Engendering media work: Institutionalizing the norms of entrepreneurial subjectivity

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Abstract
The article analyses how contemporary processes of media production involving temporary work contracts for journalists, long working hours, the demand for unconditional commitment to work and so on push women into unequal position compared to male employees. Attention is paid to ‘engendered’ work in ‘greedy’ media organizations characterized by precarization of work and the related devaluation of journalism as a profession. Rather than detecting the extent of power and position of women in the media, we adopt the materialist analysis of mechanisms that mask gender inequality and contribute to ‘capitalizing’ on gender for the imperative of media productivity. The study was conducted in Slovenia, in Eastern European, post-socialist context, and comprised 33 individual interviews with media managers and workers at three television stations (public TV SLO, and commercial POP TV and Planet TV). In the analysis, we focus on how journalists, by internalizing the disciplining norms of ‘entrepreneurial subjectivity’, become the motivating force behind precarization of work. Although these processes are often perceived as gender neutral even among female journalists, we argue that they are masculinized and have different effects on men and women, among other things due to the individualization of women’s reproductive roles.

Keywords
Entrepreneurial subjectivity, gender equality, greedy institutions, journalism, precarity

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Introduction

Extended working time, a rigid separation of the work process from the life-world, and the lack of alternatives to the patterns of the sexist working environment have been identified as the main reasons for gender biases in media environments (O’Brien, 2014: 1209–1216; Ross, 2001). Feminization of work has become ‘an extraordinary paradigm of current capitalism’ (Morini, 2007: 48), which increases the presence of precarious flexible, and low-paid work on media markets. Differences in gender, age and class are often neglected in an effort to fulfil the imperative of profitability of the media – the more precarious the market, the greater the share of women workers. In this article, we raise the question of how massive activation of women in the media correlates with the increased number of unsteady and low-paid jobs, and what this means for gender equality. Based on observations, we speak about the ‘en-gendering’ of the media, discussing inequality as a systemic characteristic of media institutions.

In the last decade, a number of studies have demonstrated the persistence of gender inequality in media work (Gallagher, 2008; Gill, 2014; O’Brien, 2014): managerial and editorial positions are mostly occupied by men; women are employed mainly as assistants, administrators, announcers or, when they are accepted in management, this happens in ‘crisis conditions’ when those positions lose a prestigious role (Gallagher, 2008; Gill, 2014; O’Brien, 2014; Pajnik, 2012). Women have fewer opportunities for promotion; more women than men in the media are part-time workers, more have fixed-term contracts and their salaries are 10–20 per cent lower than men’s (Gallagher, 2010). While these data point to gender segregation, the prevailing corpus of literature seems to stagnate in terms of data dissemination and fails to make a shift from ‘what to why’ (Lobo et al., 2017; Pajnik and Petković, 2017).

In this article, we focus on ‘engendered’ work in the media sector in post-modernity and the context of the post-socialist Slovenia, analysing the rise of ‘entrepreneurial subjectivity’ (Gill, 2014) characterized by precarization of work. Our goal is to evaluate mechanisms that contribute to ‘capitalizing’ on gender for the imperative of media productivity (Cohen, 2012; Delphy, 1981; Meehan and Riordan, 2002). Much like other social fields, the media sector too witnessed the ‘decline of the profession’ when regular employment as part of the work norm gradually withdrew and was replaced with project-based media work. We argue that precarization of work disciplines the employees into entrepreneurial subjectivity through the masculinized imperative of ideal, carefree workers who ‘love’ their work. In the following sections, we first present the theoretical framework for analysing precarization in journalism. We relate it to the logic of ‘greedy institutions’ and the rise of ‘entrepreneurial subjectivities’ which co-shape the existing work conditions and maintain male-centred work norms. Second, we outline the specific context of media transformation in Slovenia during the period of transition from socialism to capitalism. We focus on a post-socialist country with the intention to understand how ‘savage’ commercialization especially of television industry, which began in the 1990s, coupled with changes in labour legislation reinforced precarization and gender division of work. Third, we lay out the methodologies that we used and, based on the analysis of interviews conducted with TV media workers, we discuss how a specific mode of precarity, that is, self-employment, leads to (a) erosion of the quality of working
conditions in journalism regardless of the worker’s status; (b) self-disciplining of journalists and their internalization of entrepreneurship; and (c) individualization of social reproduction and care obligations with gender-specific impact.

**Precarization, greedy institutions and entrepreneurial subjectivity**

In the media field, precarization of work appears to be a consequence of various trends, such as concentration of media ownership, hierarchies instructing media production and consumption, technological developments, including trends of marketization and commodification of international communication (Smythe, 1960; Mosco et al., 2008; Örnebring, 2010). In Central-Eastern Europe, other specific trends include fierce privatization, media deregulation and commercialization associated with ‘paternalist commercialism’ (Splichal, 2001) which is evident in the gender pay gap and attitudes towards women media workers who are assigned underpaid, lower ranking jobs. All these processes, compounded by the economization pressure and considerable reserve ‘army’ of mostly young, highly educated workers, led to the increase in flexible jobs and general insecurity of media jobs.

In this article, we pursue the approach of the feminist political economy of communication (Meehan and Riordan, 2002) that presupposes the analysis of corporate/institutional reality of media production in its intersection with media workers’ experiences that stem from differences in employment and reproductive work. In the 1970s, feminist (historical) material analysis importantly pointed to the dialectical relationship between the capitalist class division and hierarchical gendered structures of companies and society as such. Eisenstein (1998) used the concept of ‘capitalist patriarchy’ to point to the intersection of class and gender. She analysed how individual freedom and choice of opportunities work for the multiplication of capital, pushing people into privatism and individual fantasy and sustaining gender differences. It is ‘gendered class’ that we need to analyse, as Firestone (1970) argued, to complement the ‘classical’ class analysis with reproduction, acknowledging that gender relations are not constituted only in relation to production, but also reproduction and reproductive work. We argue that new developments in media production characterized by individualization, intensification and insecurity of employments, coupled with a post-feminist myth of already-achieved gender equality in the media (Gill, 2002), put women journalists in a particularly unfavourable situation. Casualization of labour is typical of the creative industries, especially with regard to the not always constrained but often ‘voluntary’ nature of such working arrangements (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011).

Classical Kalleberg’s (2011) definition suggests that temporal insecurity of employment is the key element of precarious employment. According to some authors (Rodgers, 1989; Tucker, 2002), however, precarization needs to be understood more broadly, taking into account the elements which define the quality of workplace, such as control over working conditions, scope and intensity of work, the duration of the working time, the height of income, the share of social contributions paid by the employer, access to education, possibilities of work–family balance, trade union representation and the existence of collective agreements. Due to flexibilization and intensification of work, and
extension of working hours driven by the need to improve market competitiveness, these aspects have become unstable in regular employments too, obscuring the boundaries between safe and precarious employments.

Based on the assumption that in the neoliberal conditions the large portion of the labour market has been precarized through the normalization of greedy institutions (Coser in Egger de Campo, 2013), with some fields of work and some forms of employment being more insecure than others, our analysis looks into the expansion of precarization beyond the dichotomy of standard/non-standard employment. These reconfigurations and redistributions of the main forms of labour security generate new social fractures and inequalities and pose significant gender challenges. The challenges are not only related to the fact that flexible jobs are traditionally ‘women’s jobs’ and that women outnumber men in atypical employments. They are also related to ‘a twenty-first-century challenge’ (Standing, 2011: 61) that more women than men are experiencing a ‘triple burden’: they are expected to do most of the care for children and a growing number of elderly relatives and, at the same time, to be competitive and successful in individualized and insecure jobs on an equal footing with men, thus asserting their emancipation (McRobbie, 2002).

In 1974, Coser developed the concept of greedy institution which implies competition for individuals’ limited temporal and performance capacities. Greedy institutions appropriate one’s time and work, with the workers seemingly voluntarily adapting to the circumstances and accepting commitment. In return for their devotion, they are granted exclusive benefits, which, however, weaken their social ties with other institutions and spheres of life. In developing this concept, Coser used the examples of celibacy, affiliation with sects, strong authorities and the like. Egger de Campo (2013), in applying the concept to some modern organizations and fields of work (among others Google and social networks such as Facebook), points to the strengthening of greedy institutions on the contemporary neoliberal markets. She suggests that seemingly voluntary subjection of the individual to unlimited demands of the company should not mislead us to overlook the structural disproportions of power that are at work, determining the relations between the organization and the employees. By occupying private time of employees and preventing work and life/family balance, greedy institutions impose the ideal of a gender neutral, disembodied (Acker, 1991), carefree worker, and render social reproduction, that is, care responsibilities, as an individual problem. This approach puts women under enormous pressure.

Discussing the future of journalism in the context of increasing technological and economic advancement, some authors adopt a different focus: rather than exploring the interpellation of the worker into the organizational norms in the media field, Ramaker et al. (2015) explore the possibilities of circumventing institutional needs and enhance professional autonomy by developing and learning reflective practices. ‘Reflective journalist’ is the one who does not lament about the pressures but rather develops ways to cope with the constraints (Ramaker et al., 2015: 355). It is along these lines of thought that we should understand Deuze’s (2019: 132) plea for ‘creativity’ in journalism, or his analysis of ‘liquid media work’ (Deuze, 2007: 233–240) – not as something that only benefits the industry but as an important mechanism to nurture quality journalism. Similarly, Örnebring (2010) aims at unravelling the context of journalistic work beyond the arguments of decline and deskilling, arguing that new technologies should be viewed as opportunities
for re-skilling and for worker’s negotiated rather than monopolized subjectivities. Such creative attitudes, as argued by Banks (2014: 123), embrace the necessity of choice and engage in the ongoing search for meaning, revising the profession. Indeed, workers, regardless of gender, can be viewed as tactically navigating the demands of the institutions they work for in order to secure a more autonomous position, but the impact of organizational constraints cannot be overlooked. It is relevant to emphasize that rather than working hierarchically from the management down to the worker, power relations in modern companies now work – as in the Foucauldian conception of power – within the subject and through the subject.

We propose the thesis that the demands of greedy institutions have reinforced the formation of what Gill (2014) termed entrepreneurial subjectivities that are based on the notions of individualism, meritocracy and egalitarianism. Structural power relations that underlie the relations between the company and the employees and relations among various categories of employees, have to be systematically denied in order to establish legitimation of greedy institutions which intensify and extensify work in space and time, including through new technologies that push for the norm of worker’s unlimited availability. Entrepreneurial subject is seemingly voluntarily self-regulated and self-disciplined, established as flexible, mobile and agile, constantly upgraded, trained, re-programmed and re-invented, with all his or her interests and duties being subjected to work (Gollmitzer, 2014). Such disposition of the entrepreneurial subjectivity strengthens the masculinized imperative of work-focused carefree worker. We argue that the concepts of greedy institution and entrepreneurial subjectivity well illustrate the position of (bogus) self-employed journalists which our study identified as a prevalent albeit ambivalent mode of precarization in the Slovenian media field.

In contrast to the thesis that creative subjectivities in cultural industries simply surrender themselves to hyper-intensive work norms, Banks (2014) takes the perspective of creative industries and autonomist approaches, and speaks about the ‘the perfect synthesis between the worker and the work’: ‘being in the zone’ is described as an ‘optimal fusion of the productive mind and the labouring body’, resulting in gratifications for both the worker and the media (p. 242). Viewed from this perspective, creative subjectivities are not only a result of an imposition coming from the industry but emerge through a process of self-valorization that does not dismiss the idea that ‘work can be pleasurable and productive’ (Banks, 2014: 247). Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s (2011) study of workers in television, publishing and music recording pursued the argument that what drives creative subjectivities are not so much institutional requirements but rather moments of ‘pleasurable absorption’ that enhance workers’ satisfaction in what they perceive as rewarding jobs (p. 132). On the other hand, we could also argue that the reproduction of the cultural industry in capitalism is enabled precisely by ‘the creatives’ that cannot entirely be subjected to standardized and routinized work procedures but need the latitude to achieve creations to be sold to the market. Such circumstances, according to Cohen (2012), cannot be adequately addressed solely by debates over autonomy, but need to include the analysis of aggressive media regimes.

Indeed, the entrepreneurial orientation requires the denial of structural inequalities in favour of symbolic images of work – the image of the ‘autonomous creativity’ is praised. In such ‘post-feminist atmosphere’, that is, the illusion that ‘all the battles have already
been won’, an image of a modern, ‘cool, informal and bohemian’ working environment is created (Gill, 2014: 523–524), delegitimizing the materialist criticism of gender inequality. Viewed from the perspective of such criticism, creative female subjectivities participate in such working culture by submitting to the gender neutral working norms which stand for ‘normality’.

‘Savage commercialization’ and self-employment as a business model in Slovenia

In the early 1990s, Splichal (1994) challenged the idea that the overcoming of authoritarian practices in the former socialist countries would automatically mean a rise of democratic political and media systems. His doubts emerged when he saw that Central-Eastern European societies ‘were caught up in the imitation of West-European practices in economy and society’ (Splichal, 2001: 33) rather than exploring how developments of Western media systems can be accommodated in the specific situations in Central-Eastern Europe. ‘Imitative revolutions’ (Splichal, 2001) brought primarily fierce denationalization, commercialization and privatization of the media.

In the mid-1990s, public broadcaster Radio Television Slovenia (RTV) encountered its biggest competitor – a commercially oriented POP TV owned by the US corporation Central Media Enterprises (CME). The re-regulation of broadcasting allowed for granting of licences to new private and commercial broadcasters (Splichal, 2001: 34) but without taking into account wider consequences of such changes on media development and without providing a proper regulatory framework. Newspapers that had previously been socialized, with workers being majority owners, were privatized overnight with boards of state funds selling newspaper shares to a few owners in privatized companies. Privately owned commercial radio and television stations started to mushroom across Slovenia. Instead of rethinking their own post-socialist development, the countries of Central-Eastern Europe began to adopt media systems that equated press freedom with private ownership, seeing the market as a safeguard against state interests (Splichal, 2001: 43).

In Slovenia, the disintegration of working relationships in the media is related to the shrinking of regular employment and favouring of the freelance or self-employed status for journalists. The key factor that increased precarization was the entry of the commercial private media in the 1990s (i.e. POP TV). In addition to media commercialization, technological changes, in particular, the digitalization of the media, appear as an important factor resulting in an increased de-standardization of journalists’ work. Self-employment is most present in commercial, privately owned media, where it constitutes a business model and regular employments are not even available. The 2016 data¹ show that of the 2295 people employed in journalism, 1372 were women and 923 men. Of those, 690 were self-employed (amounting to almost 30%), among them 304 men and 386 women. While the share of self-employed men and women is almost even, numerically more women than men working in journalism are self-employed. This stands in contrast to the situation among the general working population in Slovenia, where the share of self-employed people in 2016 was 12 per cent, with women accounting for only 30 per cent of the self-employed.²
Although in its legal form, self-employment is intended to enable entrepreneurial activity, it is often used as a disguise for ‘dependent employment’ (i.e. bogus self-employment when a person has an exclusive labour contract with one employer), lending it a legal form and enabling evasion of the labour rights associated with a regular employment contract. The law provides for minimum job security and income level comparable to that of regular employees performing similar work in similar conditions, but not also for the worker’s rights associated with working time, paid holidays, sick leave, parental leave, pension contributions and so on. Self-employees pay their own social security contributions, but these are considerably lower than regular ones (and consequently, their social security rights are lower too), which in turn enables self-employed workers to negotiate higher salaries than regular employees. Because of the differences in taxation, many journalists willingly submit themselves to bogus self-employment and consequently to lower social security and employment stability. This situation points to the role of state and its tax policy in supporting a commercial TVs’ business model. In contrast to freelance and self-employed journalists, all regularly employed workers in the public RTV Slovenia are officially classified and employed as civil servants, as stipulated by the Public Sector Salary System Act in 2002. Jobs are classified and grouped into pay grades applicable to other public institutions, local organizations, public funds, agencies and bodies in Slovenia.

**Methodology**

We used the method of individual semi-structured interviews with the elements of narrative interview, which enabled us to analyse structural and institutional factors that influence the living experience of media workers. Twelve interviews were conducted in the spring of 2016 with representatives of the managements of three selected television stations, namely the public TV Slovenija (TV SLO) and the private POP TV and Planet TV, three editors of web portals and two representatives of trade unions or professional associations. In addition, interviews with 22 journalists involved in primetime news production were conducted in the autumn of 2017. In selecting interviewees, we aimed to include journalists in different living and employment situations. All interviews were recorded and transcribed; they lasted 1 hour on the average. Interviews were anonymized, while pseudonyms used are those chosen by interviewees themselves. The sample included 11 women and 10 men of different age groups (the youngest respondent was 25 years old and the oldest was 56, with the average age being 37), and with different employment arrangements (six respondents were in regular employment, one in fixed-term employment, while the rest were self-employed or freelance journalists). Apart from enabling us to observe gendered effects of labour precarization in journalism, such sample also allowed us to analyse how flexibility impacts journalists in regular employment. The main characteristic of our sample is that the majority of the self-employed or freelance journalists were bogus self-employees who voluntarily accepted that status and received relatively high wages compared to regular employees.

We aimed to identify discourses which reflected interviewees’ experiences and working conditions and based on this establish gender (in)equalities in working conditions. In addition to seeking to understand their actual experiences, we also sought to establish
how they internalized and legitimized their situation and how (self)critical they were of it or how they resisted it. Our goal was to unravel the ‘experiential truth’ (North, 2009: 508) where interviewers’ narratives, not necessarily reflecting the ‘objective truth’ and not allowing for generalization, nevertheless help to explain important experiences and feelings that constitute instances of unequal gender relations.

**Absence of the corporeality of class: Towards individualization of work**

Flexibilization of employment relationships and economization of labour costs by skipping the payment of social security contributions and the expenses arising from workers’ rights were the fundamental reasons for introducing self-employments in Slovenian journalism. At the same time, it also enabled media companies to appropriate employees’ time and work. In other words, the insecurity of self-employment and relatively high earnings discipline workers into entrepreneurial subjectivity which presupposes a competitive, mobile and flexible individual with no obligations outside work. However, these norms aggravate the working conditions for regular employees as well, as noted by one of our interviewees:

> Indeed, the position of all worsened, because in fact the process of precarisation naturally brings pressure on regular employees, because there is no separate competition, so we can actually say that precarisation is the business model which serves to lower the standards of all. (Representative of the Union of Slovene Journalists)

Economization and the drive to reduce labour costs can lead to the increase in the number of workers in non-regular employment, which in turn exerts more pressure on those in regular employment. On the other hand, economization may also involve the strategy of reducing the number of employments in general while intensifying work and extending working hours, which also affects the quality of work produced:

> Before, one person as the on-duty junior covered one or two contributions, while now one person is expected to cover at least four, so there is simply not enough time to produce quality work. (Luka, M, 25, self-employee, TV SLO)

The absence of collective representation is a typical consequence of the self-employment business model and an important element of insecurity. In this respect, the public TV conspicuously differs from both private TV stations covered by our analysis. The public TV has an employees’ working group and a trade union. Both actively practice solidarity with the employees and extend their support in labour disputes relating to employment contracts. On the other hand, negotiations between the employees and the employers in private television companies such as POP TV and Planet TV are completely individualized:

> And always, everyone has taken care of their own contract only, and this is an unwritten rule, and most of us comply with it. I know so little about the status of others, I do not really know, and I am not really interested. (Matej, M, 51, freelance journalist, POP TV)
A man can be paid more than a woman journalist for the same job. All depends on how much one is persistent and successful in negotiations with the management . . . and we actually don’t discuss payments with our fellow co-workers. Everyone hides it if she or he negotiated a bit more. (RTV, F, 28, self-employee, TV SLO)

Individualization of negotiations with the management weakens the position of workers with flexible jobs as well as that of regular employees as the latter consequently also have less power in relation to the management. The competition and self-assertion that are encouraged as principles of operation among the self-employed staff give employees the opportunity to win bonuses and better positions. As we have argued early in the text, such corpo-realities can mean gratification for individual employees (Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) but they can also further strengthen individualization and self-disciplining. As Sennett (2006) showed, individualization of work reduces solidarity among employees and increases stress at the individual level. Indeed, studies adopting the autonomous approach (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011) also recognize that rewards bring instant satisfaction to individual workers while at the same time they can function as justification for unjust work. Furthermore, such individualization promotes a denial, as argued by Morini (2007: 44), of the existence of any social corporeality or corporeality of class.

Vobić and Slacek Brlek (2014) pointed to the processes of normalization of precarization within (public) radio journalism, when journalists, loyal to the media, internalize the corporate logic of media routines through which precarization is perpetuated. Similar trends can be empirically confirmed in the case of the television media environment, both public television and even more so the private television stations in Slovenia:

It seems to me that we are silent, we do not fight . . . there is no sense of solidarity among colleagues. (Tanja, F, 56, permanent contract, TV SLO)

Everyone takes care of his or her self. [...] There is no asset, no trade union, no informal connections, everyone works alone. (Katalina, M, 40, self-employee, Planet TV)

Individualization of work also erases the awareness of and sensibility for gender and other (ethnicity, ability, age) inequalities at workplace because, as we show later in the text, only meritocracy and individual qualities count. ‘We never think of one’s gender, we only look for skills and knowledge’ (Management TV SLO).

**Fragmentation of journalistic collective by the pay mechanism**

Our analysis of interviews points to a mechanism of differentiation that works through differences in salaries and remuneration practices. Individualization of contract is widespread especially at commercial televisions with smaller editorial boards and a more visible pyramid system of media management that supports media as a system of celebrity. Van Zoonen (1998: 40) referred to it as ‘Ken and Barbie journalism’, where attractiveness of the news announcer is more important than the news quality.
Moreover, such relations mirror the increasing predominance of organizational identity over professional identity, where the greater presence of women is not decided by professional judgement but by individual bias and market needs, driven by attempts to domesticate and ‘soften’ the profession (De Bruin, 2000: 233, 234). Our interviewees described the common practice of how ‘wannabe star’ journalists internalize the organizational identity, and end up negotiating their payment and work conditions individually:

The journalistic guild is a very strange guild. It is not as closely linked as medical or judicial. It is very fragmented. In television . . . glory is glory, and this is a very nice thing, and it pushes for individualism. (Januar, M, 38, sole proprietor, TV SLO)

Despite the seeming equalization of rights granted to regularly employed journalists and self-employed ones, there are typical differences in payment practices: while the regularly employed journalists are entitled to extra bonuses for night and weekend work, and either partial payment for overtime work or conversion of overtime hours into days off, self-employees, who actually work many extra hours are paid on a flat-rate basis:

I have a flat rate, so my weekends and extra hours are not paid. My schedule is all day . . . That is, say, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. . . . I think that those who are regularly employed are paid more for extra hours and weekends. (Ana, F, 31, freelance journalist, Planet TV)

We work for three weeks a month, and have one week off – every month. We do so much overtime work during the week, but we basically do not calculate this, because it is impossible. . . . We do not calculate the overtime, because this is a sort of agreement between us, and is written in the contract, and I think it is alright. (Polona, F, 29, a regular employee also working as a self-employee, POP TV)

Another way of paying the precariously employed is according to the amount of work done:

Freelance and contract workers absolutely work much more, their work is of better quality, they work faster. Because they are paid by the quantity of work that they actually do. (Dolores, F, 34, regular employee, TV SLO)

In both cases, flexible workers’ status impels journalists to internalize and cultivate entrepreneurial subjectivity by acquiescing to unconditional availability and hyper productivity as a way to satisfy the greedy institution so that it renews their contract, and a way to create a comparable advantage in relation to their co-workers and regular employees. It is also possible to argue that workers are not just ‘puppets’ of the system, and media workers would not always choose a more stable form of employment even if they had such an opportunity. We observed that journalists do take steps to secure a more autonomous position in relation to the institution, but these autonomous strategies, taken either to ‘survive’ or improve one’s position, should still be read taking into consideration organizational and managerial greedy patterns.
Differentiating work and care obligations: Increasing gender inequalities

The important inequalities between regularly employed and self-employed journalists can be observed in regard to the right to paid sick leave and parental leave (both are the statutory rights of regularly employed workers but not of self-employees), which have large impact on the position of women with care responsibilities:

Sick-leave is an interesting expression that freelancers do not really know . . . I have never used sick-leave in my life. If I get sick and really cannot do otherwise, my request for replacement circulates among my colleagues . . . and somebody else covers for me, replaces me, replacement is negotiated on a personal level. (Neža, F, 38, freelance journalist, TV SLO)

Interviews suggest that reconciliation of professional work and care work is mainly an issue for women. Male journalists who are fathers appear in supportive parental role, jumping in when their female partner is not available, meaning that they take shorter absences from work (e.g. a few hours, days), if at all. But even men journalists experience doubts as to the implications of their parental or father’s role, fearing, for example, that a sick leave taken to care for the child may negatively affect their career (Humer and Frelih, 2019):

As far as caring for the sick children is concerned, I have benefited one or two days, but in principle I do not use it. My (female) partner uses it or we arrange otherwise, with grandparents . . . basically, I avoid this because I assume this will bring problems I do not want to have. . . . There is no possibility of career advancement, development, that is, I do not think it exists at all. (Katalina, M, 40, self-employee, Planet TV).

North’s survey among female journalists working in Australian news media found that respondents articulate a perception of gender bias around options of promotional opportunities, while blaming their child-rearing responsibilities for their lack of opportunity. It is not that women easily decide to scale down their ambition, but many find that childcare leaves them with no other option (North, 2016: 327). Our findings similarly confirmed the reproduction of a systemic gender bias that disadvantages women, particularly mothers who internalize the notion that they cannot be carers and at the same time achieve outstanding results at work.

Flexible working patterns assume carefree employees and rigidly exclude social reproduction from the working sphere. Based on our interviews with journalists, we can confirm that women journalists either stay at home after the birth of children, or diminish and adjust work obligations to have time to care for children (Humer and Frelih, 2019). Furthermore, they postpone parenthood and decide to have children at an older age, or decide not to have them at all. This situation is euphemistically recognized even by the management, although it does not appear as a motive to change the greedy working culture. Typically, their discourse simultaneously denies and confirms gender-specific effects of such working conditions, and advocates for the acceptance of positive images of work in creative industries:
Journalism is a very feminised profession, so I would not say at all that women are in any way discriminated. If there is perhaps one specific feeling, it is true that journalism is a very stressful profession and without a fixed schedule. Once you have a family, that is . . . I think, that women mainly prefer to withdraw, and do not take this on in order to more easily cope with their private and professional life. (Management, POP TV)

**Self-disciplining by internalizing (gendered) entrepreneurship**

Precarization structures work in the way that the individual worker becomes the driver of the hyperproduction and the disciplining processes that lead to constant availability, long working hours and subordination of personal life to the requirements of work. The narrations from the interviews show that self-employed journalists internalize and normalize these norms – one of the most visible mechanisms that came to light through the discourse they used was thinking of journalism as ‘a way of life’. Interviewees portrait journalism as a kind of profession that is by its ‘nature’ unkind to any private or family life: ‘Journalism requires the whole person’ (Management, Planet TV) or ‘There is no boundary between professional and private in the media’ (Neža, F, 38, self-employee, TV SLO), and ‘Everything is subordinated to “journalistic life”’ (Maja, F, 29, self-employee, Planet TV).

The internalization of the norms of entrepreneurial subjectivity along with uncritical attitude towards the greedy institution are also evident in the principle of constant accessibility and availability to which the journalists in our sample adhere without exception although it is formally not required by any of the media outlets included in our research:

> I also follow the shows even when I am not at work, because I need to know what has already been done and what has not been done. Basically, it takes me less time, if I am constantly available and I follow things, than if I turned it off and would then have to catch up. (Eva, F, 33, self-employee, Planet TV)

In creative professions that are generally considered self-fulfilling, the blurring of boundaries between private and professional life, and extra commitment to work are often perceived as voluntary decisions and the result of internal devotion to creativity (Gill, 2014). Work is associated with romantic reminiscences of artistic creativity and passion for work as such. However, there is a stark line between the devotion to work for its own sake and the new entrepreneurial subjectivities that comes to light when one assesses employee’s autonomy – whether the worker is in the position to autonomously and freely decide on the extent of commitment to work, and how worker’s decision will influence the security and perspectives of his/her job. Although their subordination to the requirements of the greedy institutional culture in the media seems voluntary, the journalists in our sample seem to lack that autonomy, and their flexibility, self-discipline and constant availability for work appear to be motivated by their fear of becoming uncompetitive. They therefore accept the criterion of meritocracy as the norm, aggravating in this way the position of regular employees as well:
Ambition and willingness to subordinate yourself is important, also once you have a family, or even if you do not have a family, if you are not ready to adapt in terms of certain personal matters . . . if you go home at 3 p.m. and say ‘I will not do this’, well, if you say that three times, then you find yourself somehow stuck in terms of promotion. (Iva, F, 32, regular employee, TV SLO)

Our study showed that the most common attitude is that there is no division by gender, that it is only important that ‘you are good’, which we have previously called ‘the principle of minimizing gender’ in the conditions of an increase of meritocracy in the media (Pajnik and Petković, 2017). In her analysis of journalists’ experiences with an intensified workplace at the example of Australian print news media, North (2009: 518) discusses how the lack of awareness about gender creates an illusion that everyone is equal in the newsroom, that there is a job to be done and that genderless journalists perform journalistic tasks unrelated to gender politics. ‘The illusion of the ungendered work’ (Pajnik and Petković, 2017) is revealed in this respect as a mechanism through which men capitalize on their gender in journalism, although this claim cannot be generalized due to the small sample:

If one has knowledge and journalistic quality, gender has no impact. If you are good, you are good, whether you are a woman or a man. (Maja, F, 29, self-employee, Planet TV)

It’s about how much you can bring to the company. If you are successful enough, you bring enough stories, then you can be rewarded more. (Srečko, M, 35, self-employee, POP TV)

You can be a man or a woman (you will succeed) if you find yourself well or know the right people . . . Whether you are successful or not, it’s entirely on you. (Anže, M, 32, regular employee also working as a self-employee, POP TV)

Similarly, in her research of media employees and others working in creative cultural industries in the United Kingdom, Gill (2014: 510) found that workers identify with the prevailing capitalist work norms: ‘It’s not important whether you’re a man or a woman, black or white, gay or not, all it matters is that you’re creative’. The author (Gill, 2014) notes how creative industries push for ‘new working subjectivities’, for which it becomes self-evident that they live for their work (p. 516). The media working environment is subordinated to the atmosphere of ‘I can do it’, which promotes individualism and prefers meritocratic ethos, with self-entrepreneurism exacerbating it.

Although all these trends strengthen the carefree qualities of work cultures, the respondents in our sample consider them gender neutral (the examples below are from interviews with management staff representatives):

Journalism is feminized. I don’t think women are in any way discriminated. I believe that in our world (television) we need male not female quota. (Management, POP TV)

I don’t think gender matters, it’s not a topic for us . . . We’ve had female directors, managers, and women had no problems. (Management, TV SLO)
I don’t care for one’s gender. I only care that the person knows how to work. (Management TV SLO)

**Conclusion**

By highlighting the case of self-entrepreneurialism in Slovenian TV production, we have analysed in this article the intersections of the rising precarization of work, the functioning of greedy institutional culture and self-disciplining entrepreneurial subjectivities with the aim to detect their effects on the quality of working conditions and gender (in)equality in journalism. Consulting the approach of the feminist political economy of communication (Meehan and Riordan, 2002), we postulated that to acknowledge gender relations in contemporary media production, the analysis of entrepreneurial subjectivities that support the multiplication of labour should be coupled with the ‘gendered class’ analysis (Firestone, 1970), acknowledging particularly vulnerable positions of women journalists:

Precarization has been established as a work norm in conditions of profit-oriented and commodified media markets, affecting both regular employees and employees in flexible employment relations, as well as employees of the public media and even more so those working in the private media sector. Atypical work relations in the media increased because of media privatization, commercialization, competition and new technologies. They are sustained by anomalies of the labour market and tax regulations which are encouraging self-entrepreneurial engagements that media workers adjust to and also reproduce themselves, accepting unstable employment options, either for additional income or to make ends meet. We have pointed to the prevalence of an economic model of media functioning that disables unionization and collectivization of workers, enthroning a disembodied, genderless and highly fragmented class that functions as a coincidental sum of individuals fighting for improvement of one’s own work position. The approach of the materialist feminist analysis enabled us to see how the creative subjectivities who allegedly ‘voluntarily’ adapt to flexible working arrangements produce gender inequality in correlation with the raising new values of journalistic work such as individualization and flexibilization.

The flexibilization of employments put journalists into different and unequal positions – those with regular versus those with atypical jobs, high-waged employees versus low-waged ones, seniors versus juniors, celebrities versus ‘ordinary’ news workers. Such a situation establishes journalists as competitive, imposes individualization and enforces norms of entrepreneurial subjectivity on all employees, thus preventing solidarity and collective action for an improvement of working conditions. Instead of recognizing and problematizing structural inequalities between capital and labour, our interviewees articulate meritocracy typical for individualized entrepreneurial subjectivity – the one whose performance is of high quality and quantity, and who is ambitious and ready to submit private life to organizational demands, does not suffer from inequality and precarity. Such an attitude is most pronounced among young self-employed journalists in private media institutions, where flexibilization of work is a prevalent business model in which management buys employees’ commitment by paying out relatively high salaries on the account of employees’ social security. It is meaningful that private commercial TV
companies employ mostly young journalists: ‘We are all young. The average age is 30, 32 years’ (Maja, F, self-employee, Planet TV).

Competitive individual media workers are mobile and flexible, trained in multitasking and hyper productivity, with developed individual networks and negotiation skills, working towards the advancement of their own careers. Entrepreneurial subjectivities pushed by greedy institutions work non-stop and internalize the perception that journalism is ‘a way of life’; it is a profession where you have to push aside care obligations in order to prove your merits. Interview analysis has shown how journalists internalize meritocratic ideas, how they reproduce a neoliberal discourse characteristic of entrepreneurial subjectivities (cf. North, 2009: 514–515), and how this disables any kind of collective engagement.

What is not recognized neither by management nor by journalists, including women journalists, is the fact that while journalism increasingly attracts more female workers, carefree work culture is gaining in power. The impact of such work cultures on social reproduction concerns both men and women, but, as we have shown, it concerns women differently and in a more burdensome and exclusive way due to their reproductive roles. The materialist analysis has proven to be crucial to recognize such disparities based on gender, and has enabled us to unpack the positive image of self-engaged individualities who programme their own work. We have shown how (female) entrepreneurial subjectivities function as an ontological basis for the reproduction of hierarchies in capitalist media production. The working arrangements in the media sector, despite its egalitarian image, are still characterized by ‘old-fashioned’ patterns of gender inequality regarding access to work, position and pay, with new forms of gender inequality emerging in connection with many contemporary features of work such as individualization of work, meritocracy, autonomy and flexibility. Normalization of the norm of unconditional availability for work tends to exacerbate the subordination of reproduction and care responsibilities to the sphere of work, increasingly subjecting it to privatization and individualization (grasped in the phrase: ‘Deal with it!’) which is perpetuating gender gaps in practicing both work and care.

The myth of gender equality in journalism – that women in the media are equalized with men or at least that they are becoming increasingly more equal – conceals the fact that rather than improving, the position of women in such working conditions is actually becoming worse. In other words, the gender equality myth individualizes gender difference, so that inequality becomes the personal problem of women, which in their professional lives pushes them towards forced adaptation to a seemingly gender neutral, but actually a masculinized organizational culture. In the words of Gill (2014), rather than opposing the evident inequalities of the media organizations, the myth of equality is of key importance for the maintenance of individualized and self-disciplined entrepreneurial subjectivity.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This research work was conducted as part of the research programme of the Peace Institute Equality and Human Rights in Times of Global Governance, P5-0413, financed by the Slovenian Research Agency, 2020–2023, and the basic research project Gender Differentiation in Media Industry, J5-7095, financed by the same agency, 2016–2018.
Notes
1. See http://sindikat-novinarjev.si/izvolitev-novega-predsednika-sindikata-novinarjev-slovenije/ (accessed November 2019).
2. See https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/News/Index/8527 (accessed 15 February 2019).
3. No relevant legal or institutional changes occurred since 2017, so we can argue that the analysis reflects today’s trends as well.
4. M stands for male, F for female, followed by respondents’ age.
5. This opens broader questions on the role of trade unions that have not adapted to flexible organizational norms of companies. It is therefore not surprising that there is a general lack of worker organization in creative industries (Mosco and McKercher, 2008).

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