 and a half days to 1… So, the thing has reached a state of kind of almost blind panic.

He adds that because to the relative weakness of unions compared to those in the US, American studios dub British staff 'White Mexicans' due to their ability to be exploited. Due to this lack of organising, it is it is unlikely that long- and intense-time demands will change if market conditions remains as they are. In fact, Martin acknowledges that there is a feeling within the workforce that pushing back on these conditions would risk work being taken elsewhere, jeopardising the UK TV and film sector. The intensity of this work is later shown to have an effect on participants' physical and mental health, impacting their abilities to sustain work over the life course.

Time demands are linked to hiring practices. As discussed earlier, generating future work in Video is often reliant on developing social capital through being present on productions.

Finally, self-described 'lone wolf' YouTube creators such as Dennis are under immense pressure to continually push out content. Working 7 days a week for the past few years, Dennis balances this pressure with the autonomy that his work brings him, which is different to someone working on a production with legacy media:

> I work when it suits… well, as it turns out, I just work all the time! I get up at 6:30, and I'm sitting at my desk at 7:30, and I'll stop for lunch. And I do a bit of something in the afternoon like a bike ride or something healthy, then I'm back at my desk by 4… you know, 3 hours until 7, have some food, then I'm back at my desk at 8:30/9 o'clock and I'll probably do another couple of hours in the evening as well. So, I'm probably working longer hours than I worked when I was working full time. But those are my decisions, not anybody else's.

This way of working is only available to someone without any other commitments, which Dennis acknowledges.

These accounts illustrate how time pressures in Video might be considered incompatible with the ways that people might want to live, such as being present as parents (Dent, 2020), having interests outside of work (Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019), or wishing to look after mental and physical wellbeing (Balderson *et al.*, 2020). These issues are picked up again in Chapter 5.

4.5.2 Games

Supporting to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015; Cote and Harris, 2021; Ozimek and Rueda, 2021), data shows that 'Crunch' and 'games jams' are features of work in Games which are a strong part of Games industry culture. Justin discusses 'crunch', where workers are expected to commit extra time to meet deadlines. He comments how he has been lucky with his experiences before discussing others in the industry, noting what this might mean for the age of those workers:

> I've known people who have worked at [company]… Crunch at those places is relentless, and I think they probably go through more younger people, just because they want to start their careers, they want to put something on their CV that will really count, they don't mind working long hours.

Gray discusses their concerns about crunch, and how it has been managed well by their studio:

> I think the communication was pretty good with crunch. We were warned in advance for what to prepare for, and I was able to talk to [boss] who had been with the company longer, about 'am I going to be shunned if I express hesitancy about crunch, or what amount of crunch is expected'. And the expectations were really reasonable. It was two or three later nights a week, with food paid for. And the overtime paid for, which isn't always the case in the games industry. And we clocked our hours, so there wasn't any sort of… weird culture about 'oh, you're leaving earlier than me' or anything like that.

These two accounts are indicative of people in the sample, who have had experiences more in line with the 'good crunch' described by Cote and Harris (2021), than extreme forms of crunch such as those described by Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna (2015) and Deuze, Martin and Allen

(2007). This may be a reason why these participants have been able to remain in the field as 'older workers'. However, as hinted at by Grey, those unable to commit to some form of crunch, especially in less understanding studios, may be marginalised. Rachel supports this sentiment from a more agentic perspective, indicating how those who commit to crunch are rewarded, while those unwilling to do it leave the field:

> No one wants to crunch all the time, and those are the people that get rewarded. So, the people that leave are the ones who are like 'I'm not putting up with this. I don't need to put up with this and I'm not going to'.

In addition to crunch, Games studios hold regular 'games jams', as explained by Jess:

> [G]ame jams are seen as a mash-up of social and working, but it's basically when you down-tools for a week and come up with new games ideas, and try and make them, really quickly. And the culture is that you're in the office until like, 11 o clock, every single day. Getting pizzas and stuff like that.

Jess comment about games jams being 'a mash up of social and working' indicates how this industry cultural norm is linked to the development of social capital, which Ozimek and Rueda (2021) highlight is problematic for those that struggle to attend them, as it can affect reputation and career progression. Similarly, Gray's concern that not taking part in crunch would result in stigmatisation further highlights how time demands impact on social capital.

4.5.3 Websites

Many participants (Cody, Max, Charles, Adam, Kanvar, Cathy) have been able to work office hours for many of their Website roles. These roles have been employed and have often been in organisations that are not primarily in the 'digital' industries but operate a website. As will be seen in later chapters, this is important for understanding why participants have moved fields in order to have a better balance between work and non-work.

However, as mentioned earlier, Austin and Philip have discussed how freelance Website working can have high and intense time demands compared to financial reward as projects have to be completed to a high standard to preserve reputation, while still working for the price agreed at

the start of the project. This is particularly the case for Austin's platform work, in line with other research (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017):

> As a developer, you have to bid for [jobs] based on really partial information. You have no idea how long it's going to take… and you just have to make up a figure and hope that that's the right figure for the amount of time that it's going to take to actually fix the problem or do the work … you might bid 60 quid for a project saying it's going to take you two hours, but if it ends up taking eight hours and you can't fix it, then you're stuck with it really.

This sort of short-term freelance work requires time, unpaid, to search future jobs in addition to actually doing the work. Data suggests this is something that is especially challenging when workers are unknown and trying to build a reputation. These examples show how the time demands on freelancers are closely linked to hiring practices (developing social capital in the form of reputation) and precarious employment conditions (potentially poor pay, unpaid time searching for work).

4.5.4 Summary: Inequalities in high time demands when doing work

Assessing the time required to commit to work in the ways that are demanded by the three fields of study, the above section hints at the consequences for workers, especially in Video and Games, who cannot act as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990), committing to work above all else. However, participants narratives from the 'All-In' phase of their career histories provide little evidence of tensions around time commitments. Rather, they appear (when talking about this time in their careers) to broadly accept these conditions, operating in line with the doxic position of the fields that have developed over the course of their respective histories (as outlined in Chapter 2). However, as people's careers progress over the life course, data shows how this issue becomes more pressing, representing a key driver of 'filtering' out, down, or sideways into other roles/fields. These issues are discussed in detail in the next chapter and have ramifications for the rest of the thesis.

Having discussed the potential for inequalities to arise related to time *doing the work*, I now turn to how inequalities in the previous three themes equate to *unequal time demands*, and what this means for workers' career trajectories.

4.6 Unequal time demands: the temporal dimension to inequalities

The final of the four aspects of work in the digital and creative industries, about time demands, does not relate only to the amount of time required to commit to working as just described. It is also implicit throughout the first three elements, as each of these, of course, has a temporal dimension. A consideration of time in training, networking, and earning money can further illuminate how inequalities shape experiences in the 'All-In' phase. Crucially, those who lack the right cultural, social, and economic capital often have to commit *more time* to meeting the demands of the field. This in turn leads to slower career progression, which has consequences for sustaining careers over the life course as a lack of seniority can mean a lack of agency; a theme that is explored across the thesis.

A number of factors shape how inequalities relate to time gaining the required cultural capital for career access and progression. Economic capital shapes the experience of training because those with the resources (or disposition to acquire debt) are able to commit to courses in higher education, developing the appropriate cultural and social capitals to help them start their careers. While this actually delays the start of a career, these experiences, discussed earlier, are increasingly required to provide the necessary industry experience and credentials to access and progress in the fields of study. Those *without* the ability to gain this institutionalised cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996) will either not gain access to work, or need to spend *more time* gaining experience in more junior roles in order to progress. In fact, Alicia had years of industry experience but still found it necessary to do a relevant master's degree, illustrating the barriers for those without formal qualifications. Relatedly, this need for Alicia to get a qualification may reflect her 'outsider' status, requiring her to prove her worth through additional certification that those of the somatic norm might not need (Carey *et al.*, 2017; Friedman and Laurison, 2019, p. 117).

Another aspect of training related to economic capital, time, and career progression is the need by workers to spend time outside of paid work to conduct ongoing training. Having less opportunity to commit to this training (due to the need to earn money) can delay career progression until it is able to be completed (Philip, Charles). This is picked up in later chapters.

As outlined when discussing unequal hiring practices and indicated above, those not of the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) can struggle to access work. Without the accepted embodied cultural capital (accents, skin colour, fashion style, mannerisms), people are less likely to be granted access to networks and thus the required social capital to find work, gain trust, and develop reputation (Lee, 2011). There is also the issue of nepotism, including familial connections. These issues are in line with recent literature on the creative industries (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012; Wreyford, 2015; Friedman and Laurison, 2019; Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020). What is not made explicit in other research is what the consequences are for time use. As Kanvar highlighted, he struggled to gain access to the networks required to gain work. He had to work at breaking into them, representing extra labour in 'acquir[ing] new dispositions, sensibilities and cultural capital, in order to survive' (Singh, 2021, p. 1). This shows how those distant from the somatic norm have additional requirements, in the form of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) and *time* developing social capital.

Alicia has experienced exclusion, commenting earlier on how some areas of TV are closed to her as a Black woman, and how she has not been given the opportunities to prove herself, despite her abilities and qualifications. This has meant that she has had to spend longer in junior roles, slowly trying to build a CV than others considered 'lower risk':

> I have been emailing ever since I graduated film school just to get… meetings [or] shadowing. One of my friends who's an entertainment producer, she's like, 'Alicia, I don't even know why you're still shadowing? They should be booking you'. I'm like, 'well, I'm here, I'm available. It's not up to me, it's up to them'. I think it's because just to turn on the lights in the studio is expensive. They just go back to the tried and tested people they've known for years.

Erica discusses a lack of progression, talking specifically about gender:

> We joke in telly that you blink, and a male runner overnight has become a DV director and the woman's still, she's five years on and she's still AP-ing.

She suggests that women are spending more time in junior roles before they are able to progress, and echoing Dent (2020), links this to perceptions of women being imminent parents who will not be reliable workers (something that men are not subject to).

Due to a lack of economic capital, a number of participants have had to support themselves through other employment in the precarious early stages of their careers. As Xu (2021) and York and Eikhof (2016) argue, this need to support oneself takes time away from working on developing careers, whereas those with the resources have been able to focus on their work in the fields of study, either doing low/no pay roles to develop a CV, or 'waiting' and available for the right roles to come along. Finally, as highlighted earlier, those that are stuck in junior roles, often on low pay, may leave the sector in the 'All-In' phase, representing a 'filtering' of workers.

In addition to the inequalities that may result if people cannot commit to long and intense hours, this discussion has highlighted how inequalities can result in *extra time demands* for workers who lack the required capitals for success in the three fields of study. This supports the idea that different people have different experiences of the same field, due to the way that they are *received* by those in dominant positions. If someone is unknown, they have to spend time and effort accessing networks. If someone is not trusted, they have to show that they have more qualifications and experience in order to be hired (both of which take time to acquire). If someone is without financial security, they have to take time away from their carer to support themselves. These issues, of having to work for longer accessing work (day-to-day time inequality) and having to work in more junior roles for longer (longer-term time inequality), have consequences for early- to mid-career progression, shown in the next chapters as being important when considering life course 'tensions' and the ability to navigate them.

4.7 Understanding 'time' as a form of capital

Based on the analysis thus far, I propose a conceptualisation of time as an additional form of capital that can be used as the thesis progresses. Considering the time it takes to do a job in the way that is required by production schedules and organisational cultures, and *in addition*, the time it takes to train, network, and continually look for freelance work, (all of which are experienced differently, stratified along various intersections of inequality), I conclude that a fruitful way of conceptualising the time demands on a worker, and importantly their ability to meet those demands, is to think about time as an additional 'capital' demand: *time capital*.

The possession of time is a capacity that is linked to the possession of other forms of capital. Having time to train means more cultural capital can be developed. Being able to spend time

networking means social capital can be developed. Underlying these things is often the possession of economic capital, which gives people the ability to ‘spend time’ doing training, networking, or ‘waiting’ for the right job to come along Xu (2021). Add to this the issues of inequality discussed above, and we see that those with a lack of cultural, social, and economic capitals need to compensate for this deficit by committing more time to networking, training, or gaining experience; They are required to have more ‘time capital’ to meet the demands of the field. When looking to progress, those accounts of having to do more junior roles for longer means this ‘time inequality’ extends beyond the day-to-day demands of the field and affects career trajectories in a more longitudinal fashion.

Findings also indicate other significant ways that ‘time capital’ is a useful concept. Someone’s ‘time capital’ is not simply about the amount of time they have. Findings show it has to be available *at the right time*. If the networking required to access work (such as the networking the Kanvar had to do), or for career progression (such as taking part in ‘crunch’ and game jams discussed by Gray and Jess) occurs at unsociable hours, people who are unable to attend *at this time* due to, for example, health issues or caring responsibilities, will likely lose out. If a production schedule is working overnight, similar issues arise. Just as cultural capital is context specific, so too is the time capital someone has; Having a lot of time available to do freelance website design while working around childcare responsibilities does not equip someone to work in factual TV production which might require the same amount of time, but at times when they have caring responsibilities. As we will come to see in Chapter 6, the fact that time capital demands relate to *when* time is committed is key to understanding the ability of someone to continue their career if they go on to have other commitments over the life course.

The intensity of time use in a role can also be considered when thinking about time capital. Just as different varieties of cultural capital are needed for different roles, people’s different capacities for managing intensity of time use (patiently waiting for months when filming wildlife versus intense live directing) is important to consider when thinking about someone’s ability to be successful in a role. We can consider that someone’s habitus is shaped not only by their economic, social, and cultural capitals, but also by their ‘time capital’ i.e., the amount of time they have available, when they can commit it, *and their attitudes to the way time in structured in a field* (its ‘temporal consciousness’). This temporal consciousness (Atkinson, 2019) is discussed in depth in the next chapter, where how someone relates to the temporal consciousness of different social fields plays a role in the tension felt between work and non-work roles.

4.8 Conclusion: Demands of the field, inequalities, and career progression

This chapter has explored the varied demands of work in the fields of Websites, Games, and Video, and how inequalities shape experiences of these demands. In doing so, it has built on literature describing inequalities in the digital and creative industries. In a novel contribution to understanding inequalities in career progression, this chapter made the link between inequalities and the different *time demands* on workers, affecting both their day-to-day experiences and longer-term career progression.

As evidenced throughout this chapter, those without the right mix of economic, social, and cultural capitals struggle to access work compared to their more privileged counterparts. Moreover, those workers distant from the 'somatic norm' (Puwar, 2001) , i.e., who do not possess the embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) favoured by those dominant in the field, experience the field differently. Subject to different demands, they are often required to spend *more time* meeting the demands of the field, which represents barriers to successful participation and progression in the field. This has implications for short-term success, as people may not be able to afford the time to do extra work on training or networking, or to spend more time in precarious employment. It also has implications for medium- to long-term success, as career progression takes longer, leaving people poorly paid and more like to leave the field. Crucially, the unequal outcomes revealed in this chapter are relevant for the rest of the thesis. Participants' experiences of their respective 'All-In' phase affects their ability to achieve certain roles and level of seniority ('field positions') that affords them agency to address any 'life course tensions' that arise, where the demands of other aspects of life competes with the demands of the field. These themes are explored in the subsequent chapters. Furthermore, I have argued that unequal time demands, plus the pressure to conform to the long and intense hours of the 'ideal worker', means 'time capital' is important to consider when thinking about the ability of different groups to sustain digital and creative work, an approach which will be returned to in subsequent chapters.

As a final point, this chapter has, due to the selection criteria of the sample, explored the experiences of participants who have sustained, to various extents, digital and creative careers. However, their data has provided contextual information that indicates there are people in similar

social positions who, without the specific capacities and enabling conditions available to participants, would not have been able to establish viable careers. Therefore, these findings on inequalities in the 'All-In' phase indicate an initial cause of 'filtering out' of workers from the sector.

Chapter 5 Life course tensions

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 explored the experiences of participants in their early careers, describing the demands of work in Video, Games, and Websites through a consideration of training, hiring practices, precarious employment, and time demands. A discussion of inequalities outlined how a lack of the right mix of cultural, social, economic capitals, and what I have conceptualised as ‘time capital’, affected entry into the fields. Once in work, my research revealed that in addition to ‘deficits’ in capitals which are ongoing, someone’s proximity to the ‘somatic norm’ of a field affects what demands are made of workers, with marginalised workers needing to spend *more time* training, networking, and gaining experience in order to progress. I argued that this additional time demand has consequences for career trajectories in the ‘All-In’ phase of work, affecting someone’s role or seniority. As well as adding to the literature on inequalities in the digital and creative industries, Chapter 4 provides benchmarks for the demands of the fields which will be used in the analysis of outcomes of career changes over the life course, discussed in Chapter 6.

This chapter explores experiences over the life course as work and non-work come into tension. The chapter takes a different look at the ‘All-In’ phase, developing findings from Chapter 4 to identify the various ‘temporal consciousnesses’ (Atkinson, 2019) of work in the fields of study. How the ‘rhythm and pace’ of Bourdieusian fields (Atkinson, 2019, p. 955), in this case work in Video, Games, and Websites, shapes the way people experience time, and are consequently required to act (if they conform to the doxic position of the field), is a way of encapsulating the field in a way that Chapter 4’s approach can miss. The chapter goes on to explore how the temporal consciousnesses of work are compared with how participants experience other aspects of their current or *imagined future* (Williams, 2018) lives. This comparison is an effective, and novel, way of revealing the tensions that participants have felt at different points over their life courses. It goes beyond a simple analysis of ‘work/life balance’ because temporal consciousnesses encapsulate the ways that structures shape time use, such as when the time is required, and the intensity of that time. As outlined in Chapter 2 and recapitulated below, this tension, between the different social fields of work and non-work, is a cause of reflexivity that can initiate action to resolve tensions, as the logic of one field is compared with another (Decoteau, 2016).

Through an exploration of the different ‘life course tensions’ felt within the sample, the chapter argues that ‘field position’ (adapted from Levy and Bühlmann, 2016), an outcome of inequalities in early careers, determines the nature of these tensions and governs the choices of action that appear available to participants in resolving them (the subject of Chapter 6). This is similar to Banks’ (2019) comparison of ‘event time’ and ‘biographical time’, where those of lower field position cannot plan for the future, but more senior workers are still able to maintain a sense of biography. However, findings show that it is not only seniority, but also to a lesser extent role, that determines one’s ability to maintain a sense of ‘biographical time’; Those workers that have not achieved a field position (either role or position) where options are open to them to resolve life course tensions are at risk of not being able to sustain their careers. As such, this represents another point at which a ‘filtering’ of workers occurs.

The chapter is structured as follows. An outline of the relevance of ‘temporal consciousness’ to understanding the experiences of work and how this relates to the framework from Chapter 4 is laid out. Then, findings from Chapter 4 are referred to as I discuss the various ‘temporal consciousnesses’ in the fields of Websites, Games, and Video experienced by the sample. The latter half of the chapter is an exploration of the ways that participants expressed life course tensions that have arisen over their careers. This is done by identifying the non-work ‘temporal consciousnesses’ that are compared with work, such as ‘caring time’ and ‘wellbeing time’. Corresponding ‘life course tensions’ are identified as participants compare work temporal consciousnesses with others from different aspects of their lives. Throughout this section, I show how participants’ habitus, and importantly, ‘field position’ at the time they experience life course tensions, impacts how tensions are experienced. Crucially, findings also show how unlike the ‘All-In’ phase, gender inequalities come to the fore when considering life course tensions due to gendered assumptions around childcare, and gendered ageism.

5.2 Temporal consciousness

The holistic nature of work in the fields of study can be hard to fully encapsulate when considering the individual demands of the field as we did in the previous chapter. However, a way to neatly do this is by using Atkinson’s idea of ‘temporal consciousness’, which expresses the ‘experiences and meaning of time’ in a field through an understanding of its ‘rhythm and pace’ (Atkinson, 2019). By thinking about how time is spent in a social field we can bring together all the demands of a field into a relatively easy to comprehend package. A temporal consciousness

indicates time demands, both in terms of the amount of time, and when time needs to be committed. It also moves beyond this simple analysis of time use, describing the *quality* of this time. This includes the intensity of the time use dictated by, for example, production schedules. Additionally, it brings in the activities required by the field, such as networking, training, or travel. It does this, crucially, because a temporal consciousness is a summation of the 'rhythms and pace' that structure time in a field. For example, the rhythm of picking up new work through networking, or keeping up to date with training, or traveling to set for a film shoot. This means we can readily link the experiences of a field to the structures that cause them. This concept is also useful when thinking about how participants have compared experiences in different social fields, (the focus of this chapter), which the 'demands of the field' framework cannot capture.

Despite this different application of Bourdieu's work to the research compared to Chapter 4, there remains a relevance in understanding the capital demands of the field as previously discussed. A consideration of capitals has a clear link to inequalities in wider society (Bourdieu, 1986). Additionally, as I outlined at the end of the pervious chapter when arguing for 'time' as an additional form of capital, the relationship between changing amounts of time and the other forms of capitals is required for an analysis of how a change in participation in work affects success in the field, explored in the final chapter. Both of these issues are not captured by the 'temporal consciousness' lens. The two frameworks come together when we consider how the temporal consciousness of a field interacts with someone's habitus, shaped by their possession of various capitals, and their field position (Atkinson, 2019, p. 955), meaning it is possible to explore how someone relates to a field with reference to both concepts. Importantly, this exploration can be done with reference to the *multiple* social fields that people operate in, i.e., work, home, and social, meaning we can explore the tensions that arise between different fields, such as 'work' and 'home' fields. The way this is conceptualised is now recapitulated.

5.3 Temporal consciousnesses in the 'All-In' phase

Chapter 2 explored literature that considers how the 'experiences and meaning of time' (Atkinson, 2019) is shaped by digital and creative work. Table 4 provides a brief summary of the temporal consciousnesses discussed.

Temporal consciousness	Key feature	Reference
Intensification, increased connectivity	Shaped by neoliberalism, transport, and technology	Atkinson (2019)
Neoliberal time	Commodification of more or life, increases pressures to produce cultural products	Sugarman and Thrift (2020)
Money time	Displacing 'thought time' to pursue productivity and profit	Noonan (2015)
Network time	Increased connectivity, humans the slowest link	Hassan (2003)
'Prosumpton' time	Blurring of content production and consumption in social media (YouTube)	Fuchs (2014)
Platform time	Workers' time is subservient to the demands of the platform	Schörpf et al. (2017)
Project time	Shaped by production schedules and regimes of management control	Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan (2015) Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenn (2015)
Event time	Day-day struggle, unable to plan for the future	Adkins (2013)
Biographical time	Seniority allows for work plans and biography to coexist	Banks (2019)

Table 4 – Summaries of the temporal consciousnesses discussed in Chapter 2.

Data shows that of these, Atkinsons' description of intensification and increased connectivity, money time, network time, platform time, and project time are all examples of the temporal consciousnesses that chime with the experiences of people in digital and creative work. Building on these to provide field-specific categorisation, this section takes another look at the data presented in Chapter 4 to propose new definitions of temporal consciousnesses that participants have been subject to in the 'All-In' phase of work. In addition to the 'demands of the field' already discussed, these temporal consciousnesses are able to quickly summarise the experiences of work and are later used to compare how participants have discussed other aspects of their lives as they move through the life course, revealing the 'life course tensions' that have developed between work and non-work temporal consciousnesses.

5.3.1 Core temporal consciousnesses

There are a set of temporal consciousnesses which form the core of the experiences of work in Video, Games, and Websites. These are described now.

'Production time' is the dominant temporal consciousness in Video. Much of the features of this were described in Chapter 2 when reviewing the literature on project working such as long and intense hours, often at unsociable and irregular hours (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015; Piasna, 2018), and covered in Chapter 4 when considering the time demands of Video. For example, Rhonda and Erica's quotes highlighted the long and intense hours, often away from the home. This prevalence of location filming over many days or weeks is a powerful factor shaping production time that is only avoided by people in certain roles, often at more senior levels. This issue of those in senior positions being isolated from the extreme work of production time is picked up later in the chapter. The increasing intensity of work, illustrated by Martin's discussion of 'miracle drift' squeezes time for 'creative intelligence' to percolate (Noonan, 2015), replaced by, as Martin says, 'blind panic'. Further illustrating the nature of 'production time' within TV and film, Martin describes how the demands of filming and post-production is expected to outweigh any other consideration:

> I was coerced into skipping my grandad's funeral, which I agreed to do because they made me believe it was very important…

'Crunch time' is similar to production time but is more focused on shorter time periods of intense working for participants in the study. While the name implies a relationship to the Games field, participants in Websites have also experienced this temporal consciousness as deadlines approach. Crunch time does not have the same element of working away from home as production time, and those in Games and Websites tend to have longer contracts, meaning the precarity/precariousness experienced in Video is less of a feature. As previously mentioned, those in the sample have not experienced extreme crunch as others they know in the industry have, although as Chapter 4 explored, cycles of crunch (and regular games jams) have been raised as concerns for many games workers in the sample who are looking to balance work with other aspects of their lives.

While only (partially) relevant to one participant, Austin, the demands of platform work, encapsulated as 'platform time', are tight turn-around times, pressure to go beyond expectations, and work for competitive rates. These experiences are in line with the literature that suggest platform workers need to 'subordinate their private lives under the logics of this… labour process' (Schörpf *et al.*, 2017, p. 44). However, as already mentioned in Chapter 4, the fact that Austin only

used platforms to supplement other work means no one in the sample was dominated by this platform time.

The YouTubers interviewed, especially Dennis who works on his own, have their time shaped by the relentless need to push out new content, which I have termed ‘conveyer belt time’:

> The thing about YouTube is, you have to be absolutely, relentlessly consistent if you want to build a decent sized audience. Every Sunday, at 2pm, the video goes out… So, even if you're less than delighted with a video, [you] put it out… because you’ll always do another one the following week. People need to get into the habit of seeing your video pop up every [time] you do it.

The way YouTube rewards consistency by making regular content more visible has shaped Dennis’ experience of time, with an endless sequence of deadlines. Despite his age (52), Dennis is still having to work as if he were in the ‘All-In’ phase, unaffected by life course issues. With the possibility that he will have to care for an elderly relative, this way of working may be unsustainable. Roger has a different experience of conveyer belt time due to the division of labour within his YouTube channel, a function of his success. However, this was not always the case as he has only managed to grow his channel to this size in the past couple of years. Both YouTubers have experiences that echo Fuchs (2014), where ‘play’ and ‘labour’ have become blurred, and for Dennis, his passion for communicating environmental issues has taken over his life as a result of the demands of YouTube’s algorithm.

Finally, ‘Office time’ represents a way of working more in line with a traditional 9-5 workday that has been experienced by many employed participants in websites. While still having the potential to suffer from the ill-effects of ‘money time’ and ‘network time’, the ability to maintain office hours is in stark contrast to the experiences of the temporal consciousnesses discussed above. The appeal of ‘office time’ has shaped a number of participants’ career trajectories, as will be explored in Chapter 6.

These core temporal consciousnesses are experienced alongside a number of lesser, but still consequential, temporal consciousnesses related to networking, reputation, and training. Together, these shape the various experiences of participants in the sample.

5.3.2 Supporting temporal consciousnesses

‘Network*ing* time’ is another dominant feature of work for freelancers, and to a lesser extent employed workers. The requirement to develop and maintain social capital means in addition to the concerns of doing the work, experiences are shaped by the extra effort needed to make connections needed for continued employment, or the consequences for those unable to participate. In Video, this requires a presenteeism within ‘production time’, where, as will be explored in Chapter 6, deviation from this norm means social capital suffers. Similarly, while games jams might not be a requirement of a role, attendance is considered necessary to develop the social connections for career progression, as discussed in Chapter 4 and the literature (Ozimek and Rueda, 2021). Out-of-hours socialising has been raised by many participants as a fun element of work culture that builds social bonds and aids career progression. While Adam has been able to comfortably integrate this into his working life as he ages, and even once he had children, others have faced challenges in doing so, which has impacted their ability to sustain social capital.

For freelancers, future employment is governed by the ‘you’re only as good as your last credit’ axiom, meaning work for freelancers across each field of study is shaped by pressure to maintain a strong reputation. Erica explains:

> I think it’s a mixture of pressure you put on yourself and pressure that the industry puts on you… I think that as a freelancer, you can’t have a bad day.

This pressure, shaped by industry but internalised by workers, creates a temporal consciousness of ‘reputation time’ where people understand that performance on each job is crucial. This is also the case for platform workers, as described by Schörpf et al. (2017) and experienced by Austin, where ratings systems influence future employability. There is of course a similar concern for maintaining a reputation for those employed workers, but the stakes are not as high in the immediate term, with formal performance reviews occurring on less regular cycles than ‘per job’, which can be very short in duration for those in Video. Also related to reputation, a number of participants have discussed the curation of social media as something they feel obliged to do or that they actively engage in to manage their reputation (Erik, Max, Charles, Martin). This is in line with research from Van Zoonen et al. (2016) and Huang & Liu (2017) who argue that curating social media for the benefit of their professional lives has become an important tool for bolstering careers.

Ongoing professional development makes ‘training time’ a temporal consciousness of work. Participants in Video have expressed the need to stay up to date with production techniques while on-the-job, while those in Websites and Games have to continuously retrain to stay employable on the latest coding languages or platforms. Shaped by a longer ‘cycle’ than other temporal consciousnesses, the requirement to regularly commit time and energy to training nevertheless places addition pressure on workers, especially where responsibility falls on the individual. The tensions that this can create over the life course are discussed later in the chapter.

5.3.3 Summary

The ‘core’ temporal consciousnesses; production time, crunch time, platform time, conveyer belt time, and office time, tend to be features of work that are central to the fields. The other ‘supporting’ temporal consciousnesses of networking time, reputation time, and training time are less pervasive in participants’ narratives. Nonetheless, they play an important part in shaping how work is experienced. Table 5 shows that, for different participants, their role, employment status, and organisational support gives rise to a range of temporal consciousnesses, with many experiencing the combination of a ‘core’ temporal consciousness such as production time, alongside each of the ‘supporting’ temporal consciousnesses. This appears especially prominent in Video where freelancing, informal hiring practices, short-term contracts, and ever-evolving skills needs predominate. In light of this, we can see that those who freelance in Video have the most demanding experiences, with less ability to balance this work with other aspects of their lives. As is explored in the coming sections, this creates challenging life course tensions for these workers.

		Temporal consciousness							
	Participant	**Production**	**Crunch**	**Platform**	**Conveyer-belt**	**Office**	**Networking**	**Reputation**	**Training**
Video	Ruby					Trainee scheme			
	Ester					Script editor	Worked for one company		
	Alicia								
	Rhonda								Director
	Neil								
	Cathy								
	Judith								
	Erica								
	Holly								
	Roger								Actor
	Martin								
	Dennis				YouTube				
Games	Michael								
	Justin								
	Kristen					Comms			
	Rachel								
	Gray							Freelance	
	Jess								
Websites	Rosa								Producer
	Ophelia								Producer
	Douglas								
	Cody								
	Austin		Freelance						
	Philip		Freelance						
	Adam								Comms
	Kanvar								Comms
	Charles								
	Max								
	Erik		Freelance						
	Natasha								Producer

Table 5 – Showing (in blue) the temporal consciousnesses experienced by participants in their ‘All-In’ phase.

Where some participants have experienced a range of ‘core’ temporal consciousnesses, the most prominent is included. Details of unusual cases included.

Before moving on it is worth returning here to a theme of Chapter 4, namely the inequalities experienced at the ‘All-In’ phase, and how these interact with a ‘temporal consciousness’ lens. In

the previous chapter, I discussed the different demands of the field caused by differences in the amount and type of capitals people have, and their proximity to the somatic norm (Puwar, 2001). This showed how those in less advantageous positions were likely to have to commit more time and energy to meet *their* demands of the field compared to those in favourable positions. When considering what this means for how people experience a field's temporal consciousness, I contend that inequalities affect experiences of the 'supporting' temporal consciousnesses of networking time, reputation time, and training time, due to the increased demands in those areas for marginalised workers, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, inequalities appear to have little effect on the 'core' temporal consciousnesses, due to these being structured by production schedules and employment type, rather than organisational cultures. While there may be a link between marginalised groups and a lack of secure employment (meaning people are not taken on as staff and remain freelancers), there is insufficient data to claim this.

Additionally, we can consider whether someone's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) in the 'All-In' phase, shaped by their possession of various capitals (including time capital), is compatible with the temporal consciousness of a field. This consideration of a 'habitus/field fit', discussed elsewhere as 'person/environment fit' (Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015), can indicate the ability for someone to sustain work in the field from the perspective of their embodied experience, as opposed to just whether they can meet the demands of the field. Can someone who is having to do a lot of emotional labour in order to develop the appropriate social capital, or someone having to do extra non-career work to support themselves, both of which are inevitably habitus-forming, continue in a field over time if they continuously have to contend with temporal consciousnesses that require lots of networking or precarious (e.g., production time) working? This exploration of how the two lenses (demands of the field and possession of capitals, temporal consciousness) come together fleshes out an analysis of whether someone can sustain work, or whether a 'filtering out' occurs.

By outlining field-specific temporal consciousnesses and considering how these are experienced differently by different people, this section has further added to the literature on experiences of digital and creative work. Moreover, a focus on the 'experiences and meaning of time' provides a way of encapsulating the logic of work for a participant. However, this is just a starting point. As outlined in Section 3.6.3, this thesis considers how people are at the intersection of multiple social fields (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016), with people becoming reflexive as they compare the logic of one field to another (Decoteau, 2016). As will be explored, this process does not necessarily have

to rely on comparison to another social field that someone is or *has been* involved in, but can provide the spark for exploration of different *imagined future* fields (Williams, 2018) such as the possibility of leading a less stressful life, or starting a family. As such, the categorisation of temporal consciousnesses of work is now used in a comparison with the temporal consciousnesses (the logics) of life course experiences that have arisen or been thought about for participants. The comparisons between fields (of work and non-work) are shown to lead to reflexivity around 'life course tensions', in line with Decoteau's (2016) theory. How inequalities interact with these tensions is explored.

5.4 Life course tensions: clashing temporal consciousnesses

Interviews asked participants to consider work in the context of their wider lives. This led to rich discussions about the way 'life course experiences' i.e., events, phases, transitions, as well as *imagined future* (Williams, 2018) experiences, were often in tension with work. Just as with work, the 'logics' of these non-work experiences can be encapsulated as a 'temporal consciousness' of a social field. For example, the 'rhythm and pace' of caring for a young child that shapes the 'experiences and meaning of time' for a new parent. Clear in the data was a high degree of reflexivity as people compared work with non-work, which Decoteau's (2016) conceptualisation is particularly useful in exploring. This section discusses the temporal consciousnesses of non-work that emerged in interviews, illustrating how these are in tension with temporal consciousnesses of work. Three key findings emerge. Firstly, despite any process of individualisation (Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994) and delayed or resistant transitions (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, p. 244), there are common trends in life course tensions such as the desire to settle down or the transition to parenthood, and subsequent desire to 'ramp up' work after children have grown up. An especially emotive theme (from my personal perspective as an older parent) is from women in the sample who are worried about leaving parenthood too late. Secondly, unlike the 'All-In' phase, gender inequalities come to the fore when considering life course tensions. Gender norms around care, and gendered ageism, begin to dominate the narratives of women, whereas the issues of care and age are less of a direct concern for men. This finding underlines the gendered nature of the 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006) that are the three fields of study, providing evidence as to reasons why women are subject to 'filtering' in digital in creative work compared to men. Finally, and crucially, someone's field position and wider social position are shown to be important in the shaping of life course tensions. This often relates to the degree of agency someone has in their role, or (often relatedly) the amount of economic, social, cultural, or *symbolic* capital (Bourdieu, 1986) (reputation) they have as they look to change the amount of

time they spend at work. This is discussed as being analogous to Banks' (2019) comparison of 'event' and 'biographical' time, and is shown to greatly affect whether someone can sustain their careers, or is subject to being 'filtered' out, down, or sideways.

5.4.1 The transition to parenting: 'caring time'

Chapter 2 discussed the literature concerned with parenting, especially the gendered outcomes that exist for women who have, and might be presumed to have, children. There is both concern that parents (primarily mothers) will not be able to balance work and care (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Dent, 2020; Percival, 2020; Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini, 2020), and issues of marginalisation based on assumptions of mothers' commitment to work (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Dent, 2020; Milner and Gregory, 2022). The burden of these concerns often falls onto the individual rather than ire being directed at structural inequalities (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020, pp. 226, 243), with cultures of work making these issues 'unspeakable', and thus hard to resolve (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015). These issues were very much present in the findings, as this section illustrates.

As already alluded to, the 'rhythm and pace' of caring for a young child is, as the following interview extracts show, very different from the temporal consciousness of work in the fields of study. As such, a 'life course tension' arises as participants compare work and caring temporal consciousnesses. Seventeen out of the thirty participants have children, with discussions around work and children being a prominent feature of these interviews. In addition, some of those without children have expressed their views on what having children means to them and for their careers, and how this is creating tension for them. Importantly, many participants, both male and female, have gone on to make major adjustments in their participation in work as a result of having children, showing how important this life course phase is to the career trajectories of those working in Websites, Games, and Video.

Accounts of the experiences of the transition to parenthood can be categorise into three types: As being about imagined futures (Williams, 2018) with children, where there is a recognition that work life and parental life might not be compatible; those transitions that are done in crises, as changes at work are not seen as possible so both work and parenting are juggled, and; those transitions which are able to be done in a way that is compatible with work. There are also

accounts of those that have chosen to remain child free. These different experiences of the transition to parenthood have a number of different causes. Firstly, field position (role and seniority), and the field itself, is important: Some roles are more suited to flexible working than others, and this is shown to be more likely the more senior someone is; Flexibility varies between the fields of study due to their individual structures; Experiences also vary regardless of field due to organisational cultures that are in a number of cases unsupportive of the needs of parents; Often related to field position, someone's wider social position, particularly their economic capital, is instrumental in their available choices and therefore how they experience this life course tension. Secondly, there is a stark gender divide in how people experience the transition to parenthood due to societal expectations/requirements about how they should change their participation in work. This reflects existing research (Brook, O'Brien and Taylor, 2020; Dent, 2020), and appears to be a key driver of gendered 'filtering' in the digital and creative industries.

What follows are accounts of participants who have reflected on the clash of temporal consciousnesses. Firstly, in regard to an *imagined future* (Williams, 2018). Erica is a 35-year-old freelance shooter/director working in documentaries, whose work is shaped by an especially intense 'production time' temporal consciousness. She is at a crossroads due to her desire to continue doing the work she loves and the desire for an *imagined future* of having children. She discusses the dilemma she faces in terms of her well-regarded field position, economic capital required to make the two roles compatible, and how 'caring time' would shape work in a way that she would not favour:

> Yes, it's something I've thought long and hard about because I do want to be a mum and hopefully quite soon… I have considered the possibility of having to leave the industry when I become a mum. I don't think you have to. I mean… I think a lot of that comes down to how much finance you have. Money gives you options, right? So, it can work. I think my credits and my CV and my network, I think I could keep directing if I had the money to have a nanny and wanted to go down that route. I just think it requires… I don't think it's so straightforward in telly. I think I would also have to think about slightly different projects… I put my life on hold for the job and my life has to shift because I work around my contributors. I won't have that freedom when I have a child… A lot of mums that I know, that were directors before having a child, have moved into edit producing or they've tried to move into development, or maybe they've become a series producer. They're not jobs

> that I really want to be doing. So, I don't know. I think a lot of it comes down to what options you have and what drives you to do what you do.

Erica's narrative is indicative of the clash of these temporal consciousnesses, where negotiating their mutual accommodation is littered with challenges and compromise. It does appear that, even with her strong field position, for Erica to have a child, her role would have to change.

Holly, a freelancer in documentary television provides an example of when the transition to parenthood is done 'in crises' because someone does not have any other options than to work in 'production time' if they want their career to progress, despite the new pressures on 'caring time'. Holly was trying to make the leap from assistant producer to producer/director (PD) when she had a child. She discusses the problems this caused:

> It does feel like it came down to one really key point where if I'd just got that bit further it might have made a difference, but I didn't. Then I went off, had a baby, and had time off, and then I had to come back at that point where I was still on that cusp of something…
>
> …So, at the point when you want to be able to say, 'I can do this. You can totally invest in me. I can do everything,' you're also wanting to say, 'but I don't want to give you my all because I've got some other things that matter to me now too.

Erica and Holly are examples of freelancers who were not in field positions (either role of seniority) where the temporal consciousnesses of 'production time' and 'caring time' could be reconciled. Their narratives chime with the 'impossible career dilemma' of mothers discussed by Wallis, van Raalte and Allegrini (2020) While Erica was at this crossroads at the time of interview, Holly's story is picked up again in the next chapter.

In contrast, Ester and Judith managed to reach a level of seniority or develop strong enough social or symbolic (reputational) capital, prior to having children, to give them a different experience of this 'production time'/'caring time' life course tension. Ester initially thought that having a baby presented her with an 'impossible career dilemma' and would end her career:

> I'd thought at that point, well, I'm not sure I'll ever get another job again in TV, because I've got this baby. I don't know how you're going to work this career

> around a baby and kids, and I don't want to do the long hours that TV requires often. I want to spend time with my kids and be able to be around and be a mum… maybe I should think about doing a career change.

However, what initially appeared to be a 'crisis transition' ended up being a turning point in Ester's career. The studio she had developed a strong relationship with decided to support her desired change in time at work, essentially removing her from 'production time' into 'office time'. Judith had a similar experience of a supportive organisation:

> Then I was pregnant. I got pregnant! That put that [career idea] slightly on pause, but remarkedly, which is a really unusual thing in telly they said, 'Okay, well, we'll hold back on it and you can come back in a year and we'll give you… We'll promote you to exec producer.'

These examples of people who reach a level of seniority/reputation which gives them a chance to continue their roles are, as Judith comments, 'unusually' helped along by supportive organisations who recognised the value of continued investment in them, as opposed to finding someone new. While positive in this case, these examples highlight a problem discussed in the literature – where in place of any strong support from the state or labour organising, workers are subject to the whim of managers for such arrangements (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018; Milner and Gregory, 2022). Judith was promoted while on maternity, and Ester was kept on throughout three pregnancies by a studio she had developed a strong personal relationship with. Had they not been able to develop (in no small part helped by privileged educations and strong social capital in the 'All-In' phase) these relationships and reputations prior to the transition to parenthood, or had they not been with supporting organisations, their stories would likely have been different. While I have said something about outcomes here, Judith and Ester's career trajectories are picked up again in Chapter 6 as they continue to grapple with the consequences of parenthood. It is worth contrasting these experiences with Holly's who struggled to get to a senior position early. What role social position i.e., access to networks, economic support, and the right flavour of cultural capital plays in rising to a field position that affords more agency is important to consider.

The women in TV who were employed were able to take maternity leave and had some security when they returned, which for freelancers was not possible. This has meant that their accounts of having children differ from freelancers who expressed more concern about the transition in terms of insecurity. The interview narratives from those employed by broadcasters (whether in video, games, or website production) show that their concern with time commitments came later once

they have had children. Natasha worked for the BBC in games production, but her long commute to Salford meant she could not see her child as often as she liked:

> I was still living in [Northern town] and to get to Salford it's two hours on the train there and back, so it's a four hour commute a day. I had my first baby in 2013, so I went back after maternity leave and produced a game and did my very best, but quite honestly, I just was missing seeing my child because he was asleep when I got home. I just didn't think it was worth it.

Ophelia, working for a US entertainment network, experienced tension when she was not seeing her child as much as she liked:

> I didn't want to go back full-time, so at that point I asked for three days, and I never got three days. In the end I got four days… they were very old-fashioned. I kept suggesting job shares… they just couldn't get their heads around that. Then the other thing… They were going to move everyone to [another office which] would have meant my commute was an hour and a quarter rather than 55 minutes, and it just felt like the last straw really.

Ophelia's account indicates, in contrast to the experiences of Ester and Judith, the impact that unsupportive organisational cultures can have on workers' experiences.

While some of the participants discussed above are in games production, their employment at broadcasters means that they share much of their working cultures and practices. In purely Games studios, the time demands are different, with 'crunch time', as well as an expectation that staff socialise after-hours ('networking time'). Despite smaller indie studios having more flexible cultures of work (as will be explored in the next chapter), participants identify where different temporal consciousnesses have come into tension over their careers. Jess, a games designer, talks about how she felt when she started thinking about having a child and the impossibility of this happening had she continued to work in her old jobs. This extract characterises many things that affect women in Games from commutes to organisational cultures, and wider social norms around parenting. She also addresses the clash between different 'crunch' and 'caring' temporalities:

> I think it's really difficult. I mean if you take… [company 1] was quite toxic. [Company 2] wasn't toxic, but if you just think about the logistics of it, I had to commute to London, so I would leave… the house about 7:30. And then I

> would get home… 8 was like, the absolute earliest I could get home. And so, nurseries are open around 8-6 generally. So, it's like, what do you do? Do you take your kid with you, to London?! How is that supposed to work?
>
> A lot of women in my industry, they either decide to be child free or they just put it off a lot longer than they would like. It's very hard, and I know a lot of women who have left and have not come back because of the child thing. That has been the main issue. So, I do think… I don't like to bang on about it because I know that men look after their kids as well, I'm not saying that they don't, but it is just generally… it becomes the woman's role.

Explanations of Jess' perception of the gendered expectations around childcare continue:

> [Men] act like they're still in their 20s [laughs]. They still go out all the time, go to conferences, jet off around the world. It's really not uncommon. You know, their career is just what they live for… It's almost like a competition to be who's the most passionate, who's the most into it.

Jess highlights how some women in Games decide to be child-free or are forced into delayed transitions to parenthood due to the temporal consciousnesses of work. This has been quite common in the sample of games workers with 4 (2 men and 2 women) out of 10 stating they have chosen to be child free.

In another example, Kristen, who worked in e-Sports, experienced a wholly unsupportive, patriarchal organisational culture when she became pregnant:

> It was like an old boys' club. The management were the management, and things were done a very specific way…

The life course tension she felt when planning her maternity was thrown into further crisis when she was made redundant while on maternity, forcing her to take a break when her child was young.

Only two men in the sample, both from Websites, have indicated that they have thought about making changes to their commitment to work in order to play a more active role in parenting. Erik explains (in passing) how he went freelance when his wife became pregnant:

> When I started [my agency], my wife was pregnant with our first child, and it was very much a work-life balance decision, and at the time it was, 'Look, if this works for two or three years, brilliant, I'll have had the two or three years being able to see my daughter and have a lovely life, and that'll be great'.

Philip, a freelance web developer who works from home, expresses the change of priorities, and added time pressure, that transitioning to parenthood brings, comparing how he was working in 'crunch time' with 'caring time':

> …because you're burning time that you haven't got. And that distinctly changed once I'd got kids. Because economically, when you are… working for free when you've got kids [it] feels a bit obtuse because you've got kids that you can go and play with. Suddenly, all of your time is seen as a value.

A number of men in the sample only mentioned their parenting in passing, and alongside the rest of their career histories, indicates that the transition to parenthood did not lead to the same life course tension. Taken all together, data clearly points to the continued gendered norms around parenting and the subsequent tensions this creates for women who contemplate having children. This, in addition to their treatment in organisations, points to the challenges mothers face in sustaining careers. How they negotiate this issue is explored in the next chapter, revealing how parenting continues to affect career trajectories long after children are born.

5.4.2 Mental and physical health concerns: the need for 'wellbeing time'

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 on 'working less' considered a range of motivating factors (Kelliher, Richardson and Boiarintseva, 2019; Balderson *et al.*, 2020). However, findings from interviewed revealed that a primary driver for taking time away from work was the need to protect one's mental and physical health. As already indicated, the pressures of work in Video, Games, and Websites are often extreme, and the temporal consciousnesses of 'production time' and 'crunch time' have been especially challenging for some of those in the sample. The consequent experiences for mental and physical health concerns are now discussed, highlighting the 'life course tension' caused by the demands of work and the need to prioritise 'wellbeing time'. Wellbeing time is not as well-defined as 'caring time', but represents the time needed by

someone to rest and recuperate away from work, which is identified by Balderson *et al*. (2020). By assessing these tensions in relation to individual habituses, we face the idea that maybe some people 'are just not suited' to this kind of work. However, as raised by Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan (2015), this 'person-environment fit' concept (what we might call habitus/field fit) can hide the structural issues that pervade the sector, whether that's inequalities already discussed which increase time pressures, or structures that shape time use such as production schedules or organisational cultures. In addition to any consideration of personal aptitude for a particular temporal consciousness, field position and wider social position are important factors in shaping the experience of this life course tension, just as with the discussion of the transition to parenthood above.

Martin, a 37-year-old graphic designer, is subject to a range of pressures that make the demands of 'production time' especially challenging for him, due to both the conditions of the field/role, and his own social position where he has been especially concerned about precariousness. Firstly, he struggles with a working environment hit by labour shortages:

> There has been a shortage of labour, and one of the things I've found is, people who were very junior are now in positions of power, which they're not ready for. So, I did [series]… they didn't know how things worked. And then the job [wasn't] being organised properly… that all filters down. And the crumple zone, if you like, are the people making it. It's not the money or the time [that change under pressure], it's… the people who are compressed to make it happen, not the process.

Compounding this is the further intensification of work caused by 'miracle drift' (discussed in Chapter 4), which shortens the expectations of deadlines. As well as time-intense roles, Martin's concerns about precarity and financial security have resulted in a situation where he has felt he has had to work constantly. Due to these factors, he has been under so much sustained pressure that his physical health is suffering in a way that critically affects his work (details held back to protect anonymity). He acknowledges that he needs to balance 'production time' with 'wellbeing time' in order to protect his health and as a result, Martin is having to reassess what he is able to do in his career. This is creating a 'life course tension' for him:

> You know, I was very close to being the best… working on big films, having an established body of work, a look that people recognise, and being known for doing what you're doing. I was very close to getting that…

> … So, to change that entire way of living… yeah, it's not just leaving a job, it's changing who you are.

Similarly, Erica feels the unrelenting pressure of 'production time', especially for freelancers, is not sustainable over a career:

> You hit the ground running, you can't be ill, I never take time off for being ill, you just power through. I've had burn out. It's hard. It's hard being freelance as well because if you need to take time off, you're not getting paid to do that. I think it gets harder the older you get because there's no let up. Those hours exist whether you're 19, 20 or whether you're 52. I think people just have to look after themselves…
>
> Mental health is very stigmatised. I think there's a fear to say you're anything other than on your game, because they'll get rid of you. That's a reality. No one wants to employ someone that they think won't be anything but the best they can be.

Erica recognises the pressure that the industry puts on her, which is compounded by her desire to have a family as previously discussed. Her mention of age is highly relevant to the problem of worker attrition over the life course, which this thesis is concerned with. Her recognition of the stigma attached to mental health issues indicates organisational cultures which need to be addressed if workers are to be better supported to stay in the sector.

Rhonda, a highly accomplished drama director, has been selective with the jobs she takes (prioritising 'wellbeing time' over too much 'production time'). However, she acknowledges the tension this creates linked to her financial concerns, and her worries about 'being forgotten':

> I've turned down jobs because I've just done two other jobs, and I don't want to be away from home again. But actually, it's a very dangerous thing to do, because if you don't do [a job], you get forgotten quite quickly. They like you to just keep rolling on from job to job to job. So, that's the awkward thing for me… It feels like a gamble. Every time. I'm gambling. Because my position is precarious.

We return to Rhonda later, discussing the consequences of her prioritisation of 'wellbeing time'.

In websites, Cody and Austin have been in roles which have strong elements of ‘crunch time’, as well as irregular hours, which have felt especially intense. Austin discusses his experiences of ‘crunch time’ and the constant pressure to deliver in web development roles:

> It means you just have to spend half your life just trying to do bug-fixes… So that was a huge amount of pressure on me. Suddenly it was this big deal, and if it went wrong, it was all going to be on me… I ended up getting really bad back problems, shoulder problems… yeah, my anxiety went through the roof really. I think I've realised that I'm quite a sensitive person, and that kind of stuff just doesn’t work for me at all. That level of pressure.

Austin describes the relief he felt when getting a break from work:

> I volunteered on a farm for a bit, which I found really nice. Just to try and get away from the anxiety of working with computers all my life. And just working with my hands, working in simple, menial jobs on a farm, I found very relaxing and a totally different way of life than spending all day vying with computers.

The reflexivity afforded through this break set a course of action to an *imagined future* which better balanced work and non-work in order to prioritise his mental wellbeing. His actions are discussed in the next chapter. Similarly, Cody’s struggles with mental health led them to reflect on the balance between ‘crunch time’ and ‘wellbeing time’, affecting their career trajectory. Both Cody and Austin have been in junior roles as these life course tensions have arisen, which as we see in the next chapter, has limited their options.

As with the discussion of the transition to parenthood, field position and social position is important in how the life course tensions around mental and physical health concerns are experienced. Ophelia, a producer in Websites and Games who has experienced similar ‘crunch time’ pressures to Cody and Austin discusses how she views prioritising her mental health:

> I’ve been able to make [choices] because we have weighed up that it’s okay if my income is less or whatever, or we’ve decided it’s better for my mental health or our son’s well-being or whatever it might be. I think that’s quite important…
>
> I think there’s something that’s not always picked up around what choices people are making to feel that long-term they’re enjoying what they’re doing, which then has a positive effect on their family life and their mental health.

Ophelia identifies that she has been able to make such choices due to the financial security that her husband's job brings. Rhonda, as mentioned previously, has been selective about the jobs she takes on so that she does not work constantly. This, in contrast to Martin's precarity/precariousness and Cody and Austin's junior positions discussed earlier, has been possible due to her financial security.

Each of these examples has described a 'life course tension' associated with either suffering from, or protecting oneself from, mental and physical health concerns. There has been a recognition that work needs to be balanced with 'wellbeing time' in order to make it sustainable. How these participants and others have acted to resolve this life course tension is discussed in the next chapter.

5.4.3 Location of work: the desire for 'settling down time'

With time away for work, either due to long commutes or because a production is on location (cf. Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013), the resulting time away from the home and/or social fields has been shown to create tension for participants as they move beyond the 'All-In phase' and look to prioritise other aspects of their lives. While being away from home due to the location of work is not field-specific (commutes and working away from home occur in many work careers), the tension between temporal consciousnesses of work and what might be termed a temporal consciousness of 'settling down time' has been a trigger for reflexive action for a number of participants, so is included in these findings. Commuting/working away doesn't necessarily bring with it a particular temporal consciousness, but it does prolong the association with work temporal consciousnesses and involves committing more time. This is linked to where someone works (Oakley *et al.*, 2017), which are often inherent to the organising logics of the fields. For example, participants working in 'production time' in Video have to work around the schedules of location shooting which, as is described below, can be around the UK and abroad. Due to the way that productions are 'crewed up', these commutes or trips away can be on very short notice. When not on location, issues remain, as across the sample it is evident that jobs in websites, games, and video tend to be geographically located in only a handful of 'creative hubs' (Gill, Pratt and Virani, 2019) around the UK, meaning commutes can be long. Where someone lives and their proximity to work is something that is not always easily changed, especially if someone has commitments like a mortgage or children in school.

As with other ‘life course tensions’, experiences are not equal. Evidence indicates the persistence of gender inequalities as this ‘settling time down’ interacts with gendered expectations of ‘caring time’. Those experiences of life course tensions related to the need for ‘wellbeing time’ are impacted by working away from the home, meaning those whose who have experienced mental and physical health concerns are more affected by this issue. Interestingly however, field position, while still playing a role, appears less consequential compared to other life course tensions. At the time that many participants were experiencing the issues described below, organisational cultures and technological limitations restricted their ability to work from home (the exception being a few younger workers in websites). While some senior roles in Video are more likely to be office based and not on location, commutes still feature. Of course, the rise of home working since the Covid-19 pandemic has changed many aspects of work, but due to the timing of these interviews (at the start of the pandemic), that is beyond the scope of this research.

Natasha, Rachel, and Jess, all in Games where there has traditionally been a culture of office working, have discussed how their commute has impacted their wellbeing. Jess commuted from the south coast of England to London, and coupled with inflexible hours found this a challenge:

> I moved [job] to London, and that was a much longer commute and was very tough, and I only stayed there for a little over a year. It was a great team, a great studio, but I really just hated the commute… And they really didn’t do flexible working or anything like that. You could do the odd day at home if you were really kind of stuck, but nobody had any kind of agreement that they could work at home for multiple days a week or anything like that. So, after about a year I was pretty sick of it.

Rachel reports a similar theme, showing her reflexive thinking:

> Realising that I was putting two hours into a commute each day… it just makes you re-examine why. And I think that a lot of offices have a culture of ‘we need to be face to face’. I know that my previous role did.

Natasha, discussed in more detail in the parenting section, had a very long commute of 4 hours a day and was unable to see here young child. Each of these examples, as will be explored in the next chapter, resulted in decisions to work remotely from their home location. Their ability to

choose this new form of working, and the impact this has had on their career trajectories, is also explored.

Working on location is a feature of ‘production time’, as Rhonda explains:

> I work all over the place, so when I get a job that’s away, I’m basically away. It’s usually between four and six months. I went to Spain for four months… All around this country. So, basically my job is very based on where the production is based. One has to be very flexible about just upping sticks and just moving somewhere else.

Holly also comments:

> All these jobs involve filming on location and being able to go off and do things for a period of time intensively, so that involved eight weeks living in Blackpool, for example. Before that at various points I’d spent eight weeks in Florida, eight weeks in Ibiza, moving around, which you have to be in a position to be able to do that.

This norm of being away has come up as being in tension with people’s preferences as they get older. Erica explains her changing preferences, while still being willing to work away from home to advance her career:

> I definitely view jobs that take me away from home, at this point in my life, differently to eight or ten years ago. That’s purely because I like being at home a bit more. I would definitely still consider a job that takes me away from home [if it] is a step up…. [For one job], I was willing to move away from home and to make that sacrifice for that opportunity… I am married. I don’t have any children, so I still feel like I have that freedom… I do think [about] it differently to my earlier years, for sure.

As already discussed, Erica does not currently have children. However, for those (women) with a family, working away for long hours a day is incompatible with childcare. To revisit the discussion on the transition to parenthood, and to reiterate Holly’s position, this way of working is incompatible with childcare arrangements:

> It’s quite an intense period, but of course, that doesn’t work with childcare. The problem is, in theory if you’ve got no other commitments you could go on

> a project, you could work really hard, and then you might have two or three weeks off in-between where you're looking for other work. You're also having a break. Obviously, you can't plan for childcare that way.

It is evident that the tension of working away from home and the transition to parenthood are overlapping life course tensions. Also explored previously, Rhonda's decision to protect her wellbeing by being selective in the roles she takes on, as well as Erica and Martin's comments on workload, indicates that working away from home and health concerns are closely related.

Once again it is worth highlighting how men and women have talked about working away from home differently. Roger, a previously well-known actor now producing and presenting YouTube videos, talks about his time away for work as being regrettable but inevitable:

> So, when I was making [show] in the states, I would be in California… We made a whole series of [show] in America in 2001, and we were living in Sydney then, and that was… I found a diary… I read a bit out to my wife the other night… and she just said 'you can't do that, just shut it, I don't want to hear'. It was so heart breaking. I missed the kids so badly. Because they were then young… 4 and 7… young kids. And you know, they like… I now know, kids that age, particularly boys, quite like having their dad around.

Roger is upset that he missed time with his children, but this tension was not followed by action which altered his career trajectory. As with the discussion of tensions around parenthood, there is a surprising lack of other comments from men on time away from family, either due to commuting or working away. Erik and Philip mention commutes and family only in passing. This, compared to the range of reflective comments from women in the sample, is indicative of the gendered norms of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) in workplaces that have long and intense hours and expectations of working away, making this issue seemingly unworthy of reflexive action by many men in the sample.

5.4.4 'Left out time'

The life course tensions already discussed have been relevant to when the temporal consciousnesses of the 'All-In' phase have come into tension with other temporal consciousnesses. These have been where work is taking up too much time, is too intense, or too

logistically challenging to sustain. However, participants have been interviewed at different stages over the life course and as such, have experienced a range of life course tensions across their careers. Later life course tensions are explored in this section: Firstly, people who have not adhered sufficiently to the 'training time' temporal consciousness described in the first part of this chapter are now at risk of obsolescence. Secondly, people who have previously had very successful careers now faced with an 'early exit' as they cannot attract enough work due to (gendered) ageism. In sum, these various 'later-life' tensions, which constitute the risk of 'early exits' can be described as being about the temporal consciousnesses of work being in tension with 'left out time', where people fear not being able to sustain work because they cannot maintain enough employment.

Training was identified as being important for sustaining careers in Chapter 2 (Hennekam and Bennett, 2017; Martinez Dy, Martin and Marlow, 2018). For many in the sample, the 'common sense' (doxa) of the field is that training needs to be continually updated in order to remain employable, with individual workers responsible for this. This is expressed earlier in this chapter as the 'training time' temporal consciousness. However, there are people in the sample where the adherence to 'training time' has been lacking due to long periods of stable employment in jobs that do not require much ongoing training. They have later been confronted by the threat of unemployment as their jobs have gone and they are left behind in the contemporary job market. This threat of obsolescence ('left out time') has created crises. Max, a 47-year-old digital manager for a charity explains:

> I think one of the things that is increasingly an issue, perhaps in quite a lot of IT… is this thing between generalist and specialist. Ten years ago, I was expected to know everything about the web. As time's gone on… you're stuck as a generalist whilst other people are developing specialisms. And that can be more of an issue because… there's a lack of generalist jobs out there. People are wanting specialisms, they're wanting people who solely look at UX or solely look at search engine optimisation or solely look at social media, and as somebody who knows quite a lot about a lot of stuff… it's harder for [us generalists] to have career progression through the industry.

Due to some organisational changes, Max now feels his charity job of 20 years is under threat and is concerned for his future. Recognising a similar concern, Charles, a 50-year-old front-end web developer, has made some efforts to develop a specialism in search engine optimisation but has only done this through free courses offered by the companies like Google and Meta, which may

be insufficient. Whether he, or Max, have committed the right amount of time to developing their skillset to remain employable is unclear. In contrast, Douglas and Gray are examples of when 'training time' has been prioritised across their careers, resulting in no tensions around 'left out time'. Their stories will be picked up in Chapter 6, showing what is necessary in order to sustain careers in a sector where continual retraining is so important.

Roger and Rhonda discuss their experiences of ageism in Video. Firstly, Roger, an actor and presenter who now works in YouTube content creation, discusses the challenges he faced in the context of being an ageing man, and how this relates to the women he knows in the same position:

> So, in my 50s with teenage children with high financial demands, I had no job, no income, nothing. I did actually then get some work… survival money, you know. It wasn't that well paid. So, that was a real drop in income. I think I worked out that it was about an 87% drop in income from 2007 to 2008. It was like 'shit, I've earnt nothing'… So, that was extremely stressful… …really difficult.
>
> It's so cruel. Out of all the women I know from the last 30, 40 years, one of them is working now. It's so unusual. And she's doing a job that she hates. And quite a lot of the men are still appearing on panel shows. And older actors get more work than older actresses… All the women that I know that have gone into other fields… You can be an older woman and write. That's acceptable. But to have started out as an attractive young woman in television, and then you're 55… forget it. You know, I'm a white bloke in a sexist, white supremacist culture who's old… so fucking what. You know, that's why [my age] isn't a problem, I think.

This final sentence contradicts his first statement but makes sense in the context of what Roger has been able to do since, explored in the next chapter. This discussion of gendered ageism on screen reflects findings from Raisborough *et al.* (2022) who argue that women are erased on-screen as they age.

Echoing these sentiments on gendered ageism and extending them to behind-the-camera roles as Ursell (2000) does, Rhonda, a 55-year-old director, talks about her experiences:

> For men, this drop off is much less dramatic. I'm sure you've read about female actresses… after the age of fifty, women start to disappear. Like, with actresses, people used to think it was because of the way they looked. People don't want to see older people on television, and all the rest of it. But I'm behind the camera, so it shouldn't really apply, but it does. It's difficult to really get underneath why that is, because the fact that I'm older should really be something that is a positive, not a negative… really. So, I don't really understand it. But it's there. I know it's there because I am aware of the statistics.
>
> … I had my leaps early, and then I hit a ceiling. Quite early. If you look at [my male colleague] and me, he's gone up, and I keep hitting glass ceilings … I don't feel like I've been able to shape my career… The older I've got, I just feel like I'm just hanging on in there. There's no career plan or shape… I really do feel that I haven't been given the same opportunities in order to [plan a career]. And I know plenty of other women directors who are in the same position as me.

This rich testimony is slightly in tension with Rhonda's previous discussions of being selective about the work she takes on, and what this means for her career prospects. By not 'rolling on from job to job to job', her social capital may have been affected (discussed in the following chapter). However, despite the earlier decisions to balance work and wellbeing, her story of gender inequality chimes with Leung, Gill and Randle (2015) who find that women in TV and film are often 'career scramblers', unable to chart a clear career course as their male counterparts do. It is interesting that, despite Rhonda's early success which put her in a strong 'field position', her age and gender seemingly override her reputation, indicating another facet of Video's 'inequality regime'. Indeed, we might consider how the 'somatic norm' includes 'youthfulness'.

Each of the life course tensions related to 'left out time' have prompted action to try and maintain careers and avoid 'early exits'. These actions are discussed in the next chapter.

5.4.5 Other experiences of life course tensions

While indicative, the examples used above do not describe every experience in the sample, but rather those themes that are most prominent. This section briefly outlines the remaining stories, providing some context which helps to explain their different experiences.

Neil, a 46-year-old animator had built up a strong reputation as a freelancer working with a prestigious animation company. His European wife missed the support of her family, which created a life course tension between the social demands of ‘production time’ and the *imagined future* of being able to support his wife’s wellbeing.

Ruby, a career changer into TV production, has been able to balance work with ‘caring time’ thanks to role with a weekly, studio-based news programme run by a large broadcaster, gained through a specific training scheme. However, the impact of covid had, at the time of interview, disrupted this pattern, meaning she is faced with the prospect of having to operate in ‘production time’ as experienced at the ‘All-In’ phase. This, as already discussed, is likely incompatible with ‘caring time’.

Adam and Kanvar, both in Website communications roles have had, once established in their roles, rapid rises to strong field positions, giving them agency over their time. In the case of Adam, he has initiated a relaxed office culture which has allowed him to be flexible enough to support his family alongside his wife. Kanvar has moved into a more senior role that allows him to stop ‘networking time’ so he is able to maintain regular office hours.

Douglas, in websites, and Michael, Justin, and Rachel in Games, have made conscious decisions to remain child-free. This has meant that despite whatever concerns they have for workload, they have not had to contend with navigating the balance between work and ‘caring time’. While their situations may change, each person here could be considered to be still largely operating in the temporal consciousness of their ‘All-In’ phase.

Similarly, although in their late 40s/early 50s, Alicia and Dennis are operating as if in the 'All-In' phase. For Alicia, this is in part because she moved into the Video field in her 30s, but also because, as discussed in Chapter 4, she has had a lack of opportunities thanks to the way the industry has treated her as a Black woman. Unlike those in more established field positions, her reputation and networks are less secure. For Dennis, his work demands that he operates in 'conveyer belt time' where, as discussed earlier, he has to relentlessly publish YouTube content to provide his income. While Roger has a similar demand, he works with a team so is able to act be in a producer role involving less time commitment, and he is more financially secure. Neither Alicia or Dennis has children, and both are able to commit to the time demands of the field. However, they are in precarious positions as if their work is disrupted in any way, they may not be able to meet these demands. Dennis has mentioned the potential for him having to care more for his elderly father, indicating a potential challenge to his situation.

For some of the participants mentioned in this section, we will not meet them again. This is because they are not at a stage in their life course and career where a renegotiation has taken place, or because they have, thanks to their lack of life course tensions, been able to operate as the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). Who the participants are who have not been affected by the issues in this chapter indicates the nature of the 'inequality regimes' that the fields represent.

5.5 Conclusion

Having identified the field-specific temporal consciousnesses present at the 'All-In' phase of work and how these are experienced differently depending on someone's possession of capitals and consequently their habitus, this chapter has gone on to identify how the temporal consciousnesses of work have clashed with temporal consciousnesses from other, non-work social fields. I have shown that at the intersection of these different social fields, people have become reflexive as they compare the logic of one field with another (Decoteau, 2016), with the resulting 'life course tensions' being the starting point for action to reconcile work and other aspects of people's lives.

Chapter 4 focused on the role that inequalities have played in the different outcomes in the 'All-In' phase. This chapter has highlighted how consequent field position i.e., role and seniority/reputation, plus the continued effects of wider social inequalities and relatedly

someone's habitus, affect experiences of life course tensions. Early inequalities, already a cause of 'filtering' of workers out of the workforce for some, have the knock-on effect of life course tensions being experienced differently by different people, with those in less advantageous field positions experiencing the biggest perceived challenges.

In addition, there is strong evidence in this chapter that, unlike the 'All-In' phase, gender inequality has come to the fore. Life course tensions have often appeared to be more consequential in the narratives of women, both in terms of their affective nature, and the more limited choices available to them due to gendered expectations around parenting, organisational cultures which in many cases still favour the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990), and the role that gendered ageism plays. The fields of study represent gendered 'inequality regimes' that are broadly not supportive of women over the life course. Furthermore, it is worth noting that all the women in the sample who have moved beyond the 'All-In' phase are from white, middle-class backgrounds. While this makes any sort of intersectional analysis challenging, this lack of diversity does strongly indicate the extent that the 'inequality regimes' of the three fields of study marginalise the working class and people of colour; They have already been filtered out, or in the case of Alicia, held back and forced to operate as if in their 'All-In' phase.

Comparing this finding with the literature, the fact that career outcomes are only now becoming gendered reflects Dent's (2020) findings, where a (white) middle-class disposition that initially allowed women to access work in the creative industries is the same disposition that favours 'intensive mothering'. At the same time, this privileged position does not overcome the gendered assumptions of the creative industries. Both issues mean the women in that study (and the family units that they are a part of) often end up deprioritising their careers. The extent to which this is the case for this sample is explored in the next chapter. Steele's (2022) findings on the lack of suitable working conditions for older workers with caring roles is also relevant. The ageism experienced in the sample echoes Ursell (2000, p. 816) who shows that older workers are 'discarded' in favour of a large pool of cheap, more pliable newcomers, along with Raisborough *et al.* (2022) discussion of the invisibility of older women on screen.

To end this chapter, I turn to a useful way to summarise the different experiences of life course tensions discussed in this chapter, which is to adapt Banks' (2019) comparison of Adkins' (2013) 'event time' and his 'biographical time'. These might be considered as two *master temporal*

consciousnesses that sit above the experiences of work and refer more broadly to how someone is managing work and non-work*;* Either time use is being shaped by work 'events', or time use is at the will of the individual to live out their preferred biographies. Banks explores whether someone is able to maintain a sense of biography while sustaining their career, or whether they are forced to prioritise work over their lives to stay employable. This allows for a neat way of assessing how field position and life course tensions interact if we adapt the idea to ask: when 'biography' is experienced by the participants (when life course experiences occur such as children or ill health), are they able to sustain their careers? At what point in someone's career trajectory does their role and position allow them to balance work and non-work without being 'filtered out'? As will be seen, 'biographical time' *is* possible for many in the sample. That is of course because the sample is skewed towards those that have sustained their careers. For those that do manage to sustain their careers, it is important to understand how they do this, and what the consequences are, so that we can provide evidence for policy and practice on how positive outcomes might be scaled up to help more older workers sustain their digital and creative careers.

To that end, the next chapter considers the various actions taken to resolve life course tensions, which, as will be explored, is done through a renegotiation of participants' 'participation profiles' (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016), specifically through a renegotiation of their time at work. It shows how the ability to renegotiate a participation profile is dependent on a participant's field position *and* the institutional and organisational support they receive in the process (Tomlinson et al., 2018). Those in strong field positions can be successful, whereas those in less advantageous positions are less likely to be able to make changes without negative consequence. They may even be in a position where they can no longer meet the demands of the field. Findings also show how important *enabling conditions* are to this process. The chapter explores: who is having to take what action? What are the conditions which allow them to do so? Importantly, what compromises are made in terms of someone's career, and do these actions constitute a 'filtering', down (to lower positions) or sideways (changing role or field)? Through this, the chapter explores what more this says about the 'inequality regimes' that the fields of Websites, Games, and Video constitute.

Before we move on, it is worth thinking about those workers stuck in 'event time', who perceive that the life course tensions identified in this chapter are not possible to resolve as their field position does not allow it. They are 'filtered out'. I suggest that the precipitous decline of older

workers, especially women (Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015; Carey *et al.*, 2020; Steele, 2022) is as a result of these tensions being perceived as impossible to resolve.

Chapter 6 (Re)negotiating creativity

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 has shown how work and other aspects of people's lives have interacted to create experiences of 'life course tensions'. I have argued that these tensions are experienced differently depending on someone's social position (such as their economic support, and gendered norms around childcare and ageing), compounded by their 'field position' (their role and position of seniority/reputation) which is often a function of the inequalities that begin in early life and are exacerbated through the 'All-In' phase. These issues dictate workers' perceived ability to exercise agency in addressing these tensions, meaning that for those workers who are disadvantaged by inequalities, the experiences of life course tensions can be another point in a career where a 'filtering out' of workers occurs. I suggest that this explains the sharp decline in those in digital and creative work, initially for those in mid-career but continuing over the life course.

Having contributed a novel way of understanding the causes of workers leaving the industries as they age, the rest of the thesis is concerned with an exploration of what action many of the participants in the sample have been able to take in order to relieve these tensions so as to sustain their digital and creative careers. This action has been a *renegotiation* of their participation profile (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016) to better balance their time at work with other aspects of their lives. This is often to reduce time at work but has also been to increase time at work to avoid 'early exits' for those facing a lack of employment. As such, these findings address a gap in the literature around the experiences of older workers in the fields of Websites, Games, and Video. Importantly, by exploring the specific conditions in which people have been able to continue work in the face of the challenges presented in Chapters 4 and 5, both in terms of participants' field positions, and any *enabling conditions* such as financial help from families or supportive organisations (Tomlinson et al., 2018) that allows participants to sustain work where others in similar field positions might not, these findings present examples of ways to address those inequalities if the conditions can be replicated. As such, the thesis provides evidence for policy and practice as to what support is needed to better support older workers to sustain their careers, whether that is to promote shifts in organisational cultures, encourage more professionalised recruitment and training policies within organisations, or at the level of government policy on such things as supporting older workers to access ongoing training, or

tackling discriminatory hiring practices (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2018; Milner and Gregory, 2022; Steele, 2022).

Despite any *enabling conditions*, a theme that continues over from the previous chapters is the ability to take action to sustain careers is related to someone's habitus, field position, their wider social position, as well as the conditions of the field; Structural inequalities are very much still a part of the narratives of participants who have been able to sustain careers because the field positions required to take action have been dependent on the possession of the right mix of capitals from their formative and 'All-In' life course phases, including someone's proximity to the somatic norm i.e., their embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

In addition, new inequalities arise over the life course as despite many participants being able to inhabit 'biographical time' (Banks, 2019) and sustain a career while they encounter life course experiences, the actions that they have taken to do so have resulted in outcomes which can affect career success or represent a threat to sustaining a career. Those that have maintained their career in the same role or field but renegotiated their time at work can be at risk of no longer being able to meet the 'demands of the field' (as described in Chapter 4) and are at risk of being 'filtered out'. This is shown to be because time capital and other forms of capital are in a *dynamic* relationship; Those people who do not maintain the appropriate full-time working (shown to mean *enough* time, *at the right time*) are less likely to be able to continue to meet the demands of the field. Relatedly, where someone works is shown to be important as this often impacts their ability to maintain sufficient social capital. When someone has renegotiated their time related to work activities by reducing or eliminating commutes or working away, the lack of face-to-face interaction in a sector built on personal relationships is shown to be detrimental to continued employment opportunities. In other findings, a loss of prestige, or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is experienced by those who have to move to roles which represent a 'step back' to protect their mental and physical wellbeing. This can be considered a 'filtering down' for those workers who are unable to sustain the pressures of work at the level at which they were previously operating. Others who experience ill health have similarly suffered from setbacks to their career trajectories as they either change role or reduce their time in work in the fields of study in order to protect themselves from harm. 'Filtering sideways' has occurred when people change field, for example from Video to Websites. While these narratives appear at first to be agentic, being able to transfer their cultural capital to another field, their framing hides the fact that if production practices and organisational cultures were different, this move from the challenging conditions of

'production time' to the more manageable 'crunch time' or 'office time' wouldn't be necessary. As is shown, this sideways move isn't done across the board, affecting those with responsibility for caring more than those who can outsource this to partners. This represents another instance where career outcomes are gendered. Finally, for those attempting to increase their time in work, two themes are identified. For those facing ageism, new means of reaching an audience are explored, with new streaming services and YouTube offering ways to bypass gatekeepers who marginalise older workers, especially women. In a consideration of those at risk of obsolescence, different attitudes to maintaining a 'training time' temporal consciousness are explored within the sample, indicating what is needed to maintain the right cultural capital as technology rapidly evolves.

The chapter is structured as follows. A brief recapitulation of 'participation profiles' (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016), Tomlinson et al.'s (2018) understanding of what allows for 'flexible careers', and Decoteau's 'reflexive habitus' (2016) frames how action to relieve life course tensions is conceptualised. Next, findings are grouped into a number of themes relating to how different participants took action to relieve the life course tensions described in Chapter 5. An exploration of who has been able to take what action is discussed in relation to their habitus, field-position, and wider social position, as well as how the specific temporal consciousnesses of the field (or as will be seen, a different field) shapes action. In addition, any unusual *enabling conditions* are discussed, revealing the 'exceptions to the rules' that might point to conditions in which work in the three fields of study can be made more manageable for the wider workforce. Throughout, the consequences of taking action are considered in relation to the 'demands of the fields' outlined in Chapter 4, people's career trajectories, and how 'inequality regimes' have shaped these outcomes.

6.2 Renegotiating 'participation profiles'

As discussed in Chapter 2, Levy & Bühlmann's (2016) life course approach argues that people operate in multiple social fields, and at any moment in the life course, the way that time is divided between those social fields can be considered a 'participation profile'. Decoteau's (2016) critical realist reading of Bourdeau emphasises that at the intersection of multiple social fields, people can become reflexive as they compare the logic of one field with another. In the case of this thesis, this is conceptualised as comparing the temporal consciousness of the work field with the various temporal consciousnesses of non-work fields, including *imagined futures* (Williams, 2018).

Chapter 5 has considered this reflexivity at times when the balance between work and non-work within someone's participation profile presents challenges to participants. These 'life course tensions' are spurs for action as they give people a 'reflexive distance and conscious understanding of themselves that can lead to well-articulated plans for transformation' (Decoteau, 2016, p. 318). This chapter shows how, for the majority of the life course tensions that were identified in Chapter 5, a *renegotiation* of someone's participation profile is attempted in order to relieve those tensions. This is in line with Hochschild's (2005) notion of 'resisters', who de-prioritise work in favour of other aspects of their lives.

When considering the ability to effectively achieve any 'plans for transformation', Levy & Bühlmann's (2016) three-part definition of participation is useful. 'Participation' encompasses an *amount of time* spent in the field (participation), the *role* one has in the field (division of labour), and the (hierarchical) *position* in the field. Previous chapters have considered the importance of *role* and *position* (which I have discussed as horizontal and vertical 'field position') in affording someone agency. This chapter explores how that is the case as people attempt to renegotiate their 'participation profile' i.e., the balance between time spent in different social fields, in order to relieve their various life course tensions, considering the extent to which this has been possible. In line with Tomlinson et al. (2018), the chapter also considers what state and organisational support, as well as personal support, has been required to make any changes i.e., to realise 'flexible careers'. I have termed this support *enabling conditions*.

This short methodological recapitulation sets up the chapter's analysis of the actions participants have taken to address their various life course tensions, which are now explored.

6.3 Actions to relieve life course tensions

The actions that have been taken fall into two broad categories. Firstly, there are those who need to reduce their participation in work to address life course tensions around 'caring time', 'wellbeing time', and 'settling down time'. These actions include:

- Going part time and/or changing when work is done.
- Reducing or eliminating commutes and working away from home.

- Taking a step back from high-pressure work.
- Changing field between Websites, Games, and Video.

Secondly, there are those actions which look to sustain or increase participation in work for those with the fear of ‘left out time’. These actions include:

- Finding new creative mediums.
- Being proactive about professional development.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, these two themes tend to be split between those in mid-career, and those experiencing ‘late-career’ tensions.

As these themes are discussed, I emphasise the importance of field position, social position, and the conditions of the field. While this does to some extent reiterate the themes of Chapter 5, the specific examples allow for rich descriptions of how renegotiations are dependent on field position, and in some cases, related *enabling conditions*. Any *enabling conditions* often point to the ‘exceptions to the rules’ in the fields of study, highlighting both the prevalence of structural barriers to sustaining careers, and potential ways to help more people sustain their careers, if these enabling conditions can be scaled up.

6.3.1 Going part-time to manage parenthood

Chapter 5 illustrated how the temporal consciousnesses of work, especially ‘production time’ are often incompatible with ‘caring time’. This section about going part-time, and the next on reducing or eliminating commutes, shows two ways in which participants have attempted to renegotiate their participation profile in order to better prioritise ‘caring time’. It reveals how people have been able to do this, both in terms of their field positions (role and seniority) and any *enabling conditions* such as financial help from families or organisational support. It also explores the consequences of this renegotiation, revealing the risk that any action poses to sustaining a career, or if it constitutes a sideways or downwards ‘filtering’ of workers. Who is able to take what action, how do the conditions of the field effect their experiences (for example, being

freelance versus being employed), and what the consequences are for different people is assessed.

Starting in Video, Judith highlights the importance of vertical field position, indicating that her ability to renegotiate her time commitment would not have happened if she had had children earlier:

> I'll say this to anyone, I was able to progress this far because I had children later in life and that's the long and short of it. I had my kids at 37 and 39 and at that point I was officially an executive producer. If I had of been having my kids at 28, 29, no way I would have been able to get this far, none whatsoever because… in order to progress you have to compromise on the jobs you're taking and that does mean no work/life balance.

Holly also highlights the problem of having children when working at a junior level, relating this to norms around age and life course phase:

> You have to be higher up, high enough to be the boss, to be able to then have that flexibility. If you're working at the level that most people are… the people who are actually making the programmes, a lot of those people don't have children and there's a reason for that.

These comments illustrate why those who have children before reaching more senior roles find it very difficult to sustain work. This can be seen with Holly's account of what happened when she tried to continue her progress towards being a producer while having the responsibility of a young child:

> There was a couple of times where I had to say, when I was in the edit, 'I've got to go home now.' Someone would come in at five to six… to look at something we'd been working on, and then say, 'Can you make these changes?' and I was like, 'No! I can't make these changes now. I've got to pick up my baby from nursery.' I really remember this, and I remember them being, 'Oh, I'll do it then.' I felt like a problem, and I didn't get offered any more work from them and I don't know why.

Holly felt she was not able to give what was required of her. In addition, she was made to feel that her need to prioritise her child was not OK and that her place in the industry was therefore devalued, echoing the literature such as Dent (2020). This experience was exacerbated by the fact

that she was freelance, meaning there was no support for her position as a mother. Holly ended up being 'filtered out' of the TV industry because she made the transition to parenthood while working in 'event time' (adapted from Adkins, 2013; Banks, 2019 discussed in Chapter 5) and was not able to take the roles she was offered because they would not work for her circumstances. She was unable to resolve this life course tension between 'production time' and 'caring time'.

In contrast, field position (and the *enabling condition* of organisational support) allowed Judith to do what Holly could not. Judith's field position meant that when she fell pregnant, she was in a position where her strong reputation and personal relationship with a production company (a result of her symbolic and social capitals) allowed her to make the transition to parenthood while sustaining her career. With the unexpected support of the production company, Judith was made an employee and went 3 days a week once she came back from a year out to have her child. She moved from series producer, operating in 'production time', up to executive producer which could accommodate an 'office time' temporal consciousness. In this role, she worked early office hours to fit in with childcare, which was earlier in the day than her colleagues. Holly and Judith's contrasting stories have implications for Erica who, as discussed in the previous chapter, is experiencing tension as she reflects on how she wants to start a family while wishing to carry on doing the work she loves; work that is even more time intensive and inflexible than Holly's work was. With no possibility to work from a fixed base, to keep hours that fit with nursery, and with insufficient economic capital to employ a nanny, it appears that Erica's options are very limited other than delaying, or *deferring* (Hochschild, 2005)*,* this transition to parenthood.

Despite the apparent success of Judith's renegotiation of participation profile, the consequences of change did present challenges to her being able to sustain her career. Judith's renegotiation of her role to be both part-time and at hours that were earlier in the day than her colleagues has meant that she feels she has both a lack of time to do the role properly, *and* a loss of respect from colleagues who perceived her as not being sufficiently committed to the role. This long quote, full of rich detail about the cultures of work which marginalise flexible working, indicates the relevance of 'time capital' and how it is in a dynamic relationship with the other forms of capital, in this instance social capital, as argued in previous chapters. Firstly, Judith feels she is not committing *enough* time, and secondly, due to an inhospitable organisational culture, that she is not doing so *at the right time*:

> [T]he fact that I have been working three days a week in this new role has been incredibly disadvantageous. Disadvantaging in my ability to do the job… and yes, just in how you're perceived within the workplace as well is a big, big issue.
>
> I have, rightly or wrongly, and I'm starting to think maybe a little bit wrongly, been quite clear about what it is I'm prepared to do and [not] do…
>
> I literally am the first person in the office. That's at half past eight, and the office doesn't really fill up until maybe ten o'clock. Then it means that you're in a position where you're leaving at five and everyone's still very much in the middle of their working day, so there's kind of a perception issue around that…
>
> A lot of stuff in TV is about how committed you're perceived to be and how much sacrifice you're prepared [make]… There's a real sense of presenteeism and being fully engaged. I see other mothers who maybe have got different childcare arrangements to me who are very much in that mindset as well. I've tried to not get embroiled in that mindset and say, 'Actually, no, for me, I feel that's unreasonable,' but how successful that is, I don't know! Come back to me in two years' time if I'm still working or not.

Judith's new participation profile means she will potentially struggle to maintain her position in the field. Her ability to carry out her role in a reduced timeframe has suffered, and her reputation (symbolic capital) and social capital have also suffered because in addition to the stigma indicated, she is not able to join her colleagues for drinks after work which is often used to maintain employability in homophilic networks. As a result, she is unsure if she has a future in the industry. Judith's comments help to illuminate the extent to which organisational cultures impact experiences of work, even when operating in the more forgiving 'office time' temporal consciousness. Echoing very closely Judith's experience, Ophelia experienced the same marginalisation when she changed her hours to be earlier in the day to fit around childcare. Both Judith and Ophelia experienced organisations where it is evident that although flexible working is available thanks to the initial support of management, the cultures of work still valorise the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). This means that while it is *possible* to work in the way Judith and Ophelia are working within their renegotiated roles, the norms that have developed with TV around it being a 'privilege to work in the industry' so 'you need to be a little bit less fussy, or work very hard, or make sure that you're doing as long hours as everyone else is' (Judith) means people who opt to work as Judith and Ophelia have are penalised. The contrast Judith describes between her priorities and that of other mothers reflects Hochschild's comparison of the 'busy bee' who tries

to do everything, and the 'resister' who refuses to subsume their personal lives in the logic of work (Hochschild, 2005). The fact that other mothers are conforming to the norms of the 'ideal worker', and Judith's experience of marginalisation, indicates that this form of sexism is 'unspeakable' in her workplace (Gill, 2014; Leung, Gill and Randle, 2015).

Interestingly, an example of someone with the backing of a supportive organisation highlights what is possible with the right support. Ruby, 37, is a career changer, and only recently got a role in production. As she has children, she needed to work flexibly from the outset, which limited her options regarding who she worked for. Here she explained the process of getting a role with an understanding organisation:

> It was a bit tougher for me to get a training placement because I wanted one with flexible working… So, I aimed my search basically at BBC, ITV, and Channel 5… Because they all supported flexible working, they were all like, yes, it would be fine, we don't see having kids as an issue or a problem… Yes, then [organisation] offered me a placement.

This organisational support has meant that Ruby has been able to begin a career in TV production. However, Ruby's comment about the need to target large broadcasters indicates the limited number of these roles in the wider industry which is made up of many smaller production companies. Her junior field position has since left her vulnerable to shocks, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning this *enabling condition* does not fully compensate for her lack of experience and seniority.

Ester's story, mentioned in Chapter 5, is an example of when a smaller production company has provided the *enabling condition* for the move to part-time and office-based work. Ester had the support of a production company when she transitioned to parenthood and was therefore able to continue working part-time as a script editor as she raised three children. While the role itself was more flexible than roles like camera operator or director, the strong personal relationships she built with the organisation allowed her to further alter the role to suit her personal circumstances. She was able to stay in London while the series was shooting on location, hiring a junior staff member to do that work while Ester oversaw it from the office. However, as alluded to in Chapter 5, the consequences of having a supportive organisation to work for puts Ester's wider career at risk in two ways. Firstly, she has not been subject to the temporal consciousness of 'networking time', meaning her development of social capital, required to gain other roles if her series gets

cancelled, has suffered. Relatedly, her role has stayed at a relatively junior level. When asked whether other companies would be as understanding as her current employer about the fact she was in her 40s and hadn't yet reached the level of producer, she responds:

> I'm in a little bit of a safety net… which maybe is detrimental to my career development as well, because I'm not in that cut-throat kind of, 'I need to get the next role…' You need to have a body of work behind you to get to the higher levels of the industry.

Ester's ability to renegotiate her participation profile was due to supportive management, but this *enabling condition* has resulted in some vulnerabilities if she were to lose this job because of the consequences of not developing social capital or a body of work (which can be seen as a form of institutionalised cultural capital).

Kristen's story is of someone with a strong field position and the *enabling conditions* of high economic capital and a supportive organisation, but one that highlights the gendered outcomes of parenthood. With a career background in communication roles in Games, she explains how she returned to part-time work after being made redundant on maternity leave. Her narrative is a combination of luck and a recognition that her hard work and good reputation from before having children has given her this opportunity to come back in a way that suits her:

> So, I joined [the company] … and my boss [said] to me at the time, 'we want someone to come in and just do our social media channel. I know that's below your level, but will you come in and help us?'. And at that particular time, it worked out exactly perfectly for me. I'm lucky enough… I don't need to go back to work to make the finances meet. So, I did it mostly out of my own choice because I like my career. I've worked bloody hard to get this career… I know I'm very lucky, and I've been very fortunate to end up at a company who've been willing to keep me on part-time… I've [after some time] been able to move somewhat more to the level that I was before I left to have a baby. So, you know, that's just been incredibly lucky. And a case of knowing the right person at the right time, because it was an old colleague who got me the role in the first place.

Kristen's account of her move to part-time is broadly positive (although she does share the same concerns as Judith and Ophelia that there is not enough time to get the work done). She leveraged her social capital and economic resources in order to work for a company that offered

her something that suited her hours despite the norm being less flexible. However, in order for this to happen, Kristen had to take a lower-level role. While she indicates that she is back to where she was, this represents a 'filtering down', as someone who was able to carry on at the same level might now be in a more senior position. Kristen's internalisation of the industry culture: that part-time working is only for the 'very fortunate' and taking a step down is a reasonable compromise, indicates the wider inflexibility of the field of Games. The gendered nature of care giving suggests that this sort of occurrence impacts women more than men, *if* they are 'lucky enough' to be able to get part-time work at all.

The final example of successfully renegotiating a participation profile to prioritise 'caring time' is from Jess in Games. Jess has been able to go part-time in a strong field position. However, she recognises that the fact her husband running the studio she works for is the reason that this has been possible:

> I think that's the main reason why I can still work in this industry, and that I can do flexible working… So… what can I say about it really? I had no intention of working for that company… But things were going OK and [my partner] felt like, 'why don't you just come and work for us?'… We're a small company, and I feel like we try and make things a bit better than most other places.

Jess speaks to the wider issue of women having children in Games, and how it is only with exceptional *enabling conditions* that they are able to renegotiate their participation profile in order to accommodate time for parenting:

> There's usually a story there. Some unique situation… There was a cohort of us, all about my age, all starting in our twenties. And when I look back now at how many of us are still in the industry, a lot aren't… You said it was unusual me being the partner of a company owner, but now I think about it, I think there are quite a few women who come to mind!

In this instance, Jess has the enabling condition of her husband's studio. Interestingly, in her interview she mentions the growth of newer, more supportive small studios that are starting to proliferate now that the workforce is aging and seeing the need to better balance work with other aspects of people's lives. This points to a potential way forward, although for this to be scalable, this shift in organisational culture would have to move into bigger studios, especially as – thanks to the competitive release schedules in the industry – they dictate the working practices of

smaller studios (Ruberg, 2019). However, Jess explains why there is a cultural barrier to more people being able to work part-time in Games:

> I think certainly I feel like art would be a good role to make part-time… If you can do two projects at once, then surely you can be part-time. Just do one project at once for half the time. But it doesn't seem to have filtered through into games…
>
> I think it's hard to convince [studio owners] to see the benefits of flexible working… because a lot of those people's times is just spent in meetings… that's their day… and it's like, if you take that away from them… it's almost like they don't have anything else. So, I think that that's another thing that causes the issues… they can sometimes struggle to understand [flexible working].

Jess argues the barrier to part-time work is not about the role not being suitable, but about the organisational cultures in Games. This finding adds some interesting nuance to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 that does not explicitly discuss the activities management undertake, and their personal motivations for sustaining long and intense working practices.

This long section about going part-time to manage parenthood has explored the varied ways that participants have been able to develop new forms of working that better balances the temporal consciousnesses of work with 'caring time'. It has highlighted the importance of field position in providing the agency to renegotiate time at work. It also explored how the *enabling conditions* of sufficient economic capital, often from family, and organisational support has allowed participants to sustain their careers in unusual circumstances. However, the section also showed some negative outcomes of these 'success stories'. Some moves to flexible and part-time working have been done in the context of organisational cultures that are often hostile to anyone not seen to be fully engaged. As such, these examples represent a 'filtering down' or risk of 'filtering out' for participants as their career trajectories and reputations are negatively affected. How these have been managed by some of the participants is discussed later in this chapter. Better organisational support experienced by others, such as the loyalty of a production company or the support of a broadcaster, can actually pose a threat to workers if they do not continue to develop other opportunities in the face of risks to their current arrangement. This highlights the insecurity in the fields of study.

6.3.2 Reducing or eliminating commutes and working away from home

Another way that participants have been able to renegotiate their participation profile to better prioritise ‘caring time’ or ‘wellbeing time’, even if not directly reducing the amount of work that they do, is to reduce their commutes or to work from home. This renegotiation of where someone works can mean people can address life course tensions while maintaining full time work, while others have been able to work from home *and* go part-time to further accommodate other priorities. However, as with going part-time discussed in the previous section, this strategy can negatively impact careers, primarily through a loss of social capital which is traditionally maintained through in-person working, including the presenteeism already discussed. Other potentially negative outcomes include a loss of a strong career path and security if leaving an employer and going freelance.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Natasha was enduring an extreme commute of four hours a day that created tension between work and ‘caring time’. Natasha chose to leave the BBC and work for a small agency:

> They were literally opposite the train station, so I went down from a two-hour [each way] commute to a ten-minute ride on my bicycle. It was amazing! They were a tiny little agency and they specialised in non-profit websites and digital projects, so charities and non-profits.

While much more suited to her preference for being near her young family, Natasha compromised on job security:

> I'd just managed to secure a permanent full-time, ‘you-are-safe’ job just before I decided to give it away.

She also went from a huge organisation with lots of prospects to small agencies which offered much less. Whether the decision to step away from a secure job with prospects in order to prioritise parenthood would have been made by a man is difficult to know from the sample, but the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicates that it is less likely. What is safer to say is that for those who do, there are reduced opportunities to work at secure and prestigious creative organisations because these tend to be clustered in a few major conurbations. Unless someone lives in one of these areas, their chances of securing work on the same terms are limited.

Rachel and Jess have both previously moved workplaces to reduce their commutes, and Erica now works closer to home if she can. When asked how, Erica has explained that this has been possible because of her strong reputation has given her the ability to pick up all her work in the London area. However, other participants have not had this ability and still had to work around the country. Due to the nature of her work and her still-precarious employment, Alicia cannot opt to work close to home. Prior to getting promoted to executive producer, Judith was unable to turn down work around the country.

The ultimate way to reduce one's commute is, of course, to work from home. This theme is challenging to assess, as at the time of interviews most participants were in lockdown and working from home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is unclear how things have changed since, especially with a greater acceptance of home working (Office of National Statistics, 2022). However, participants were asked what is typical for them and what their plans were when 'normality' resumes, so that is what is reported here.

One theme is the suitability of roles for working from home. Those working in 'production time' are unable to do this as their work is on set, location, or in an edit suite. However, more senior roles in TV and film which are not directly involved with making content can be done from home if organisational cultures allow. Games and Websites, if connectivity allows, are more suited to home working, although as is discussed below, doing so can have negative consequences for maintaining social capital. Jess, discussed in the previous section, works flexibly between the office and home with the support of her husband's games studio that employs her. Douglas, a back-end developer, has recently negotiated working entirely from home so that he can support his disabled partner, and he hopes that this is not just limited to Covid restrictions. He does mention that he could earn a lot more money if he were willing to commute from the South Downs to London, but this is not a priority for him as he is paid comfortably. Roger and Dennis, the YouTubers, both primarily work from home, especially Dennis. For Roger, this is a huge change from his time in legacy media when he would be away for many weeks at a time, and as he approaches retirement, this change of pace is welcome.

In order to resolve the tensions between work temporal consciousnesses and 'caring time', both Rosa and Ophelia have gone freelance in order to work from home. For both of them, the move to freelance and home working was done *after* the initial move to part-time which, as discussed in

the previous section, had negative outcomes in terms of a loss of social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The main challenge for them in this change has been the move from employed to freelance, which has initially been difficult. After setting out the context for each, the ways that Rosa and Ophelia have been able to successfully go freelance and work from home are explained.

While already working part-time as a producer in multimedia content at the BBC, Rosa felt she was being passed over for work because of the way that, echoing Dent (2020), she was, as a mother, perceived to be unable to manage her workload. She had also just moved away from London and did not want to commute as it was taking too much time away from her young family. Her solution was to take redundancy when her job moved to Salford and go freelance to work from home. However, this was challenging at first:

> I'd got a pay-off from leaving the BBC, so I was in the position where I had a bit of time, where I could think, okay, what else can I do? Then that transition was, initially, quite difficult. I was applying for jobs, not getting those… I was [thinking] am I doing the right thing, paying for my kids to be in childcare, got no work? If I don't put them in childcare, I can't work. You're in that cycle.

However, due to the move to Salford, there was a mass-exodus of Rosa's network from the BBC at that time, and this helped her to establish a freelance career that suited her part-time schedule:

> I would say, it would be 90 per cent of my work has come out of the BBC network that I had from working there. I'd say if I had a single thing that has helped me, it's probably that BBC network scattering, going to other places, and those people that I'd worked with there have hired me over the years to do different things on and off. I just come and go with them.
>
> …my old boss got me a job working with someone that he was working with in London. They just said, 'What's your dream job?' I said, 'Two days a week'.

This ability to build a freelance career around her preferences shows the strong field position that Rosa developed through her early hard work and development of networks. However, the unique historical moment of the BBC moving her department to Salford was clearly an *enabling condition* (one not discussed in Tomlinson et al. (2018)) that played a huge role in Rosa's career trajectory.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ophelia struggled with an organisational culture around part-time working at the US multimedia entertainment network and decided to go freelance and work from part-time from home. While her career history of working with big broadcasters since this change is a credit to her abilities, she mentions the importance of her husband being able to provide financial support while working part time from home:

> I have not worked full-time since [going freelance]. I've been able to do that because my husband earns a really good salary, so I think that's something… A lot of what looks like choices, I've been able to make because we have weighed up that it's okay if my income is less…

This economic capital has been vital for Ophelia's transition to a new form of working, and important to consider when assessing who is able to make these same choices.

Both Neil and Philip moved home in support of their wives' priorities. Neil emigrated to Europe, and Philip moved to a town near his wife's work. This was made possible by their ability to work from home as freelancers. Erik leveraged his strong field position, especially his connections with previous clients, to go freelance in order to work from home and support his wife with childcare. As previously mentioned, the narratives from fathers in the sample are less emotive and personal than those of the mothers, seemingly reflecting the division of labour within the household. Where women in the sample indicate that the ultimate responsibility for childcare is with them, the men in the sample have played *supporting* roles, reflected in the fact that none of them went part-time. Nonetheless, the lack of commute provides more time for fathers to spend with their children, reflecting findings from Halford (2006). Moreover, while 'at work' when at home, their presence means that the temporal consciousnesses of work and care can become 'hybridised' as fathers are available to 'be there' for care while working, as described by Maher's (2009) concept of new temporalities of work and care. This is, of course, also the case for the mothers discussed above.

6.3.3 Losing networks: negative outcomes of part-time and home working

Whether done to prioritise 'caring time', 'wellbeing time' or 'settling down time', the decision to work from home or go part-time has had some disadvantageous consequences. The loss of ability to network in person risks the ability to maintain the social capital required to sustain work, echoing findings from Gascoigne & Kelliher (2018) who show that a reduction in time means

people lose the opportunity to spend time maintaining networks. This is especially challenging in film and TV (Blair, Grey and Randle, 2001; Wittel, 2001; Blair, 2003, 2009), presenting a particular threat to sustaining careers.

The extent to which social capital was lost varied. Rosa has been able to continue to network in new ways due to her living in an especially creative town:

> I've been able to carry on that network… the people I know, the people I spend my time with, work in similar industries to the ones that I do… This is a definite media area. Lots of people I do know who live here used to work [at the BBC].

At the other extreme, when Neil moved to Europe, he lost all ability to network in person with others in the same animation industry. Where he once picked up work from a network in the west of England, he is now cut off.

In between these two extremes, others have indicated the need to mitigate the loss of networks through additional action. While useful to maintain social capital, in some instances, participants have continued to experience similar marginalisation as older women or caregivers that exist in the workplace. Organising or speaking at conferences have been popular for a number of participants who work at home. These conference roles mean that people approach them rather than them having to proactively make those connections. Natasha explains:

> It's where I do a lot of my networking. And I don't do it by being a delegate, I do it by producing sessions. I offer my time for free, I produce a session… Then, basically, I'm part of the conference rather than a participant in it, and that, for me, has afforded a huge amount of opportunities in terms of networking… that's where I would mention that I was for hire.

Ophelia talks about the same conference:

> This year I'm producing nine sessions. Again, it's contacts. Going to the conference is great for catching up with old friends, but also ultimately you get work.

Cody has mentioned that conference speaking is a way to develop networks and pick up work, and Rosa regularly speaks about her role in professional settings which maintains her presence as someone knowledgeable in her field. Of course, not everyone can be an organiser or speaker, so it

is only those with the confidence to speak publicly and with the existing networks to get themselves on the programme in the first place who can benefit.

Regular networking 'Meetups' are available to workers, and they have been used by Philip, Rosa, and Cathy when working freelance and at home in order to maintain social networks. However, these are held in the evening so interfere with other aspects of people's lives, and their cultures can be unwelcoming. Rosa highlights how the meetups she has gone to have gendered cultures which she feels are unwelcoming. In addition, they can clash with childcare:

> We used to go to product meetings and tech meetings… probably 80 per cent male. We had to point out at one that all they did for food and drink was always pizza and beer, and they'd never get any wine. Men are running it and they just think that's what everyone wants is a pizza and beer. You walk in and it's like, oh God, here we go again. There are [all] female things… they run events here and there's loads of digital women meetups and stuff, so there are women… It's just [mothers] can't go to the meetups because they've got kids and they've got to go home and sort them out. That's my take on it, it's hard.

Echoing Kirton and Robertson (2018) findings, meetups' timing, as well as the culture, do not consider Rosa and others' experiences as women and/or caregivers. The women-only spaces that Rosa mentions as being run when parents have childcare responsibilities indicates a youthful culture that doesn't consider older workers' needs. The fact that mitigating strategies such as meet ups are subject to the same gender and age inequalities, both in terms of the requirement to commit time *at the right time*, and because they are often designed by and for men, means the 'inequality regimes' that women are trying to navigate by going part-time or working from home are still present in the alternative structures that they have to contend with when addressing their loss of social capital. Nascent efforts to improve inclusivity in social events are being made (Kerr, Savage and Twomey-Lee, 2020; Ozimek and Rueda, 2021), but the data shows these are yet to make an impact.

Online social network platforms have proven to be effective ways to find work, replacing the traditional drinks networking that they are no longer able to do due to things like childcare commitments. Twitter and LinkedIn being the preferred platforms. Natasha had a successful experience with Twitter:

> I went on Twitter, and I said, 'BAFTA-winning producer looking for a job.' Then [company] found me within three hours and interviewed me.

Ophelia has positive experiences of twitter for networking:

> My experience of Twitter has actually always been very positive. I joined when I was first freelance because I thought it would be good for networking… I have found work actually.

For the participants in the sample and likely others in the fields of work, there is no 'digital divide' (Reisdorf and Rhinesmith, 2020) in terms of access to these social platforms, but there is a time commitment involved in this networking, just as there is with other forms of networking. However, it is likely that having these networks available on personal devices makes their use throughout the day viable, although this further blurs the boundaries between work, social, and home fields.

6.3.4 Stepping back to avoid mental and physical ill health

Literature from Chapter 2 (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Gascoigne, Parry and Buchanan, 2015; Peticca-Harris, Weststar and McKenna, 2015; Piasna, 2018; Swords *et al.*, 2022) and Chapter 5's descriptions of the temporal consciousnesses of 'production time' and 'crunch time' highlight the intensity of much of the work within the fields of study. Findings from the previous chapter showed the long and time-intensive working patterns, often at unsociable hours, were experienced alongside other stresses such as labour shortages and poor management. As a result, participants' mental and physical wellbeing has suffered, revealing a life course tension between the temporal consciousnesses of work and 'wellbeing time'. In order to sustain their careers, some participants have acted to take a 'step back' from high pressure roles to do less prestigious work or retrain into a different role, so that the time demands of work (both amount of time and the intensity of that time), are reduced. While relieving this life course tension to various degrees, these actions represent a 'filtering down' of 'filtering sideways' for these workers.

Martin, whose mental stress led to a physical condition which threatened his ability to work, discusses the nuances of his situation, and his decision to step back:

> I'm supposed to be avoiding stress, so I'm trying to take jobs that… I'm turning down these big jobs like the Marvel job… and going for more low-key stuff with people who understand that I have to look after myself.

> I'm going to have to get into that mindset of just doing jobs that I need, rather than constant. I need to find jobs that let me be at home as much as possible, so I can figure out how to manage the [medical condition]. I need to be on jobs where the designer is capable and competent and isn't going to squeeze people to do the work they have to do. And looking at doing shows like Eastenders… it's a stable job that won't demand too much.

However, there are a couple of reasons that Martin sees this option as unattractive. Firstly, his formative and early career phases were shaped by precariousness, and going back to worrying about money is a different stress:

> I will have to learn to be OK with not knowing what's coming workwise and being at peace with not having a pay slip every week. Which is really emotionally hard after the three or four years of poverty I was in.

This fear of precariousness might not be shared by others in the same situation who can rely on their wealth or the support of family members. However, a concern that might be more universal is that Martin reluctantly identifies that he values the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that comes with working at such a high level. Letting go of his dream is a real challenge:

> I've seen CVs do that [go up], and then they start going [down]. You see the dip and say 'that can't happen to me'. So, you're constantly trying to climb the ladder and just keep relevant and in demand. So, to change that entire way of living… yeah, it's not just leaving a job, it's changing who you are.

Martin's drive to work at the top of a field, and the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that accompanies that, is likely unsustainable if he is to protect his mental and physical wellbeing. Reluctantly, taking a step back is viewed as his only option.

Erica, as discussed in the previous chapter, has similar concerns about burn out in her current role, and just as with Martin, highlights the issue of being 'filtered down', mentioning her reluctance to move away from the particular sort of work she is doing, which is a big part of her identity as a creative person:

> I only ever wanted to… make films, programmes. At the moment, the idea of an office job just makes me think, why would I work in telly? What I love is being with contributors, is shooting… I like the buzz you get when you're a freelancer. The idea of doing a nine-to-five, I couldn't think of anything worse!

Both Martin and Erica's are in roles that are inflexible, but neither of them want to move to non-creative, management roles. Therefore, they will continue to be subject to the temporal consciousness of 'production time', shaped by production schedules, labour shortages, and challenging organisational cultures, meaning they are at risk of either being filtered out or being filtered down to less prestigious roles if they are to protect their mental and physical wellbeing. Martin's habitus, shaped by earlier experiences of poverty, add to his concerns because taking a step back returns him to a more precarious existence. For Erica, while the work is challenging in itself, the added pressures that she feels as a woman wishing to start a family and spend time with her child indicates that women are 'doubly disadvantaged' by the organisation of work and the gendered norms around the transition to parenthood (Thynne, 2000).

In Websites, both Austin and Cody's career trajectories have been shaped by the need to make compromises to their careers in order to try and protect their mental health. Austin suffered from mental and related physical ill-health in his roles in back-end web development. This was discussed in the previous chapter as being due to the intense time demands of his role and the pressure he felt to get results, often unsupported by colleagues or organisations. This is in combination with Austin's habitus being ill-suited to the results-orientated and monitored 'crunch time' of his role. As a result, it was necessary for him to take a step back to the extent that he has broadly been 'filtered out' of this digital work, only doing enough to subsidise his PhD stipend. His junior field position played an important role in this outcome, as he was always operating in 'event time' (Adkins, 2013; Banks, 2019), unable to shape his career to accommodate his need for 'wellbeing time'. Cody has struggled with organisational cultures at various times in their early career, and as such has struggled to make headway in one specific role. They felt they had to take a step back from pursuing particular careers because they weren't perceived as welcoming, and their career is characterised by starting over in new roles, including through retraining. While it is a stretch to attribute this to a temporal consciousness of work, organisational cultures of exclusion have played a role in a number of these changes. As a result, Cody is less advanced in their career than someone who was able to stay in that role and is older than many of their colleagues working at the same level.

6.3.5 Changing fields

The process of conducting interviews showed how porous the boundaries between the fields of study are, how participants had moved *between* the specific fields of Websites, Games, and Video, and interestingly, how relatively few had made a change to one of the fields from another industry. This finding supports the idea that these fields are strongly interrelated due to the fields converging in a process of mergers and acquisitions (Bolin, 2007), the skills that are required for them, and often, the cultures of work and related types of habitus that are suited to working in them. Even when people came from outside the fields later in their careers, the industries they had moved from were related, such as print publishing, photography, educational content (prior to the internet), and ITC. The close relationship and similar capital requirements between the fields has meant that some participants have been able to move between them in order to help sustain their digital and creative careers. Sometimes, this has been done in order to renegotiate the amount of time spent doing a job, because just as with the ‘stepping back’ strategy, changing fields can help people maintain a full-time role while reducing the intensity of the work, in terms of absolute hours (because ‘full-time’ can vary widely), and/or changing when the work is done to hours that are more compatible with other aspects of people’s lives. Other examples discussed are of people changing field are so that they can remain employable.

Cathy worked for in TV production for the BBC for ten years and highlights how, after having a child, she did not want to continue due to the hours, so made the switch to websites while this was still in its infancy:

> I didn't really want to [do] television anymore, with its irregular hours and filming and all that kind of poor work-life balance…
>
> …so I moved to digital when it was very much in its infancy… I became assistant producer in digital so I was a digital producer for CBeebies.

When asked more about the motivation for the move into the new field, Cathy responds:

> [T]his would be better for my home life… [and] I think it will be interesting to learn about it, and it's the exact audience of my child. I won't have to suddenly go filming on a Saturday or in the middle of the night…

Not only were the hours better in this new field, but Cathy was later able to go 3 days a week when her childcare needs changed. This would have been much harder in TV production work due to its temporal consciousness.

The time period Cathy made this switch, 1997, is very important. Just as in the accounts of Adam, Charles, and others, the early days of the internet were less professionalised and specialised, meaning the requirements for entry were less rigorous and formalised. This is made clear by Cathy:

> I applied and had the interview and they offered me the job, so it was no more painful than that.

Later on, when Rosa went freelance in 2010, she was able to branch out from websites into more interactive games content which can be considered a change of field from Websites to Games. This was possible both because of her transferrable skills as a producer, and because the contacts and reputation she developed during her time at the BBC, meant that she was trusted to make this move into something she had not done before:

> …sometimes, people would say, 'Can you do this?' or, 'Can you do that?' I'd start doing a bit more and then… My old boss used to just come up with all these projects and suddenly go, 'I've met this person. I'm going to make an app, can you help me make that?' I started making apps because it's basically the same as all the other, it's the same as a website, same as a CD-ROM, it's just slightly different text. My process as a project manager is the same stuff and the same content, thinking about the content.

This ability to branch out into different production roles played a big role in Rosa choosing her hours to suit her priorities when she moved to freelance working. While it is likely someone with such a reputation would have made a success of their situation sooner or later, this particular pathway, when other avenues were not proving successful at the time (the jobs she was going for in websites she was not getting), meant Rosa had more chance of sustaining a career than those without her experience or reputation.

Just like with the ‘stepping back’ strategy, changing field to renegotiate their participation profile is not issue-free. Whether participants identified it as an issue of inequalities or not, the fact that a career trajectory was altered in order to change a participation profile should be looked at in terms of who has had to change field and who has not, and what impact this had on someone’s seniority or earning potential. While the examples of Rosa and Cathy present as being agentic

accounts of career changes, both these participants reveal how their husbands did not have to forge these new ways of working and continued in their careers without taking on such responsibility for childcare. These outcomes, of being 'filtered sideways', provide further evidence of gendered nature of the 'inequality regimes' in which women in the sample are operating in.

In other examples of transcending fields, Jess and Adam discuss how moving between fields gives them options for continued employment. While these are not related to a renegotiation of time, they do illustrate the closeness of the fields, and that there are alternative career options for people to remain employable which might later help them avoid 'early exits'. Adam, a creative director in digital advertising, moved from website-only projects to incorporating video into his work in the late 2000s as Web 2.0 (van Dijck, 2013) expanded range of media that websites could display:

> [This work] ended up being the grounding for making TV ads and whathaveyou because… at the start of social media, we were making plasticine animations on shoestring budgets and by the end of it we were doing huge projects for people like [client] that were basically indistinguishable from TV ads really.

This is another example (along with Cathy and Rosa) of how technology shapes the market, and how proactive people can jump on opportunities in order to stay relevant. As the fields continue to converge (Bolin, 2007) and new technologies develop or become viable across different industries, the opportunities for workers could expand. Due to Adam's seniority in his field, his experience of changing fields is somewhat removed from the others because he can rely on his creative vision as opposed to his skillset as a producer or content creator. Nevertheless, it again illustrates how the fields are interconnected. Jess explains how her transferrable skills give her options to move from Games to Video:

> I actually did some things a few years ago where… nothing ever came of it… [I was] talking to a TV company to do something together. Like a TV show with a play-at-home element. And then I kind of realised that there is a role where you can design TV games shows, for example. And I was like 'oh wow, I would love to do something like that actually, that would be really fun'.

While only a possible plan for the future, Jess illustrates how the similar capital requirements for the fields make moving between them possible.

These examples of changing field, made possible thanks to the similar cultural and social capitals required for work in the three fields of study, reveal how digital and creative careers might be sustained in the face of life course tensions. Considering the similar capital requirements for roles such as producer (Rosa, Ophelia, Cathy), encouraging more workers to consider these sideways moves at different times in the life course in order to allow for periods of less intense working (around the time when workers have young families, for example), could help workers build a portfolio career across the fields of study. However, this presents a couple of potential issues. Some of the examples above have outcomes which represent a 'filtering down' or 'filtering sideways', which are shown once again to be gendered; career trajectories are not maintained in the same way as those who stay in the same field might be, mentioned by Rosa and Cathy who have husbands who work in TV who did not make a change. Secondly, despite any process of 'convergence' (Bolin, 2007), organisational cultures may present barriers for acceptance into the new field. When asked about the practice of producers changing fields from Video to Games, Rachel, in Games, was dismissive, saying that TV producers have not come from the same cultural background, and do not understand the process of games production. If Rachel's view is more widespread and people outside of a Games culture are not welcomed, it might limit the ability for more producers to change fields into Games. Along the same lines, considering the tight social bonds made in TV and film production, it would be interesting to understand whether producers from Websites or Games would be able to break into Video. This examination of the role of occupational cultures in underexplored in this thesis and would be interesting to explore further in future research.

6.3.6 Finding new communication mediums

Similar to changing the site of work between the three fields of study, working in new mediums changes, to some extent, the field in which people are operating in meaning they are subject to different structures. Rhonda has done this in two instances. Firstly, after having been marginalised for her resistance to BBC oversight on a drama she directed, which she perceives as sexist, Rhonda worked for one of the new breed of streaming platforms which allowed her more creative freedom:

> I really dug my heels in, and since, I have never been employed by the BBC! …I got tarred with the 'difficult' brush. Would that have happened if I was a man? Probably not.

> The thing that I've loved the most, recently, is [name of show]. Which is an extraordinary piece of television. And that was working for [an American production/streaming company]. And they were so hands off. They just let me get on with it. And I haven’t had that level of creative freedom for a long time. And I absolutely loved it. And it was because they just trusted the directors they’d employed to do the job.

Despite this success, Rhonda still experiences gendered ageism from commissioners, discussed in the previous chapter. As a result, she explains how she turned to a new form of distribution in order to try to get new work recognised, bypassing to some extent the gatekeeping of commissioners. Here she discusses her plan and the outcomes:

> [W]e put it on YouTube because the idea was to gather an audience and then we would get it commissioned. But the strategy didn’t quite come off [laughs] because nobody picked it up, to be quite brutal about it… it’s all about the financial model [of YouTube]. You need to have millions of subscribers to make enough money to pay people. So, it’s a difficult economic model to make work. But… yeah, I'm always happy to try new things, really, to see what it’s like… But it didn’t really pay off from a purely economic… We all have to earn our [living].

Fearing ‘left out time’ due to the gendered ageism in TV directing, Rhonda first went to streaming services, and then YouTube. At the time of interview, Rhonda was downbeat about the prospect of a continued career in directing, despite her experience and glowing track record. As such, Rhonda has a ‘plan B’ of operating an Airbnb in order to support yourself, signalling how she expects to be ‘filtered out’ of Video in her 50s. It appears that gendered ageism overrides field position so as to marginalise older women.

In contrast to this experience, Roger had a different outcome. Reflecting the findings from Hennekam (2015) how explored older workers move to self-employment, Roger, who’s acting career was in jeopardy and was not providing enough income, decided to turn to YouTube to rebound from a difficult financial situation.

> Our expenses were very high, and suddenly I stopped earning the money I had been. We went through a really difficult financial period around then. 2008-9 which is when I was doing [YouTube show]. So, that caused a lot of stress in the family, because I was going away to film these things in the in the hope that it would catch on, and that lots of people would watch it, and I would earn some money somehow… I kind of had a gut feeling that it wasn't the wrong thing to do.

This show was eventually picked up by a digital channel. Later, Roger went back to YouTube and launched a different show in 2010 which still runs on the platform. This took a long time to make money from via YouTube advertising, Patreon sponsors, and live events, but Roger is proud of what he has managed to achieve:

> I've only benefitted financially from [show], really for the last three years. So up until then, I paid to do it. But now I do get paid. You know, a modest amount, but I actually get paid. So, in that sense, I'm really proud that I've managed to make something that earns enough money to employ people including me. So, that is quite an achievement, but that's taken some serious effort and time and dedication. It definitely hasn't just happened and been brilliant.

In addition to this serious dedication, it is clear from the interview that Roger benefitted from his celebrity status and connections in the TV industry that have helped his show gain the recognition it has, as well as his skills as a producer. Whether a less well-connected 65-year-old would have had this level of success is questionable. With more modest success, Dennis, 52, a YouTuber and 'climate communicator', has built his entire career change around the platform. Having leveraged his design and production skills he developed in retail, he started YouTube part-time while still working, but now earns enough from Patreon sponsors to have given up his old job. Without the platform or others like it, there is little chance that this former engineer and designer would have been able to build an income from a weekly show. Neil, the animator in Europe whose work for larger companies is drying up, now produces short-form educational content which is often shared on YouTube. The rise of this form of communication is now a source of his income from commissions, which would not exist without the platform or one like it.

While YouTube and other platforms provide new opportunities for income generation to sustain creative careers, the importance of old networks in Roger's case, and Rhonda and Neil's reliance

on being commissioned by others, indicates that it is not a 'level playing field' and still suffers from the same problems as legacy media to some extent, although in different ways. For content creators starting in YouTube, the dedication over many years to build an audience, the hours needed to be put in (Dennis works 7 days a week), and the tiny percentage of content creators that make money (Arthurs, Drakopoulou and Gandini, 2018), means that this way of sustaining a career is far from easy. How this work intersects with life course pressures such as parenthood or burnout would clearly be an issue for many in the sample who are trying to work less, meaning YouTube is not a realistic or viable option for many.

6.3.7 Being proactive about professional development

Chapter 5 identified the risk of 'left out time' for those in the sample (Max, Charles) who had not prioritised the supporting temporal consciousness of 'training time', resulting in a lack of relevant, up-to-date cultural capital. This was especially the case for those who do not have organisational support for training needs. Being proactive about professional development is a strategy that helps to avoid this, although this has not always been seen as desirable or possible. The following examples emphasise the importance of someone's capacity to commit to self-initiated/self-directed learning, as well as the economic and time capitals that are required to be able to do this.

People's attitude towards training in their own time has differed across the sample and has impacted career trajectories, which this comparison of Gray and Douglas with Austin shows. Gray, a 40-year-old animator in Games, has been very proactive with ensuring they remain employable. After a formative experience of an early exit from games design, they were able to come back into the industry having completed a MA in 3D computer animation. Gray has since thought carefully about their employability and has developed an enthusiasm for ensuring they are being proactive in their training, as this quote illustrates:

> I started studying Python, and character-rigging… which is setting up the puppets that the animators manipulate to create the animation. And I'm well aware that that really is a skill that is in shortage. People who are both technical on the one hand and artistic on the other. And I think I can excel in that area, so that's quite exciting for me.

Douglas, a 38-year-old back-end developer, is very enthusiastic about his continued skills development and considers programming to be a hobby that he continues in his spare time. In addition to the time he takes during the working day to learn what he needs to for his job, he continues learn at home:

> Programming is my hobby, basically, so in the evenings I'll be playing around with various things that interest me, just for the hell of it, or just because it's interesting. For me, personally, that's been mostly my kind of learning, the stuff that I've done for myself in my own time and off my own back.
>
> … I think, to be a very good software engineer, you have to have a passion for it. There is a lot to know and understand, both in the breadth of things that you need to know about and understand, and, in depth of each of those items, there's generally a lot there.

Douglas does not perceive this additional time spent training as being in tension with his home life because of his passion for the work (his habitus), and he does not have other commitments that take him away from this hobby; he has sufficient time capital to invest in his hobby. Both of these things mean his field position is enhanced and he remains employable. In contrast to these two examples, Austin's lack of motivation to learn for the sake of it created tension when he faced having to do training for the role in his own time while not having any help available at work:

> I think to be honest, to be a programmer at the moment, I think you need to be really committed to your own development… you need to want to be a really good programmer. Spend your free time looking at… the latest programming languages, and experiment with programming in your free time… There's a drive to demand that programmers keep up to the latest standards without really any support from organisations in order to do that, and without a real desire to be a good programmer, it's really stressful.

These contrasting attitudes towards training illustrate how someone's habitus can shape the experience of this life course tension, and the actions taken to resolve it. The examples also highlight a condition of the field which is that workers are made responsible for their own continued development ('training time'), both for freelancers (Austin) and when employed (Douglas). This requires not just the desire to do that, but the time capital, and economic resources, to invest in training. This issue of economic capital has arisen for Philip in his freelance work. Philip has discussed his desire to develop 'software as a service' in order to avoid

obsolescence and achieve a reliable source of income into the future. To do this, he needs to train up on some new software. However, unlike Douglas and Austin, he does not have a wealth of additional time to spend training as he has caring responsibilities, meaning he has to take time out from paid work in the day to train. This balancing act of working to support oneself while taking time out to train illustrates how career trajectories can be affected by economic inequalities.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the strategies that older workers have employed in order to sustain their digital and creative careers over the life course. It has looked to understand these actions by considering participants' horizontal and vertical field positions, wider social positions, and their habituses which have been formed as a result of prior experiences. In doing so, the chapter, and this thesis, have shown that inequalities experienced in early life and in the 'All-In' phase of work have impacted participants' ability to continue to sustain work over the life course, as someone's field position may not provide the agency to do so. In addition, a range of *enabling conditions* including supportive organisations and familial support have allowed participants to sustain work where others' would not be able to, representing the 'exceptions to the rules', and providing an indication of how, if scaled up, these conditions could support more older workers to sustain their careers.

The 'strategies' identified by Hochschild's (2005) and discussed in Chapter 2 have been evident. We might consider Alicia and Dennis to be 'endurers'. They are doing what they can to make work viable for them, but there is a sense within the interviews that their careers remain precarious, and that there are issues around the corner such as the possibility of having to care for parents that could challenge their ability to sustain their careers. In an adaptation of 'deferrers', Erica is waiting to have children in order to build her career. This has previously been the case for Judith, with her commenting that it is necessary for women to get to positions of seniority in order to be able to continue work. The 'busy bee' might be Erik, who appears to take work and home life in his stride, employing Maher's 'hybrid temporalities' where 'time for care' can be done in the midst of 'time for work' (Maher, 2009, p. 236). While not discussed at length in this chapter, there have been 'delegators' who have not been primarily responsible for childcare (Adam, Kanvar). These people have been able to comfortably continue to work as 'the ideal worker' (Acker, 1990). Added to this group are those who have chosen to be child-free and operating as an ideal worker

without much conflict (Justin, Rachel, Douglas, Gray). Even Michael, who has resisted crunch and been involved in unionisation activities in previous roles is still working within the norms of his current organisation and has no caring responsibilities. For those who have looked to work less, their strategies have been in line with Hochschild's 'resisters', being unwilling or unable to subsume their private lives into the logics of work any longer. This applies to parents (Natasha, Rosa, Cathy, Ophelia, Judith, Ester, Jess, and Kristen), and those looking to reduce time at work for reasons of wellbeing (Martin, and Rhonda earlier in her career).

For parents, renegotiation has involved a change in the *amount* of time committed, and *when* the time is committed, with negative consequences for their careers. Holly was unable to meet the time demands of her 'project time' role and was 'filtered out'. Judith and Ophelia, in more advantageous field positions, were able to renegotiate their time at work but were stigmatised by an organisational culture that valorised presenteeism, and a youthful, social atmosphere. These examples provide evidence to support my conceptualisation of time as a form of capital which is in a dynamic relationship with other forms of capitals; When these participant changed their 'time capital' commitment, their social capital was affected, echoing findings from Gascoigne and Kelliher (2018). This represents a 'filtering down' as career progression will be more challenging when faced with this marginalisation. Reducing or eliminating commutes has been useful for people to renegotiate their time away from the home without necessarily reducing their time at work (although this has often coincided with going part-time). However, for Natasha this meant giving up a secure employed job with the BBC for much more precarious work in a small studio nearer home. Rosa and Ophelia have stopped commuting to central London to work from home, meaning the way that they maintain their social capital had to change. This distance from creative hubs means that without a strong social network to leverage, as Rosa has, work can be hard to come by. This has been especially apparent with Neil, who moved to Europe and lost access to the network that was providing him with work. Participants' attempts to mitigate these poor outcomes through developing alternative ways of maintaining social capital have at times been challenged by the culture and timing of networking events. This perpetuates the same marginalisation of women and those with caring responsibilities which had often been responsible for a renegotiation of participation profile in the first place. While the fields continue to be shaped by cultures that are designed by and for the 'ideal worker', these issues are likely to persist (Milner and Gregory, 2022). Unlike Gascoigne and Kelliher (2018), no one in the sample who has already gone part time expressed a concern that they would lose out on time for training. This appears to be because for those people that have managed to renegotiate their time at work, there is no one who is in a technical role. However, Erica, in her role as a camera

operator, has discussed that any potential future gap in experience would mean she would lose the relevant skills to operate up-to-date technology.

As illustrated so clearly by Martin, when people have considered taking a step back for wellbeing, the reduced amount and intensity of time at work achieved through taking roles that are not so demanding, affects their symbolic capital, and their feelings of worth. Once again, this illustrates the link between the commitment of time capital and other forms of capital required to maintain a prestigious career. In order to protect their mental health, Cody stepped back from roles on a number of occasions which reset their career path, and Austin was all-but ‘filtered out’ of his Website career in an effort to protect his wellbeing.

Cathy and Rosa have had success in changing field so that the temporal consciousnesses of work are more accommodating of their other priorities. Adam and Jess have also had experience with changing fields, which presents ways in which they might be able to sustain and build their careers. With the increasing convergence (Bolin, 2007) of the fields, these kinds of horizontal moves could represent helpful ways of sustaining work for more people. However, for Cathy and Rosa who made these moves to support their role as caregivers, they indicate that these decisions were shaped by the gendered nature of work, with men not having to make the same choices. Being ‘filtered sideways’ prevented them from continuing their career trajectories, putting them at a disadvantage compared to those able to continue as the ‘ideal worker’ (Acker, 1990) in Video.

For those looking to work more, Hochschild’s five ideal types are not applicable. The chapter identified two ways in which people have tried to make work viable. New media has been shown to provide older workers with the ability to bypass, to some degree, the gatekeeping of legacy media. However, there remains challenges to success, with the barriers to commissioning still imbued with gendered ageism, and the economics of streaming meaning this approach has had limited success. A discussion of training to avoid obsolescence has suggested that a proactive attitude to keeping up to date with technology is vital to maintain employability, with the need to commit time and money to the challenge which can be difficult for those who have other time commitments and a lack of economic capital.

Having concluded the presentation of findings, the thesis moves to it conclusion. This final chapter outlines the thesis' theoretical contribution, its contribution to knowledge, and uses the thesis' findings to inform recommendations for policy and practice that aim to improve older workers' ability to sustain their careers over the life course.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This conclusion chapter outlines the theoretical contribution of the thesis, then brings together the findings chapters and shows how they have addressed the research questions. Doing so indicates how my findings have provided new contributions to knowledge on digital and creative work over the life course. Next, the chapter considers the finding's implications for policy and practice, with my recommendations regarding what the priorities for effective change should be in the face of a host of challenges to sustaining work over the life course. The thesis ends with a discussion of what future research opportunities the thesis has inspired.

7.2 Theoretical contributions

This thesis has developed a number of theoretical contributions that develop the work of Bourdieu and makes use of a critical realist approach. These concepts would be appropriate for use in other life course and careers research, and of particular use for studying other careers that have high time demands and pronounced inequalities. For example, this framework could be used to study lawyers in and around London's 'Magic Circle' law firms, or with elite print journalism. I have already used this approach elsewhere, when researching diversity schemes in the screen industries (TV, film, Games) at the University of York.

Analysis of inequalities in early careers made the link between 'deficits' in economic, social, and cultural capitals – including embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), with the *increased time* it takes workers to access and progress in work. This is due to the need to overcome 'deficits' and acquire the right capitals, and due to discrimination or a lack of trust, meaning the capital demands are higher for marginalised workers. These 'time inequalities' affect the day-to-day experiences and longer-term career progression.

When looking at inequalities in careers over the life course, the thesis made use of the conceptualisation of 'time' as an additional form of capital. This was useful in a number of ways. 'Time capital' is linked to the ability to *do the work*; people need *enough time* to commit to doing

the work. In addition, this has to be committed *at the right time*, for example to do a film shoot. *At the right time* also relates to supporting activities such as networking or training. This is especially useful for considering how careers change over the life course. If time commitments change, the ability to network or train might be reduced, meaning social and cultural capital is lost and workers are at risk of not being able to meet the demands of the field. This shows that there is a dynamic relationship between time capital and the other forms of capital. In addition, just like other forms of capital, someone's time capital is shown to shape their habitus. This has consequences for understanding their ability to operate in a particular field due to their 'habitus/field' fit.

Atkinson's (2019) development of Bourdieu's work on the 'experiences and meaning of time' in a field has been used to understand what I have termed 'life course tensions' that develop between the temporal consciousnesses of multiple social fields (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016). These tensions have been thought about using Decoteau's (2016) critical realist reading of Bourdieu, where a 'reflexive habitus' emerges as people compare the logic (a temporal consciousness) of one field with another. When considering the quality of these life course tensions, the thesis has shown that 'field position' (both role and position) is a function of the inequalities that shape early- and mid-career outcomes.

In a development of the literature on work/life balance, the thesis has considered how workers have renegotiated their participation profile (Levy and Bühlmann, 2016) between their different social fields in order to resolve life course tensions. The ability to do so was assessed in relation to workers' 'field position', and any support they had from organisations (with a notable lack of support from the state).

Across the thesis, a consideration of whether someone is able to meet the demands of the fields has used the concept of 'filtering' to assess outcomes. This has either been 'filtered out' where someone is forced to leave the field, 'filtered sideways' where someone has changed field, and 'filtered down' where someone has had to take a role in a lower field position. The critical realist process of retroductive analysis allowed for exploration of 'the exceptions to the rules', where analysis of an individual's context allowed us to see how they were able to sustain work where others in similar social and field positions were not able to.

7.3 Contributions to knowledge

Chapter 4 addressed the first research question – What are the demands of accessing and progressing in work, and how do these differ for people in different social positions? What do these differences mean for career progression? It also provided a reference point for the demands of the fields for future chapters. The chapter added to the literature that describes the four key areas of work most relevant to understanding the demands of the industries studied, i.e., training, hiring practices, precarious employment, and long, intense, and inflexible hours. It did this by discussing findings which show what mix of cultural, social, economic, and 'time' capitals are required for each key area in each field. Crucially, it argued that those with deficits of capitals, or who face higher demands due to their marginalised status, have to spend *more time* meeting their demands of the fields, which might differ from those of the 'somatic norm' due to a lack of trust or from discrimination. This affects both day-to-day work and longer-term career outcomes, revealing the process of how inequalities affect career progression. Findings suggested that those (not in the sample) who do not meet the demands of the fields are 'filtered out' at the 'All-In' phase.

Chapter 5 addressed the second research question – What tensions do people experience when work intersects with other aspects of their lives at different points in the life course? How do these experiences vary for different people, based on their earlier career outcomes? In a novel contribution to the literature on digital and creative careers, this was done with reference to work and non-work 'temporal consciousnesses', i.e., the organising logics of the fields. Field-specific temporal consciousnesses of work were identified, building on the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Then participants' narratives were used to identify other, non-work temporal consciousnesses, and the chapter showed how these work and non-work temporal consciousnesses interacted to create 'life course tensions'. Following on from Chapter 4's consideration of how inequalities impact career trajectories, Chapter 5 revealed how a participant's 'field position' (role and seniority) affects their experience of life course tensions, showing the link between inequalities experienced in people's formative and 'All-In' phases, and those experienced here. The chapter argued that at the point of workers' life course tensions, those in field positions which appear to be incompatible with action to resolve these life course tensions are 'filtered out' as they see no way forward. Importantly, in contrast to the 'All-In' phase where there was little evidence of gender playing a role in unequal experiences, the findings revealed that over the life course,

gender inequalities increase. Those (middle-class, white) women who had been broadly insulated from marginalisation in their early careers suffered from both the unequal division of reproductive labour meaning that they were more likely than men to make career compromises to provide care, and that when they did this, they were marginalised by organisational cultures which did not value part-time or flexible working. Later, gendered ageism becomes apparent in industries whose 'somatic norm' includes 'youthfulness'. A consideration of how class and race might play into this dynamic through an intersectional analysis was not possible due to the lack of diversity in the sample, suspected to reflect the homogeneity of the fields.

Chapter 6 addressed the third research question – In what ways do people attempt to sustain digital and creative careers by taking action to resolve the tensions experienced over the life course? What allows them to take these actions? What are the outcomes of these actions, and how and why do they differ for different groups? In answering this question, this chapter represents a key contribution to knowledge, addressing a gap in the literature about how those older workers who manage to sustain their careers do so in the face of the many challenges identified in previous research. Findings show that the actions to sustain work involved a renegotiation of participation in work. This was most often to reduce time associated with work as people moved from the more involved 'All-In' phase to life course phases which required a better balance between work and other aspects of people's lives. However, for those later in life, it involved attempting to spend *more* time at work to avoid 'early exits'. Analysis revealed that in order to be able to take action, a combination of suitable 'field position' (a result of early- and mid-career outcomes) and *enabling conditions* such as financial help from family and supportive organisations, were required in order to renegotiate the change in participation in work. Those in lower field positions struggled to make successful changes to better balance work and non-work due to their (often non-management) roles not being compatible with a change in participation. This risked them being 'filtered out'. For those who were in roles senior enough to make changes, new forms of inequalities, not experienced by participants before, emerged. This meant that while sustaining work was possible, the process was characterised by compromise and increased insecurity.

Summarising these issues, findings showed that as time at work was reduced and/or changed to be at different times, participants were stigmatised for not conforming to norms of participation. This resulted in a loss of social capital that risked participants no longer being able to meet the demands of the fields, which as described in Chapter 4, are heavily reliant on networks and

informal hiring practices (meaning participates are at risk of being 'filtered out'). Social capital was also lost by those who worked from home as less time was spent with other people developing social capital. Mitigation for these losses, in the form of organising conferences or using social media, were shown to be effective for some participants. However, for others who used the strategy of attending 'meet ups', barriers were experienced as these spaces were shaped by similar exclusionary cultures to workplaces, and also occurred at times that clashed with caring responsibilities. Others faced career challenges as they took a step back from high pressure roles to protect their wellbeing, being forced into less prestigious roles (being 'filtered down'). Changing fields (say, from Video to Websites) to reduce time at work affected career trajectories for those women who did so to balance work and childcare ('filtered sideways'). No men made this change to accommodate childcare, indicating gendered outcomes. For those looking to work more to avoid being filtered out in 'early exits', new communicative mediums such as YouTube did not fully allow them to bypass traditional gatekeepers, meaning sexism and ageism were still present. Finally, due to the way organisations often offload responsibility for training needs to the worker, those without the time, money, or inclination to maintain the right training risked becoming obsolete and thus 'filtered out'.

While findings show that social and field positions are often key factors in being able to successfully renegotiate participation at work in order to sustain careers, the role of the *enabling condition* of organisational support allowed some participants to sustain their careers beyond the point where others in similar social and field positions struggled to do so. These 'exceptions to the rules', explored through critical realist 'retroduction', highlight potential ways for the fields of study to support more older workers if these conditions were more widespread.

7.4 Recommendations for policy and practice

This section discusses my recommendations for policy and practice that aim to improve the chances of older workers to sustain careers over the life course. Findings indicate that better support for training, parental needs, flexible and remote working, and mental and physical health issues is necessary. In addition, ageism needs to be tackled. In covering what I think can be done, I have set this out along the four areas of work that this thesis has focused on. For each area, I consider organisational and institutional support, in line with Tomlinson et al.'s (2018). In the first instance I recommend changes to organisational policy and practices which findings indicate might help people sustain their careers, referring at times to examples of where work has already

begun on these issues. Then, considering the limits of what organisational change is possible within the political economic context of the fields of study, I explore the role that the state needs to play in order to address inequalities – a role that has taken a back seat in recent decades. State intervention seems especially relevant to the issue of parenthood and other caring responsibilities, where inequalities for these groups, due to current production practices that are shaped by the economics of the industries, seem intractable without help from outside the industry. Comparisons with other countries are touched on, indicating how changes in support might help to address barriers to people sustaining work over the life course.

In terms of access to the right cultural capital through training, the need for better routes into the industries for those who do not attend a handful of elite courses is evident. In addition, ongoing training should be available to workers, including freelancers, provided by the companies that benefit from a skilled workforce. Some recent progress has been made on this, for example in TV where Screenskills have recently set up their own skills fund for unscripted TV. In their words, 'This is unlikely to replicate the scale of training programmes usually associated with the 'old days' when broadcasters were the training ground for the sector, but… will deliver a strategic approach to training in unscripted TV and work closely with partners across the UK to amplify training valued by industry where it already exists, as well as create new programmes where there are none' (Screenskills, 2022b). Recent diversity schemes for TV and film from the likes of ITV, Channel 4, Screen Yorkshire, and the Screen Industries Growth Network (SIGN), as well as some early attempts at schemes in Games from IntoGames, look to support underrepresented groups to access industry. My own research at SIGN shows that these offer valuable skills training, access to industry professionals, and in some cases paid placements which lead to work (Thomas and Einarsdóttir, 2023). However, these sorts of interventions would need scaling up to make a meaningful impact across the workforce and must be accompanied by changes to employment practices and organisational cultures to make the industries more welcoming to marginalised groups. The state could play a role in training by reducing financial barriers, such as funding HEIs through taxation rather than fees or providing vocational training in FE settings. There is growing demand within the Games industry to support more inclusive informal learning spaces such as Games Jams. Research by Ozimek and Rueda (2021) found that developing codes of conduct on behaviour, making events more accessible, choosing times that are more suited to those with other responsibilities, and advertising more broadly would make informal learning available to more people. A range of organisations are looking to support this work, but they need support including better funding and help to develop industry-wide guidelines for organising events (ibid.).

When considering hiring practices, a professionalisation of the industries is required to avoid the perpetuation of the homophilic hiring practices that limit careers for many. This could involve the requirement for all jobs to be advertised widely, use anonymised applications, and for better resourced HR departments to be involved in an interview process. Video (specifically film and TV) has the furthest to go with this work as they have the most informal hiring practices of the three fields of study. Early work is being done on this with The Coalition for Change, established in 2020, looking to address 'employment and recruitment practices… race and diversity… [and] talent progression (Coalition for change, 2021). However, the economics of changing HR practices could make these changes undesirable to production companies working on tight budgets. As Wright (2015) points out, increasing financial uncertainty in the creative industries has led companies to de-risk by relying on freelance workers over in-house staff. How this can be reversed is unclear. It may be that policy at commissioning level needs to promote better hiring practices, such as linking commissioning to the implementation of formalised recruitment. This would be similar to how Channel 4's diversity policy works (Marsden *et al.*, 2022). Government legislation and some sort of state financial support to address informal hiring may even be necessary. In terms of the penalty that woman experience as a result of gendered expectations of childcare (both the fact that women are more likely to require flexible working, and the assumptions that managers make around women of childbearing age's commitment to work), strong commitments from companies to root out this discrimination are required. However, available evidence (discussed at length in this thesis) suggests that these unfair practices are stubbornly persistent. Better legal protections around unfair dismissal and hiring discrimination, and better access to justice (through the return of legal aid) could help, alongside an opening up of the conversation so that these issues become more 'speakable' (Gill, 2014), aided by industry bodies and state policy.

Precarious employment affects those with the least economic capital the most, making them more likely to have to leave the industries if they cannot support themselves. To counter this, moving workers from short-term freelance arrangements to longer-term contracts with production companies and games studios, which might span several productions/games, could be a way to give workers more security and keep them in their careers. How the economics work out is unclear, with further research needed to understand the viability of this idea including the collection of data regarding the benefits of doing this compared to current practices. An alternative could be that the state intervenes with better support for those on low incomes, or specific benefits for creative industry workers who are starting out. For example, France has a

form of benefits – 'intermittents du spectacle' – that supports freelance creative workers as they move between employers (Leblanc, 2022).

Expectations of the 'ideal worker' (Acker, 1990) are excluding too many. As this thesis' core focus indicates, time demands in the field of work need addressing – both in terms of the absolute amount of time commitment required and the (in)flexibility of working patterns. Doing so would help to address mental and physical ill health and offer more favourable conditions to parents and carers so that they can better sustain their careers. With the transition to parenthood and its consequences being such a prominent course of life course tensions within the thesis' findings, having improved institutional and organisational support for 'flexible careers' (Tomlinson et al., 2018) is vital. Support for part-time work and job-sharing can help. Doing this would expand options for carers and limit the negative consequences for participants who have moved to atypical hours such as Judith. Some work on this is already being done. Share My Telly Job (SMTJ) works to promote job-sharing for freelancers in the context of a TV industry which offers almost no part-time time roles. They hope that by pairing workers, they can help those who require less time at work, such as those with caring responsibilities and those with mental and physical health issues. They also look to educate broadcasters and production companies about the merits of supporting flexible work, including the retention of talent (BFI, 2022, p. 47). However, my understanding of the industry suggests that resistance will be met by production companies to this work, and this is where Government could provide better support. Legislation on flexible working which currently only requires employers to consider requests for flexibility in a 'reasonable manner' (HM Government, 2024) could be enhanced to mandate that employers provide access to flexible working, including freelancers. How this would work in practice would need exploring. A fundamental area of government support that would benefit many in the fields of study is childcare provision. This too needs enhancing, with better access to funded places and for extended hours. The Swedish system provides heavily subsidised childcare from 1-5 years old for those who are working, studying, or even looking for work. Some of this provision is also open in the evenings and at night (Nordic Cooperation, 2024). This would allow parents more leeway to take project work in the fields of study. Looking to the future, the recent rise of virtual production (VP), where a range of filming environments can be recreated on-set with the aid of vast LED screens, green screen technology, and virtual reality headsets, offers the potential to revolutionise the working conditions of TV and film (Willment and Swords, 2023). The possibility of reduced travel, shorter hours, flexible and remote working, and better accessibility can support more workers to sustain their careers.

Other key support for sustaining careers at all levels would be to reverse deregulation and bring more people in-house rather than employing them freelance. This is shown in the research to better support those who have to take time out for children and those with health issues, with this investment by firms resulting in talent being retained. However, as already discussed (Wright, 2015), the shift to employing people as freelance was done as a response to the risk of uncertain financial conditions, meaning that without government legislation or incentives, this is unlikely to change. Allowing remote working in suitable roles (something that has, due to the pandemic, changed since the interviews) would provide more options for people who cannot, or do not want to, attend a workplace. These conditions could be encouraged or enforced by government regulation, which would also benefit the wider workforce.

Finally, ageism needs to be addressed. This could be tackled through more formal recruitment processes and better recourse to legal challenges of discrimination, as discussed earlier regarding gender discrimination. It may also be improved over time if other transformations in the industries recommended above take place as there should be more representation from older workers. I have not found a single intervention which looks to tackle ageism within the fields of study. With this thesis' findings showing that this is a problem, especially for women, more needs to be done to make the problem 'speakable' (Gill, 2014; Brodmerkel and Barker, 2019) and address it.

In summary, this thesis' findings and my recommendations illustrate the gulf between current working conditions and where the industries need to be in order to become more equal, diverse, and inclusive, supporting older workers to sustain their careers over the life course. With only a minority of workers able to navigate the fields with any longevity, major commitments of resolve and resources are needed to better support older workers if the industries want to help fill the labour shortages through retention of a skilled and experienced workforce. The work that academics are doing in evidencing what problems there are and tracking the progress that is being made will continue to be vital to support the digital and creative industries as it looks to become more equitable, which I have been lucky enough to begin to do as a research associate at the Screen Industries Growth Network at the University of York, researching how diversity interventions can widen participation. In addition to this role, my work on this thesis has led me

to identify a number of future research opportunities which would support improvements in conditions.

7.5 Future research

In the process of producing this thesis, a number of future research agendas have emerged as being of interest. Firstly, in an effort to develop the thesis' findings into action, I would like to develop an intervention aimed at improving outcomes of older workers. I state in Chapter 3 that my politics guide my research in that I want to be able to develop these findings into some sort of intervention to provide a more equitable work environment, free from barriers that limit anyone's creative potential. I also value the voice of workers as experts on their own experiences. As such, developing a project based on the principles of participatory action research (PAR) which works with participants to co-design, implement, and evaluate an intervention aimed at improving an element of work in one of the fields of study has the potential to be impactful. One area to focus on could be shifting organisational cultures to better support atypical working hours. Another could be to challenge gendered ageism. I am currently in the process of putting together an AHRC bid using PAR methods as a follow up to the work I am doing with SIGN at the University of York. This has so far involved conducting some preliminary workshops with previous participants of diversity schemes about the potential for Virtual Production (VP) to overcome a range of barriers to accessing and progressing in this field. Being able to do similar action research with older workers would be an exciting opportunity.

Other issues raised in the thesis have also sparked my interest for more limited projects. Due to the thesis' breadth, there is opportunity to develop more in-depth understanding of findings on a range of issues. This could be done by returning to a select number of participants 2-3 years after the original interviews to follow up on their career histories, complimented by recruiting new participants in similar positions. I would be interested in a number of themes. Firstly, I would like to understand the longer-term impact on careers for those who have renegotiated participation in work which is out of step with the norms of organisational cultures. Do these workers manage to maintain this new form of working or is the loss of social capital too great to sustain their careers? Do they choose to go back to 'normal' hours, do they change roles, or something else? Secondly, I would like to explore the experiences and identities of Martin and people in similar positions who have been forced to take a 'step back' from prestigious work to protect their wellbeing. What impact does this have on workers' feelings towards their 'labour of love'? Martin spoke with

concern of witnessing other people's careers 'dip' once burnout had hit. Considering Martin talked about there being an element of glamour that he enjoyed when working on prestigious projects, do people in his position still value their work once it is removed from the excitement of elite productions? Thirdly, I would be interested in exploring more about feelings of cultural 'belonging' for workers who have changed fields. I am inspired to follow this avenue as I felt that there was an interesting dynamic when discussing with Games workers how TV producers had changed fields. Games workers were somewhat dismissive of those that had done this as they were not immersed in Games culture; They were seen as outsiders. Understanding whether there is an 'outsider' status, and whether this affected someone's career progress would be of interest to explore.

Finally, there were gaps in the thesis' sample when it came to disability, ethnic diversity, and women in technical roles. Further research which explores the experiences of the groups not well represented in the sample would provide additional findings to support them in the workplace. Access to these groups proved a challenge during this research's recruitment, so making connections with groups that support these communities would be likely be necessary.

Appendix A Participant descriptions

This appendix summarises the attributes of each participant, along with their career overview and life course events and any future plans which are relevant to their careers. I use the present tense, although all details are as of the time of interview. Class backgrounds are shown as how the participant described them. If not stated as privately educated, participants went to state schools.

Douglas is a 38-year-old working-class origin white British man living in rural southeast England. He received a 1st class degree in software engineering from a post-1992 university and has since worked in software development in full-time employed contracts. Douglas' career path has been uncomplicated, moving into new employment opportunities with increasing seniority and pay, and avoiding redundancy at times of downsizing. He spends his spare time learning new coding languages and techniques and sees this as a hobby that also helps his career by being up-to-date with the required skills. He is happy with his income and plans to pay off his mortgage by the time he is 45. By this time, Douglas plans to have developed an app so that he can work less by living off that income. Douglas lives with his partner, and they do not have plans to have children.

Adam is a 46-year-old working-class origin white British man living in the urban north of England. He graduated from film and media studies in 1996, after which he got into website advertising via graphic design work. Adam successfully rode the wave of technological change and growing markets, becoming creative director very early in his career and staying in senior positions despite various redundancies as companies have been bought out or folded. Adam learned the digital skills and soft skills that are needed for digital marketing in an ad hoc way without formal training. Adam credits a flexible and accommodating 'Northern' attitude to work/life balance, and a harmonious blending of work, family, and social life, for his comfortable working life. Adam is married and his children are teenagers. He did not pause his career to raise his children.

Kanvar is a 39-year-old working-class British Indian man living in the commuter belt of London, who came to the UK when he was 4 years old. He has an undergraduate degree in economics and

a master's degree in politics. He got into digital comms and website marketing via the networks he developed when working in politics. Kanvar manages website marketing for a large insurer, having worked on re-branding of household name companies. Kanvar highlights the importance of networks in building a career, saying he has worked hard to overcome barriers to networking which were exclusory to him, primarily along class lines. When freelancing, networking took up a lot of his evenings, but now he is employed this is not the case. Kanvar has a young family. He works full time.

Natasha is a 39-year-old middle-class origin white British woman living in the urban north of England. She graduated from a masters in mew media production in the south of England in 2003 and used the networked developed during that time to get a junior position in TV. However, Natasha wanted to pursue a career in new media so moved into children's e-learning websites. This then led to work in children's games production. Natasha has worked for a mixture of smaller agencies and the BBC. Despite success, she left the BBC as the commute was 4 hours a day and not compatible with a young family. She has two children and has negotiated working part-time from home, but she feels this arrangement impacts her ability to network and has affected her chance for promotions which have required full-time office working. Natasha uses Twitter and conference organising for networking, and Twitter has got her work in the past. She is considering consulting or developing her own product. Natasha recognises the need to continuously retrain on the job as technological change is so rapid.

Neil is a 46-year-old middle-class origin white man who was born in the UK, has recently taken Irish citizenship to remain an EU citizen. He lives in Budapest, where his wife is from. Neil learnt general web-based animation in an ad hoc way as the technology became mainstream, before studying animation on a post-graduate short course in his 30s. He then worked for an children's online entertainment company, before going freelance in 2010 where amongst other contractors, he worked for a large animation company in the west of England. In 2014, Neil moved to Europe for family reasons but continued to work on UK projects. He now does a lot of animation for charities and for YouTube content, employed as a freelancer. Neil feels that work is drying up, and wonders whether this is as a result of being so remote and missing out on informal networking. Neil sees his colleagues are 20 years younger than him and questions whether he should still be doing this work. However, he wants to continue to be creative and not move into management.

Rosa is a 50-year-old middle-class origin white British woman living on the south coast of England. Having graduated from a science/humanities degree, she worked in science communication for a publishing company producing CD-ROMs, and then for the BBC in website content production, including children's content. When the BBC relocated to Salford, Rosa took redundancy and went freelance, leveraging her strong reputation and network to forge a career in children's content production. This suited her situation as a young mother, meaning she could work part-time and from home. Rosa was supported by her husband's income during the transition to freelancing. Rosa has been able to negotiate a job-share role at a large multimedia broadcaster, producing children's games, and picks up other work through her BBC network and her home city network where many other creative workers live.

Cody is a 36-year-old middle-class-origin white British non-binary individual living in the urban north of England. They have an undergraduate degree in software engineering and a masters in human/computer interaction. After a number of early changes, Cody now works in the civil service in user testing and accessibility. Cody has suffered poor mental health as a result of toxic organisational cultures, and currently feels a mismatch of values with the government department they work for which is a source of tension. Cody is considering doing accessibility work on a freelance basis in the future, although is concerned that the role is potentially too specialised to attract sufficient work. They are also concerned that technological change will impact future career options and is aware of the need to continually develop skills, although the civil service do pay for and provide time for continued professional development. Cody does not plan to have a family.

Cathy is a 57-year-old privately educated middle-class origin white British/French woman living in London. Cathy completed an HND and then worked in secretarial roles, including at the BBC, where she went on to work in production and direction. After 10 years and having had a child, Cathy moved into children's digital content production when it was in its infancy, being able to make this transition very smoothly, as well as negotiating going part time. She says this is not everyone's experience. However, in 2007, due to working hours still being incompatible with childcare, Cathy took redundancy when her department relocated and began to work as a freelancer after having a year's break. This transition was possible due to sufficient economic support within the family. Cathy was able to use the network and reputation she developed at the BBC to get work in government, charity, and children's websites in content producer and editor

roles. Now that Cathy's child is older, she is looking to continue to develop her career and improve her digital skills in order to remain employable as technology changes.

Ruby is a 37-year-old middle-class origin white British woman living in London. She was recently retrained from print publishing and is at the very start of a career in TV production management, which was possible with the support and training of a national broadcaster. This transition has also been made possible with the support of her husband's income. However, as Ruby has two children, she is limited to working around how her and her husband can manage childcare, meaning that her options for taking future work are restricted to regularly scheduled shows in a commutable area. Covid has drastically shrunk the size of production crews and Ruby is concerned that with little experience, she will now struggle to pick up experience.

Holly is a 42-year-old middle-class origin white British woman living on the south coast of England. Holly did her undergraduate degree in broadcasting studies which involved a work placement, although this did not lead directly to a job and Holly had to work in precarious entry level roles for a long time before getting researcher, then production roles. After gradually developing her freelance career in documentary television over 11 years, her experience of managing work/life balance after the birth of her child was not positive. When looking to move from assistant producer to producer roles, which came about at the same time as having children, she was unable to commit to the busy and unsociable hours that the type of work she was interested in doing entailed, and she did not receive support from her employers. Holly says that freelance working is always full-on, and it was not possible to continue in this work. Holly has opted-out of TV work and is now back at university.

Charles is a 49-year-old middle-class origin white British man living in southwest England. After graduating in 1995 from a performing arts degree, Charles fell into a print magazine editor role via a friend, before moving over to web design as the publisher brought the magazine's websites in-house. Charles then moved to a similar role in local government in 2000. Sadly, Charles' wife died, and in 2008, Charles went to work for a charity related to the illness, having more time to care for his child. Recently, Charles was managed out of that role, and took a web manager role at a private school before being made redundant due to covid. He is currently unemployed. Charles is entirely self-taught in an ad-hoc way, learning what he needed to as technologies developed, through free online courses/resources. He did not (for whatever reason) invest more time and

money in training to protect his future employability. As Charles developed his expertise as the internet developed, he is a generalist, and is now suffering because he does not have a specialism which is now increasingly a requirement as website work is more complex.

Ophelia is a 43-year-old privately educated (bursary) middle-class origin white British woman living in London. Having graduated Oxford with an English degree, Ophelia went into digital children's content production at the BBC, commissioning education and games products. During this time, she completed a master's degree in early childhood development.

With her department relocating, Ophelia moved into digital manager roles for different organisations including a commercial children's broadcaster. At this time, she had a child and was 4 days a week, and then eventually went freelance for more flexible working and to avoid a long commute. Ophelia has continued to work as a freelancer, with a secure job share arrangement with a large multimedia broadcaster, producing children's games. Ophelia has been able to work part-time as a freelancer because of the support of her husband's income.

Judith is a 41-year-old middle-class origin white Northern Irish woman living in London. Judith did her undergraduate degree in broadcasting studies and politics which involved a work placement at the BBC. However, she still struggled to get work for around 18 months while trying to support herself in London. Having got a job through a university contact, her career in factual TV production progressed smoothly, and she got into series producer roles by her late 20s. When Judith was in her late 30s and was due to step up to executive producer, she fell pregnant, but surprisingly the company she freelanced with kept a position for her and she went into a new exec producer role 3 days a week after maternity leave. While this arrangement has allowed her to balance work and parenting, the reduced hours mean she is finding it difficult to do the role to the standard she would like, and the hours Judith works put her out of sync with the rest of the office, meaning that people perceive her as leaving early which she fears is impacting her reputation.

Erica is a 35-year-old middle-class origin white British woman living in London. Erica did her undergraduate degree in television production which involved a work placement with a regional channel owned by a large broadcaster, which led to her first role. She left this role to pursue broadcast television in a producer/director/camera operator mode of working, working on factual

programming. These freelance roles are time-intensive, involve a lot of travel and staying away from home, and there is a lot of pressure to perform at maximum capacity. Erica has felt the pressure of this at times. While wanting to have children, Erica thinks that her current work life is incompatible, but does not want to stop working on the kind of projects she has been doing as they are a passion of hers. This is creating tension which is unresolved.

Max is a 47-year-old working-class origin white British man living in the urban north of England. Max left grammar school education in 1991 after A Levels where he studied computing. Max got into IT training at a local council via an unrelated job as they knew he had a passion for computers. In 2000, Max moved to a website role in a charity which involves both back-end and front-end development, but not content production. As Max came into this role when the internet was in its infancy, he learnt in an ad hoc autodidactic way. Max expresses concern that he is a generalist, where now people need to have a specialism to progress, or get work in well-paid organisations. He has spoken to his employer about training into a specialism (SEO), but has not taken any action at the time of the interview. Recently, a department reorganisation put someone more experienced in modern web norms in charge of him. This, along with a workplace dispute, and Covid, has left him feeling insecure. He had some time off with mental health before the first Covid lockdown. Max does not have a family.

Erik is a 44-year-old privately educated middle-class origin white Australian-born man living in the commuter belt of London. While doing his undergraduate degree in graphic design, Erik became interested in website design, which he went on to do on a freelance basis after university. Erik has worked for various agencies with high-profile clients, promoting children's entertainment content through websites and games design. He later went on to set up his own agency, which was done in part so that he could spend time with his young family. However, Erik misses being part of a bigger team, and wants to go back to working for a larger agency so he can manage and mentor younger creators and have more security up to retirement.

Ester is a 41-year-old privately educated middle-class origin Jewish Scottish woman living in London. Ester did her undergraduate degree in broadcasting studies which involved a work placement which she managed to set up while she was interviewing a high-profile screen writer who recommended her. Ester graduated in 2001 and moved to London, lived with her brother, and found low-level freelance work through networks developed in the placement year.

Eventually Ester settled on work in script editing and is in the unusual position as she has been able to stay at the same production company for a long time, and while having three children. While initially freelance, the role became employed, and has since evolved into developing new TV projects. As having children and focusing on stability has meant that Ester has not developed her career to where others her age might be, she worries that other companies will wonder why she is not more senior. In addition, she has up until now been able to rely on the success of one TV show, which if it were cancelled would put her in a more precarious position. Staying at one company has also had the effect of Ester not developing a large network, as more precariously employed freelancers tend to do in order to sustain regular work.

Austin is a 38-year-old working-class origin white British man from the urban north of England, now living on the south coast of England. After Austin gained an undergraduate degree in multimedia systems, he has worked in university administration website design and as a freelance website developer. While he identifies with the more altruistic goals of the organisations he has worked for, Austin does not have a passion for the technical side of his work. Austin has felt that support systems and mentoring have been poor in many of these roles, and he has suffered with poor mental and physical health which he attributes to these conditions of work. Austin has since opted-out of website development as his main income, and is pursuing academic work. Austin has found that using platforms to access website work has been a positive experience as it has given him the financial leeway to be more selective with his main employment options.

Philip is a 43-year-old lower-middle-class origin white British man living in the rural midlands of England. After an undergraduate degree in software engineering, Philip did an MBA on the music industries, but was unable to work in the sector due to the low/no pay entry model. Philip went on to do IT support for schools, councils, and universities. He now works from home as a freelance website developer for universities and is often working on multiple projects so has to balance these various commitments with his parental commitments. He is responsible for his own training needs which he has to find time to undertake to stay employable. Philip plans to make work more secure by developing a ‘software as a service’ product which uses a subscription model to generate income. This could both free up more time and help him develop a secure source of income which could see him into retirement. However, this requires time he needs to commit, unpaid, to the learning of the new coding language, and the development of the project. This time commitment means he won’t be able to work on paid projects, and he has yet not managed to put this strategy into practice.

Appendix A

Due to issues of anonymity, this is a short description.

Alicia is a 48-year-old working-class origin Black British woman living in London. Alicia changed career at 38 to work in television, where she has sometimes struggled to maintain steady work but is now more successful. Work is time-intensive, and often at unsociable hours. Alicia does not have a family. She does not reveal her age to her colleagues as feels this would put her at a disadvantage. Alicia discusses the lack of access to work for marginalised groups if departments are not targeting for improvement. She also discusses the short to medium term impact that diversity agendas and the BLM movement is having on her career and thinks that this current moment feels more likely to lead to lasting change.

Michael is a 41-year-old working-class origin white British man living in London. After finishing education after A Levels and doing unrelated jobs, Michael started working as a quality assurance for games when he was around 30 years old. He was employed, but worried that there were lots of zero hours contractors. At another employer, Michael was vocal about union activities, and was not willing to do overtime. After this he was made redundant through a settlement agreement with seemingly no reason. His union took on his case and he was able to increase the settlement amount. This resource allowed him to take his time finding his current job, which he likes. Michael is now high up in the union, fighting for better working conditions for games workers. Michael is concerned that although he wants to stay in quality assurance, there are no people older than him in the role, and that it will soon be considered unusual for him to be doing these roles, meaning he is less likely to stay employed. However, he does not want to change what he is doing. Michael does not plan to have a family.

Justin is a 45-year-old middle-class origin white British man living in London. Justin graduated from a music technology undergraduate degree in 1997 before working in IT. Using redundancy money to take the opportunity to become self-taught in games design, Justin eventually got a job with a multinational console/games producer where he stayed for 11 years, rising to the role of lead designer. He now works for a small company specialising in Augmented Reality products. Justin has had an uncomplicated career and is well paid. He does not plan to have a family.

Rhonda is a 55-year-old working-class origin white British woman living in London. With undergraduate and masters degrees in the arts and film making, Rhonda had early success as a drama director in UK television, working freelance on many high-profile productions for legacy broadcasters. Despite success, Rhonda feels that she has been discriminated against due to her gender, class, and age, and that others have not met such resistance to their creative direction. While new streaming platforms have opened up more work with greater artistic autonomy, Rhonda feels she is increasingly marginalised due to her age and gender, and has recently released a production on YouTube as a way of getting it gaining a fanbase without having to deal with traditional gatekeepers. Looking to the future, Rhonda is hoping to leverage her property to generate an income as her directing work dries up. Rhonda has a teenage step daughter but this has not impacted her career in terms of taking time out.

Jess is a 36-year-old, middle-class origin white British women living on the south coast of England. Jess gained an undergraduate degree in computer science and a masters in digital media while living at home and working part time. After developing video content for the BBC as a student, Jess used this credit to get her first role in games design, eventually getting to senior designer in a company on the south coast. Jess then took a role in London but left that due to the difficult commute and being unable to work remotely due to an organisational culture which did not allow that. Jess thought this a particular problem as she was thinking about having children. Jess then took a job at her husband's small games studio where she is design director. She credits this progressive company, and her position, for the fact she is able to stay in the industry as a mother. Jess highlights that while larger more established companies are still known for their toxic environments, smaller games studios are becoming spaces for more progressive working practices.

Gray is a 40-year-old middle-class-origin Chinese/British female-non-binary individual living in the urban north of England. Gray is autistic. Having studied Japanese as an undergraduate, Gray worked in localisation for Japanese games companies before going into games design. However, they opted-out of the industry when made redundant and went into Further Education teaching for several years. However, Gray then did a masters in 3D computer animation and got back into games as an animator. While they are in relatively junior positions, their youthful appearance means that ageism has not been an issue. Gray is unsure what the future holds as the technology is changing so rapidly, but they are very focused on remaining employable and works hard to develop new skills and seek out new opportunities in emerging roles in animation for computer

games. Gray does not have a family but may have to care for elderly parents in the medium term future.

Rachel is a 41-year-old, middle-class origin white Canadian women living in London. She gained her undergraduate degree in Canada and worked in IT-related roles that developed soft skills useful roles in games. Rachel progressed to producer, where she sees herself as a manager as opposed to being involved in the creative aspect of making games. Rachel came to the UK after being headhunted on LinkedIn, and her current role is globally mobile if she chooses. Rachel has a love for gaming and is an example of where the boundaries of producer/consumer are blurred, with her main support network being on Twitch through a gaming community. The misogyny expressed through the Gamergate period has affected her, along with still pervasive gender bias. However, she says that conditions for woman in games are improving, including related to work/life balance. Rachel has not experienced ageism as she looks youthful and is considered younger than she is. She is not thinking of the future, although says she always likes to be challenged. She chooses to be child free.

Kristen is a 42-year-old middle-class origin white British women living in the south west of England. She has an undergraduate degree in communications and media studies and works in marketing for a games company. Kristen fell into a role in the games industry but now has a close connection to games industry culture. Having worked her way up from junior roles, Kristen was the head of global PR for a famous game character brand. After being made redundant from that role she worked in games as a freelancer and then in games retail, where she was made redundant while on maternity leave. She currently has a role in a smaller company while working part time to balance work with caring for her young family. Having children was a key inflection point for her career, and she says she is happy not being at the pinnacle of her career anymore. She is able to be part time with the support of her partner. While Kristen started out in print media, everything is now digital, and the way she engages audiences has changed dramatically. This is something she is struggling to keep up with due to her being older than her audience.

Dennis is a 52-year-old middle-class origin white British man living in southeast England. Dennis left school at 18 and then completed a part-time Open University degree in technology, graduating at 32 having worked full-time while completing the course. Dennis worked in retail and commercial property design for many years which involved developing graphic design and video

skills. As someone passionate about the environment, Dennis started a YouTube channel in 2018, and now does this full-time with the support of donations through Patreon. He does not run advertisements on his content so has an unusual relationship with the platform. Dennis lives alone and has few commitments, so is able to spend 7 days a week on his YouTube channel, researching and producing content. He plans to do this for 10 years and then retire, although he may have to care for a parent which may make this work more challenging due to the hours it requires.

Martin is a 37-year-old working-class origin white British man living in the commuter belt of London. He did not complete his undergraduate degree in film as he was able to start working in the field. Martin is now a highly skilled and experienced graphic designer who has worked at the very top of TV and film. However, the pressure he now faces to continue this work is resulting in him going blind. He is weighing up how he is going to carry on, or whether he is going to have to step back, change role, or change field in order to reduce stress levels. His narrative is dominated by the early poverty he suffered, which has shaped his approach to lowering risk in his career, taking on lots of work to ensure continued employment. This, coupled with the stresses of the industry are causing damage to this mental and physical wellbeing. The conditions are described as being a result of the market insisting on ever higher production values at a faster rate, while there being a damaging lack of talent, leading to people being promoted before they are ready and them pressuring people below them to get the work done.

Due to issues of anonymity, this is a limited description.

Roger is a 65-year-old upper-middle-class origin white British man living in the rural south west of England. After a long career in television acting and producing, Roger started a YouTube channel about a passion of his when YouTube in its infancy. This has since evolved into an established brand with 12 members of staff. Roger is a presenter and producer for the channel. Roger’s story is expressed as one of luck and happenstance, although there is financial peril at times which has driven him to continue working in this novel way. His move to YouTube was done when his children were adults.

Appendix B Topic guide

[Welcome discussion]

[Confirm everything OK with consent form and whether they have any questions]

[Check participant OK to be recorded]

[Explanation of 'theory-led' interviews – that I will be sharing academic theories and my thinking process in order to check their validity based on participant's experience]

[Starting interview:]

SCRIPT:

'My understanding is that someone's background is likely to have an effect on people's abilities to make take certain actions, so I would like to ask you questions regarding your background, your education, your social networks, and your career to-date'.

Biographical information

- Ask about age, gender identity, ethnic identity, class identity, geographical location of home and work, disability status.

Educational background

- Education history including state/public school, university if applicable, other education, including industry specific training.
- Did you develop any useful networks in your education that helped with your career?

Career history

- Tell me about your current job
  - How are you employed? (employed, freelance, contracts, etc.)
    - Has this changed over time?
- Could you give me a career history, from [normally when they left education] up until now? You can include as much detail as you like, and I will take some notes. [Pull out reasons for career decisions. These might include work-related or life-course related reasons, or something else].

SCRIPT:

‘There is a lot of recent research on the working conditions, and work cultures, of digital and creative workers. These questions, and the follow-up questions I ask you, are framed by the debates that are raised by that research. I may ask you questions about some of your assumptions, based on the perspectives I have been exposed to as I have read this research. I do this as a way of getting you to look at your position in a reflexive manner, not to challenge your beliefs or to question your experience’.

Questions related to research themes

CONDITIONS

- What are the main pressures associated with your work, now and in the past?
  - Conditions, pay, security, pressure to perform, etc.

WORKPLACE/SOCIETAL CULTURES

[Each interview is different – be flexible and ask relevant questions. Think of general theories (feminism, class struggle, etc.), or specific research (e.g. discourses of self-promotion vs solidarity) which could be useful for participants to look afresh at their situation].

- Tell me about the workplace cultures you have experienced? Now and in the past
  - How have you experienced these changing over your career?
  - How do you think these have affected your working life?
    - For example, is ageism a problem? Any other prejudices?
- How to you feel your workplace culture fits in with wider societal feelings about those issues (ageism, other prejudices)? – with, or against, the grain of societal norms…

SCRIPT:

'I understand from my research so far that in order for older workers to sustain careers in your line of work, they might need to make changes to their working lives for a variety of reasons. These may include making adjustments for work/life balance reasons, or to try and remain employable by acting in certain ways. These next questions are asking you about such things.

(We might have already covered some of this, so apologies for any repetition)'.

Strategies for sustaining work

- Bearing in mind the positive/negative aspects of work you have already discussed, have you made any strategic choices in your career in order to sustain work, improve work, or make work more tolerable?
- What choices have you made to try and help make your career successful?
  - Continued training,
  - Going freelance, joining a union, joining a cooperative, other 'positive'
  - 'Performing youth', self-commodifying, other 'negative'
- What were the outcomes of these decisions? – As expected?
  - (If different decisions made at different times, address each one in turn)

- Do you think the decisions you made were due to the industry/due to the type of employment you were in?

For those participants who have left their digital/creative career

- Why did you leave [the industry]?
    - Did you try to make it work, how so, and for how long?
    - Was there any one thing that made you leave, or was it a combination of things?

Future plans, wrapping up

- Have you got any plans for your future work in this industry?
- Any thoughts on the future of your industry?
- Anything else you would like to discuss?

[Asked for leads on other potential participants]

[Thanks, information on timeline for research outputs]

Appendix C Coding information

Each transcript was assigned attributes in order to aid analysis. These are listed below. Following that, coding information is listed, sorted by their code groups which were used to make analysis more manageable.

Attributes

Attribute type	Attribute
Age	35-40
	41-45
	46-50
	51-55
	56-60
	60+
Gender	Female
	Non-binary
	Male
Class	Working class
	1st Generation middle class
	Middle class
Ethnicity/Race (As they arose)	Black
	Jewish
	South Asian
	White
	White/Chinese
Location	London and South
	North (of London)
	Other
Disability	Yes
Schooling	State
	Grammar
	Private
Education: highest attainment	GCSE
	A Level
	Undergrad

Appendix C

	Master
	PhD
Children	No
	Pre-school
	School age
	Adult
Employment status	Employed
	Freelance
	Boss
	Unemployed
	Ex-digital/creative
Field	Video
	Games
	Websites
Role	Animator
	Camera operator
	Games comms
	Games designer
	Games producer
	Games quality assurance
	TV director
	TV producer
	TV script editor
	Web back-end
	Web front-end
	Web digital comms
	Web user researcher

Table 6 – Participant attributes

Codes

Code	**Code Group 1**	**Code Group 2**	**Code Group 3**	**Code Group 4**
Accents				
Acting_Going Employed	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Going Freelance	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Leaving	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Opting Out	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Retraining	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Staying	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Training	Movement	Outcomes		
Acting_Using Platforms	Movement	Outcomes		

Age_Appropriate Seniority Discimination				
Age_Experience	Context			
Age_Practical	Context			
Age_Professional	Context			
Age_Technological Change	Context			
Awesome Quotes				
Context_Employer	Context	Structures		
Context_Industry Conditions	Context	Structures		
Context_Job Expectations	Context			
Context_Market	Context	Structures		
Context_Politics	Context	Structures		
Context_Technology	Context	Structures		
Context_Training Needs	Context			
Culture_Ageism	Cultures			
Culture_Bullying	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Bureaucratic	Cultures	Pushing	Structures	
Culture_Clubbing	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Drinking	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Exploitative	Cultures			
Culture_Friendly	Cultures	Support		
Culture_Negative	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_North/South Debate	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Not Youthful	Pulling	Cultures		
Culture_Positive	Cultures	Pulling	Support	
Culture_Professional	Cultures	Pulling	Support	
Culture_Supportive Management	Cultures	Pulling	Support	
Culture_Unprofessional	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Unsupportive Management	Cultures	Pushing		
Culture_Youthful	Cultures	Pulling	Pushing	
Descriptive_Attaining Work Role	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Career Progression	Movement	Descriptive	Outcomes	
Descriptive_Co-workers	Cultures	Descriptive		
Descriptive_Commute	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Conditions	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Covid	Descriptive			
Descriptive_CPD in own time	Descriptive			
Descriptive_CPD on company time	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Culture	Cultures	Descriptive		
Descriptive_Education	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Job Role	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Management	Descriptive			
Descriptive_On the job ad hoc learning	Descriptive			

Descriptive_Organisation	Cultures	Descriptive		
Descriptive_Pay	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Relationships	Cultures	Descriptive		
Descriptive_Upbringing	Descriptive			
Descriptive_Work/Life Balance	Descriptive			
Disability	Lenses			
Excitement_Being Creative	Pulling	Feelings		
Excitement_New Challenge	Pulling	Feelings		
Fear_Being Judged	Feelings	Pushing		
Fear_Job Interviews	Feelings			
Fear_Not Being Creative	Feelings	Pushing		
Fear_Precarity	Feelings	Pushing		
Fear_Retirement	Feelings	Retirement	Pushing	
Fear_Stagnation	Feelings	Pushing		
Fear_Unemployed	Feelings			
Feeling_About Age	Feelings			
Feeling_Bad about	Feelings			
Feeling_Bored	Feelings			
Feeling_Confidence	Feelings			
Feeling_Determination				
Feeling_Good about	Feelings			
Feeling_Lack of confidence	Feelings			
Feeling_Uncomfortable with change	Feelings			
Feeling_Unsure about future direction	Feelings			
Future	Planning/Strategies	Future		
Health_Good Mental	Health	Outcomes	Feelings	Pulling
Health_Good Physical	Health	Pulling	Outcomes	
Health_Poor Mental	Health	Pushing	Outcomes	Feelings
Health_Poor Physical	Health	Pushing	Outcomes	
Inequality_Ableism	Health	Pushing	Cultures	Structures
Inequality_Ageism	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Inequality_Class	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Inequality_Homophobia	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Inequality_Location	Pushing	Structures		
Inequality_Racism	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Inequality_Sexism	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Inequality_White privilege	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Context
Key Informer_Age	Context			
Key Informer_Context	Context			
Key Informer_Field	Context			
Key Informer_Future of Field	Context	Future		
Key Informer_Gender	Context			

Key Informer_Management	Context			
Key Informer_Market	Context	Structures		
Key informer_Pipeline				
Key Informer_Retraining Into	Movement	Context		
Key Informer_Technology	Context	Structures		
Labour of Love	Pulling			
LC_Events_Bereavement	Health	Life Course		
LC_Events_Buy Home	Life Course			
LC_Events_Children	Life Course			
LC_Events_Children Leave Home	Life Course			
LC_Events_Graduation	Life Course			
LC_Events_Health Issue	Life Course			
LC_Events_Higher Degree	Life Course			
LC_Events_Married	Life Course			
LC_Events_NO CHILDREN	Life Course			
LC_Events_Relocation for partner	Movement	Life Course		
LC_Events_Retirement	Retirement	Life Course		
LC_Participation/Position/Roles Frame	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Caring for Parent	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Changing Career	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Delayed Transitions	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Establishing Career	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Leaving Family Home	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Living with partner	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Put down roots	Life Course			
LC_Phases_Raising Child/ren	Life Course			
Lens_CPE	Lenses	Structures		
Lens_Discourse	Lenses	Structures		
Lens_Habitus	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional_Age	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional_Class	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional_Gender	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional_LGBTQ	Lenses			
Lens_Intersectional_Race	Lenses			
Lens_Life Course (LC)	Life Course	Lenses		
Lens_PEC	Lenses	Structures		
Link with another participant				
Location_Office	Context	Pulling	Pushing	
Location_Remote	Context	Pulling	Pushing	
Mistakes_Insecure	Feelings	Pushing	Outcomes	
Mistakes_Lack of Experience	Pushing	Outcomes		

Mistakes_Wrong Role	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Motivation_Commute	Pulling			
Motivation_Develop Network	Pulling			
Motivation_Financial	Pulling			
Motivation_For Good Time	Pulling	Feelings		
Motivation_Get Promoted	Pulling			
Motivation_Improve Work/Life Balance	Pulling			
Motivation_Join Positive Culture	Pulling	Feelings		
Motivation_Leave Detrimental Culture	Pulling	Feelings		
Motivation_More Autonomy	Pulling			
Motivation_More Control	Pulling			
Motivation_More Security				
Motivation_More support	Pulling	Support		
Motivation_New Challenge	Pulling	Feelings		
Motivation_Remain Creative	Pulling	Feelings		
Motivation_Stepping Stone	Pulling			
Moving On_Not Challenged	Movement	Feelings		
Moving On_Not Valued	Movement	Feelings		
Networks_Exclusion	Cultures	Pushing	Structures	
Networks_Inclusion	Cultures	Support	Pulling	Structures
Networks_Leveraging Existing	Planning/Strategies			
Obsolete	Feelings	Pushing		
Org Practices_Exploitation	Cultures	Pushing		
Org Practices_Feedback	Cultures			
Org Practices_HR	Cultures			
Org Practices_Interview	Cultures			
Org Practices_Risk				
Org Practices_Social	Cultures			
Org Practices_Support	Cultures	Support		
Outcome_Bad	Outcomes			
Outcome_Good	Outcomes			
Outcome_Mixed	Outcomes			
Outcome_Unclear	Outcomes			
Perceptions_Bad Luck	Feelings	Pushing	Outcomes	
Perceptions_Good Luck	Feelings	Outcomes		
Perceptions_Unfair	Pushing	Outcomes		
Perceptions_What is Creative	Feelings			
Planning for_Long Term	Planning/Strategies	Future		
Planning for_Medium Term	Planning/Strategies	Future		
Planning for_Retirement	Planning/Strategies	Retirement		
Planning for_Short Term	Planning/Strategies	Future	Pushing	
Pressure_Above	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Feelings

Pressure_Constant Training	Context	Feelings	Pushing	
Pressure_Financial				
Pressure_Norms	Pushing	Cultures	Structures	Feelings
Pressure_Quality				
Pressure_Reputation	Pushing			
Pressure_Self	Feelings	Pushing		
Pressure_Up or Out	Pushing	Structures		
Pressure_Workload	Pushing			
Pull_Autonomy	Pulling			
Pull_Being Creative	Pulling			
Pull_Flexible Working	Pulling			
Pull_Glamour/Fame	Pulling			
Pull_Lifestyle	Pulling			
Pull_People	Pulling			
Pull_Symbolic Capital	Pulling			
Pulled In_Government Scheme	Movement	Pulling		
Pulled In_Organisation Scheme	Movement	Pulling		
Pulled In_Quotas	Movement	Pulling		
Pulled In_Social Network	Movement	Pulling		
Push_Lack of Access	Pushing	Structures		
Push_Lack of Training	Pushing			
Push_Management Control	Pushing			
Push_Precarious	Pushing	Structures		
Push_Pressure	Pushing			
Push_Work/Life Balance	Pushing			
Pushed Out_Company Collapse	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Pushed Out_Made Redundant	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Pushed Out_Managed Out	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Pushed Out_No Work	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Pushed Out_Too Expensive	Movement	Pushing	Outcomes	
Pushed Out_Too Old	Outcomes	Pushing	Retirement	Cultures
Realisation_Enjoying/interested in something	Feelings			
Realisation_Good at something	Feelings			
Realisation_Not enjoying/interested in something	Feelings	Pushing		
Realisation_Not good at something	Feelings	Pushing		
Risk_Financial				
Risk_Security				
Statistics	Context			
Strategy_Attaining	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Audacity/Bravery/Confidence	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Blagging	Feelings	Planning/Strategies		

Strategy_Changing Field	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Changing Role	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_CPD	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Developing Networks	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Developing networks through speaking events	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Digital Networks	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Going Employed	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Going Freelance	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Going Full Time	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Going Part Time	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Job Share	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Leveraging Reputation	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Organising	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Pay cut	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Performing Youth				
Strategy_Picking Jobs Selectively	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Property leverage	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Relocating				
Strategy_Retraining	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Setting up Company				
Strategy_Solidarity Networks	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Specialism	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Stepping Stone	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Sustaining	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Taking Any Jobs	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Using Platforms	Planning/Strategies			
Strategy_Working for free	Planning/Strategies			
Support_Financial	Planning/Strategies	Support		
Support_Moral	Planning/Strategies	Support		
Tension_Clash of cultures	Feelings	Cultures		
Tension_Emotional Labour	Feelings			
Tension_Self-commodification	Feelings			
Tension_Time away from family				
Thinking About_Going Boss				
Thinking About_Going Employed	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Going Freelance	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Going Part Time/Working Less				
Thinking About_Leaving	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Opting Out	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Relocating	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Retraining	Planning/Strategies			

Thinking About_Staying	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Training	Planning/Strategies			
Thinking About_Using Platforms	Planning/Strategies			
Unemployed_period of unemployment	Outcomes			
Values_Doing Good	Feelings			
Values_Ethics	Feelings			

Table 7 – Codes

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