



Experiences of women leaving the TV industry

Context

- 2011 survey of 550 UK TV freelancers indicated only 35% expected careers to last another 10 years (Parker, 2011)
 - One in 3 described career planning as 'impossible'
 - Ambivalence and vulnerability of such careers over a working life; lure of self-realisation can bring about an over-identification of the self with work (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011)
 - Much research is based on the views of workers in the industry about anticipated challenges in their futures – eg Wing-Fai, Gill & Randle (2015)
 - Goal was to reach men and women who had **already left** and find out if the anticipated reasons held true
 - Not initially intended as a gender focused-study (perhaps naively) but very quickly became so...
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Methodology

Context

- 61 telephone interviews, 80 online questionnaires
- 36 interviews with women out of 61, and 53 questionnaires from women out of 80
- Disproportion of women, production/directing roles, workers in factual TV, and freelancers
- But perhaps indicative of those leaving the industry, if not those within it?

Questionnaire data: what they did next

Methodology

- 16 worked in sector with directly transferable media skills/knowledge
- 10 explored roles with alternative outlets for creativity
- 8 went on to pursue roles relating to therapy or wellbeing
- 7 went on to careers in education
- 5 went on to charity-related work
- 4 became full time mothers
- 3 retired
- Several new companies or self-employed businesses
- Very diverse range of other roles, from accountant and barrister through to clothing retail and marine quality assurance

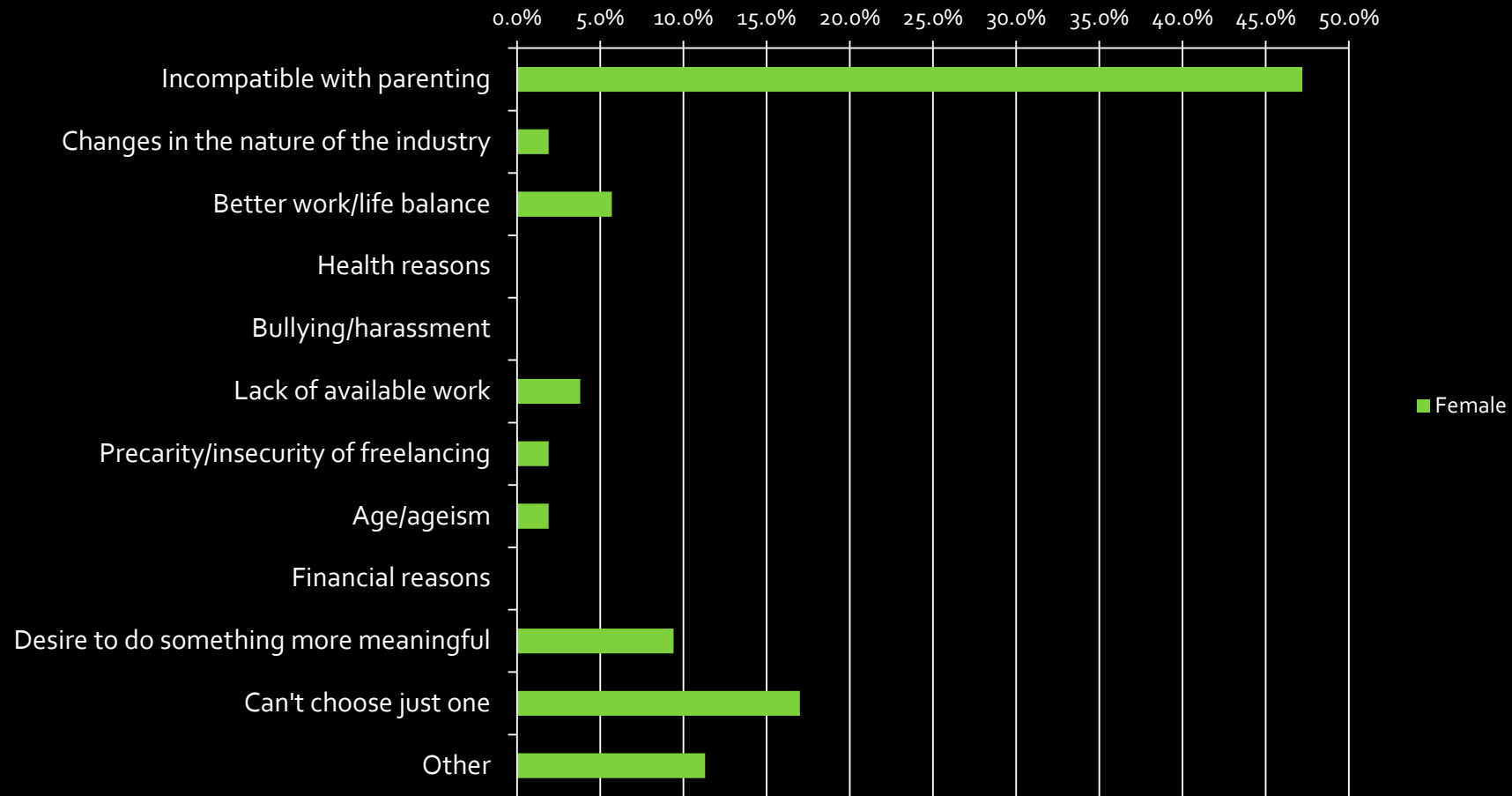
Why did they leave?
Questionnaire data: what they did next

Could respondents select one single reason why they left?

- 15 could not
- 27 chose 'incompatible with parenting' (one was male)
- 6 chose 'better work life balance'
- 6 chose 'changes in the nature of the industry'
- 6 chose 'desire to do something more meaningful'
- 4 chose 'precarity/insecurity of freelancing'
- 4 chose 'lack of available work'
- 'Other' single responses included harassment, racism, redundancy, lack of career progression and retirement

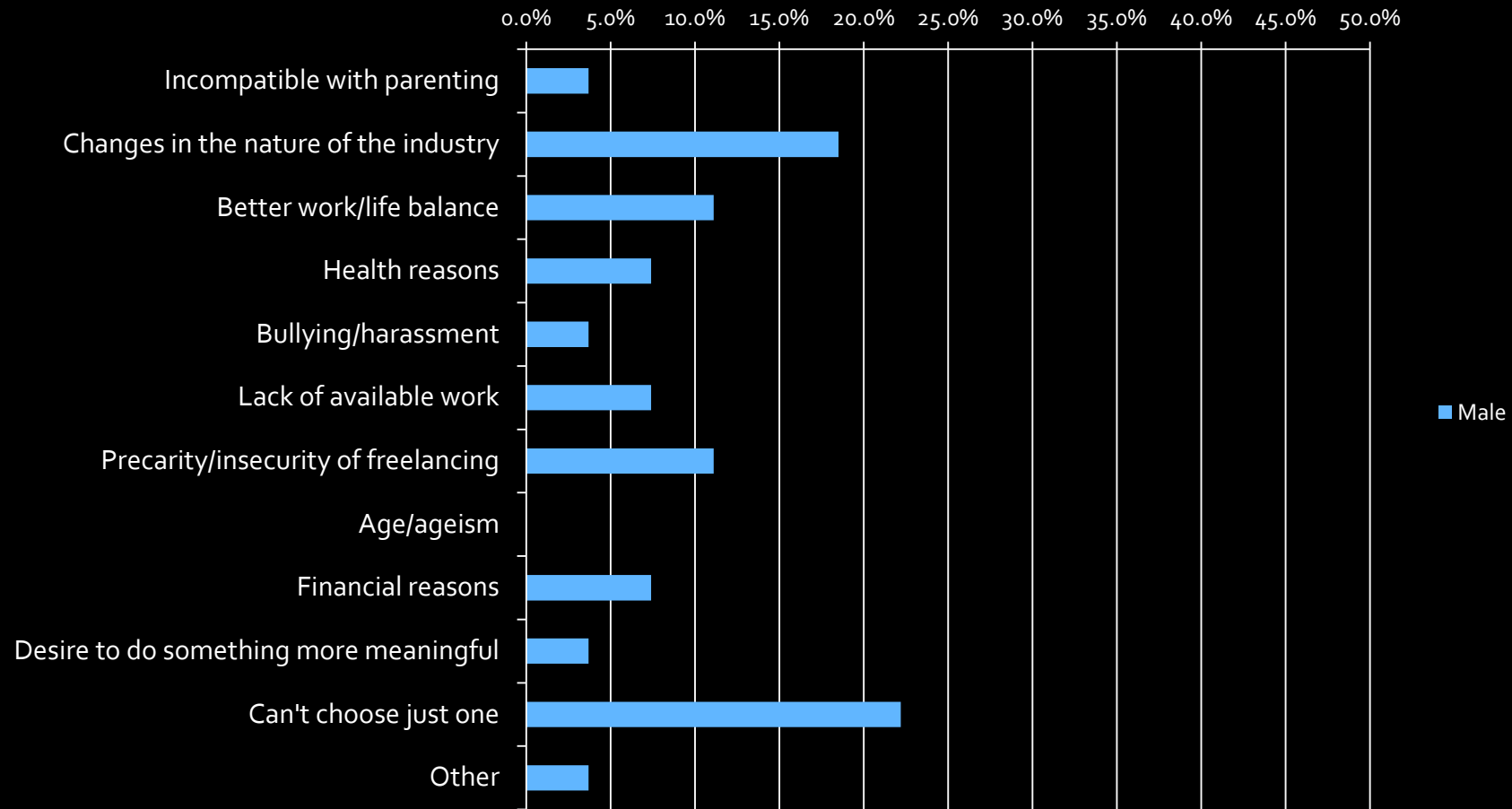
Why did they leave?

Female - single main reason for leaving



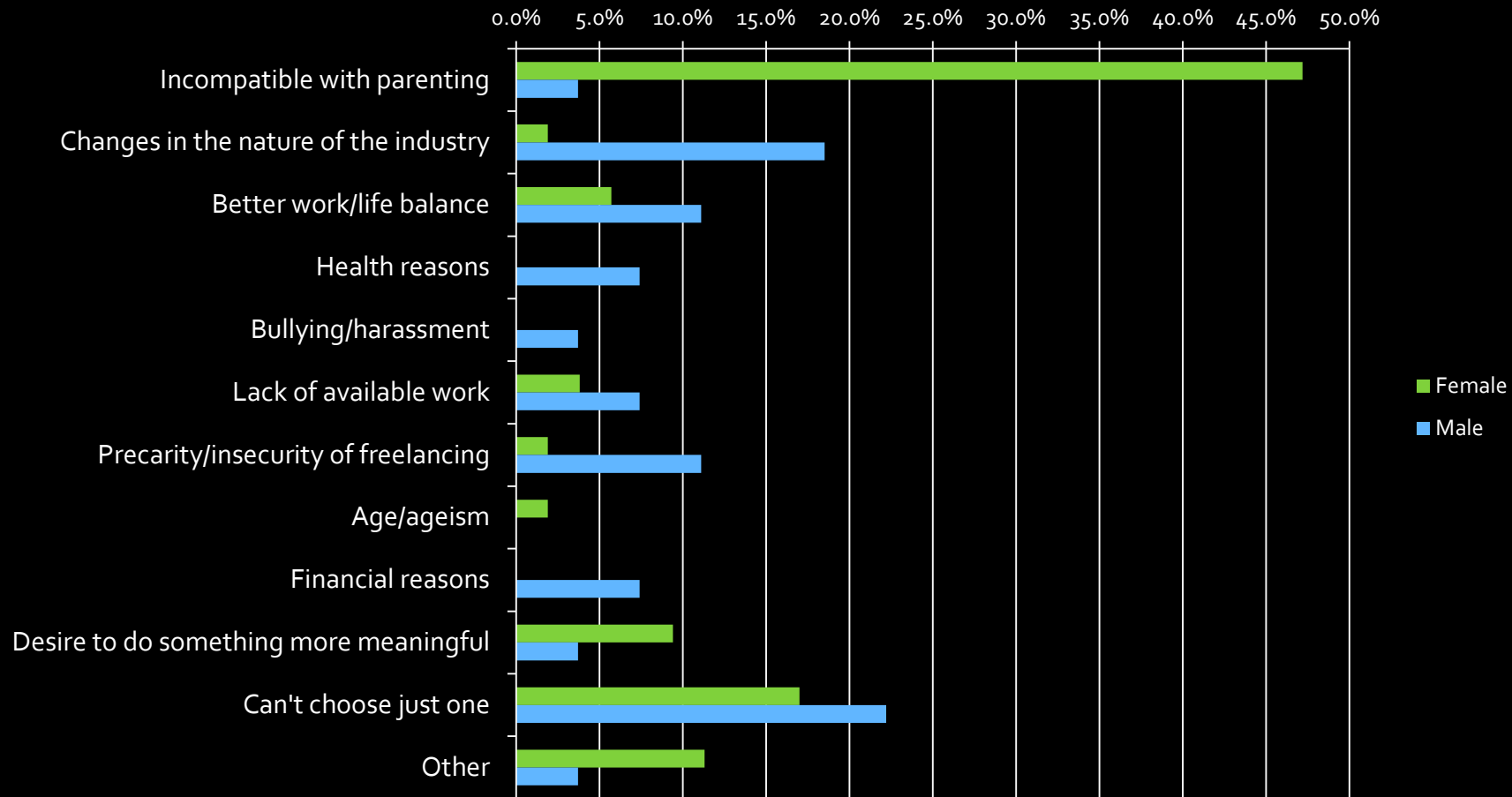
Why did they leave?

Male - single main reason for leaving



Why did they leave?

Both - single main reason for leaving

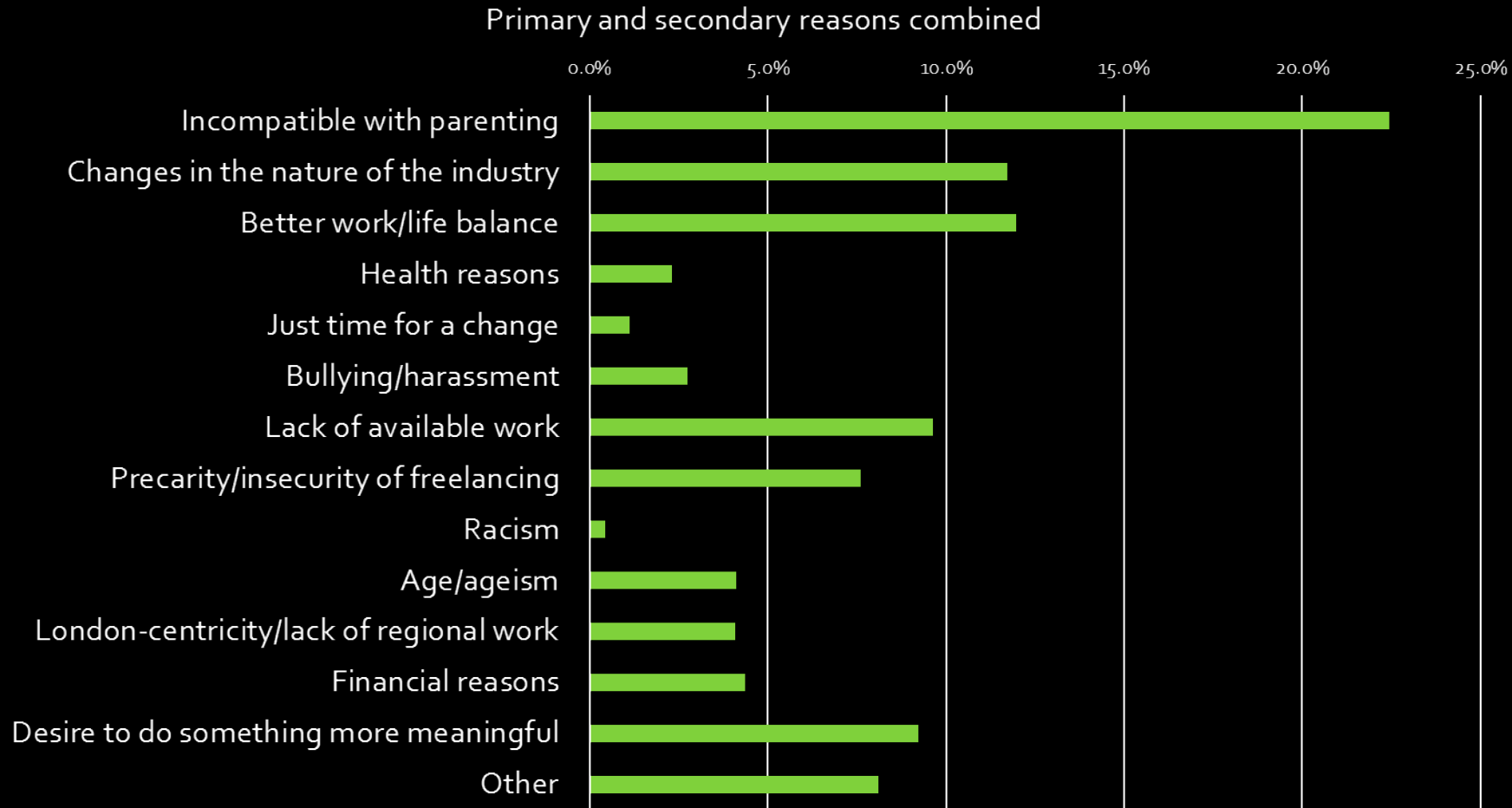


Why did they leave?

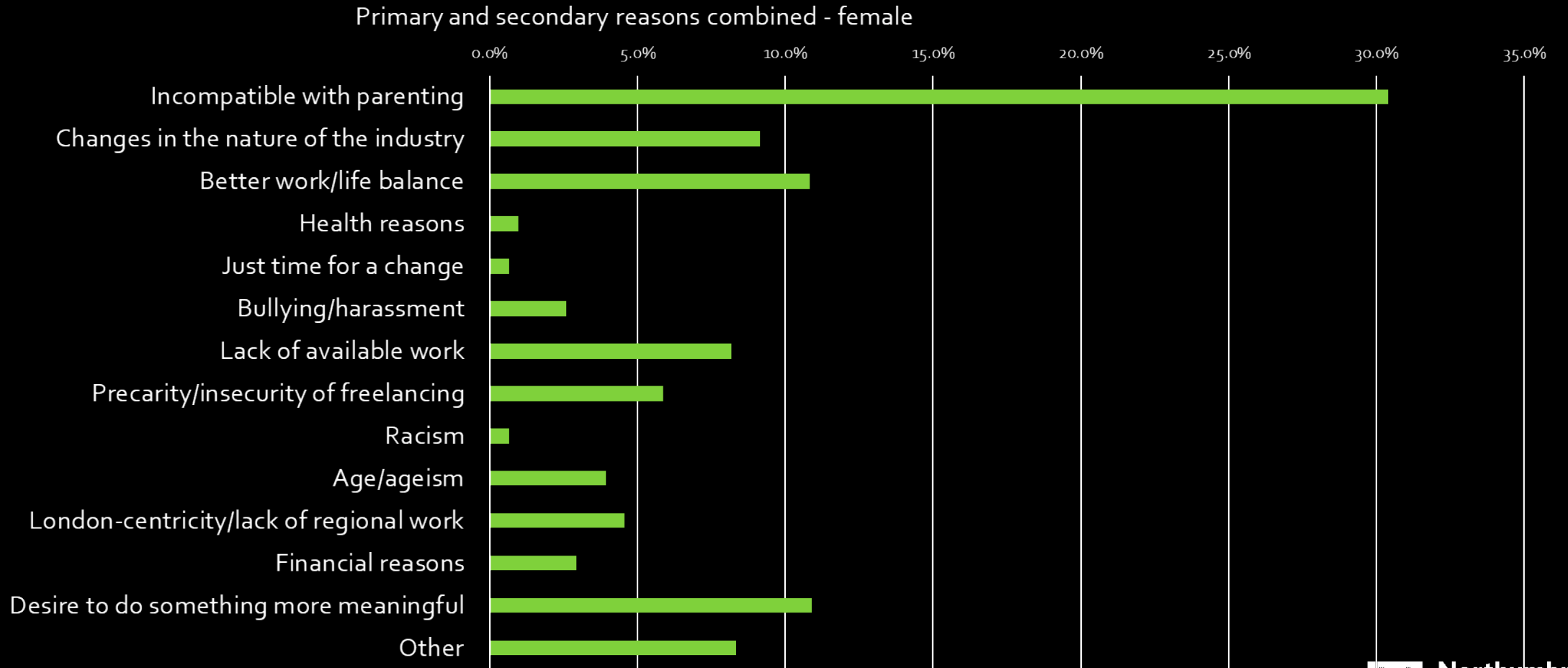
What multiple secondary reasons were given?

- Better work-life balance (34)
- Changes in the nature of the industry (33)
- Lack of available work (30)
- Precarity/insecurity (21)
- Desire to do something more meaningful (22)
- Incompatibility with parenting (18)
- London-centricity/lack of regional work (18)
- Desire to change location (10)

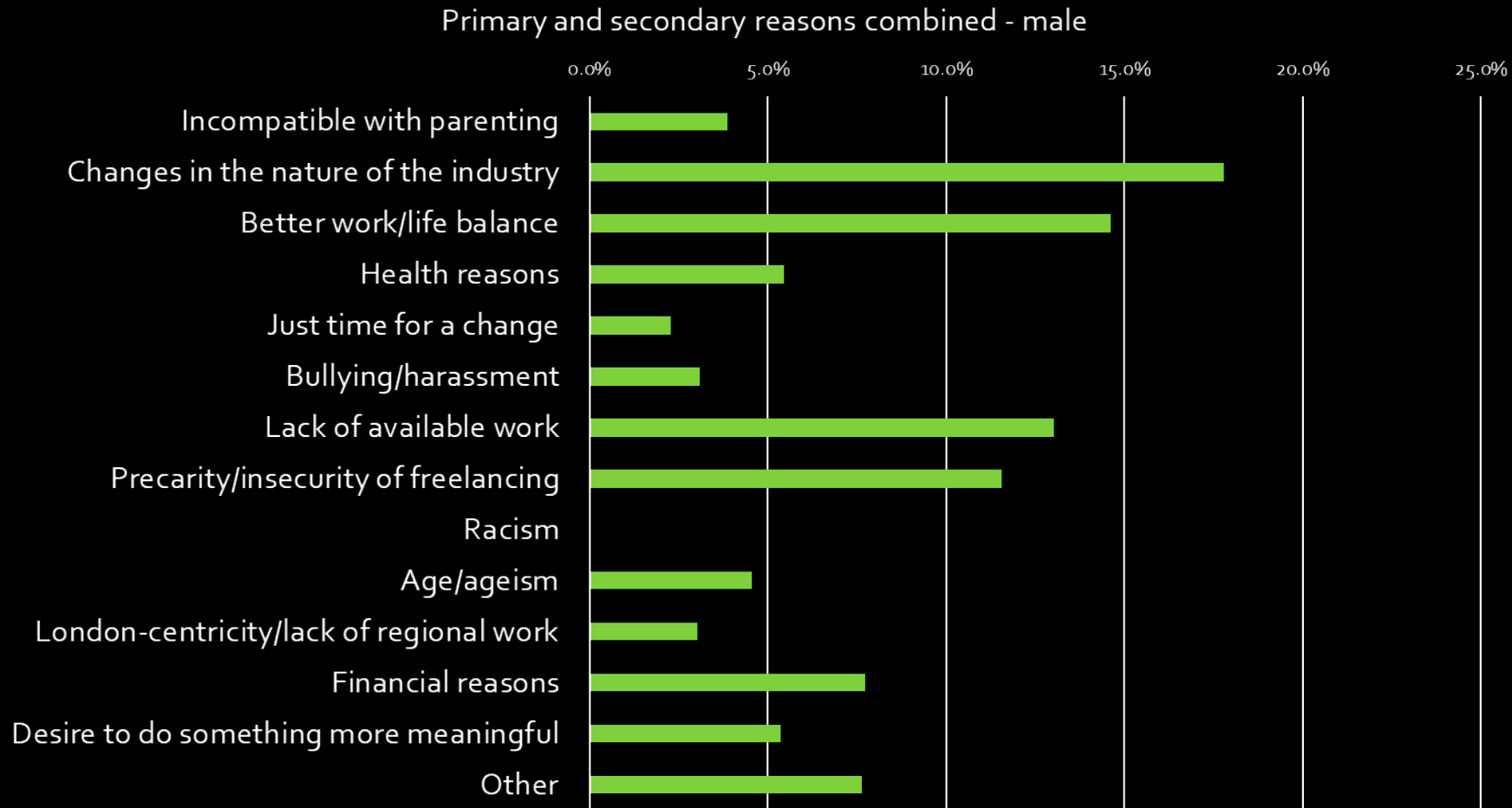
Why did they leave?



Why did they leave?

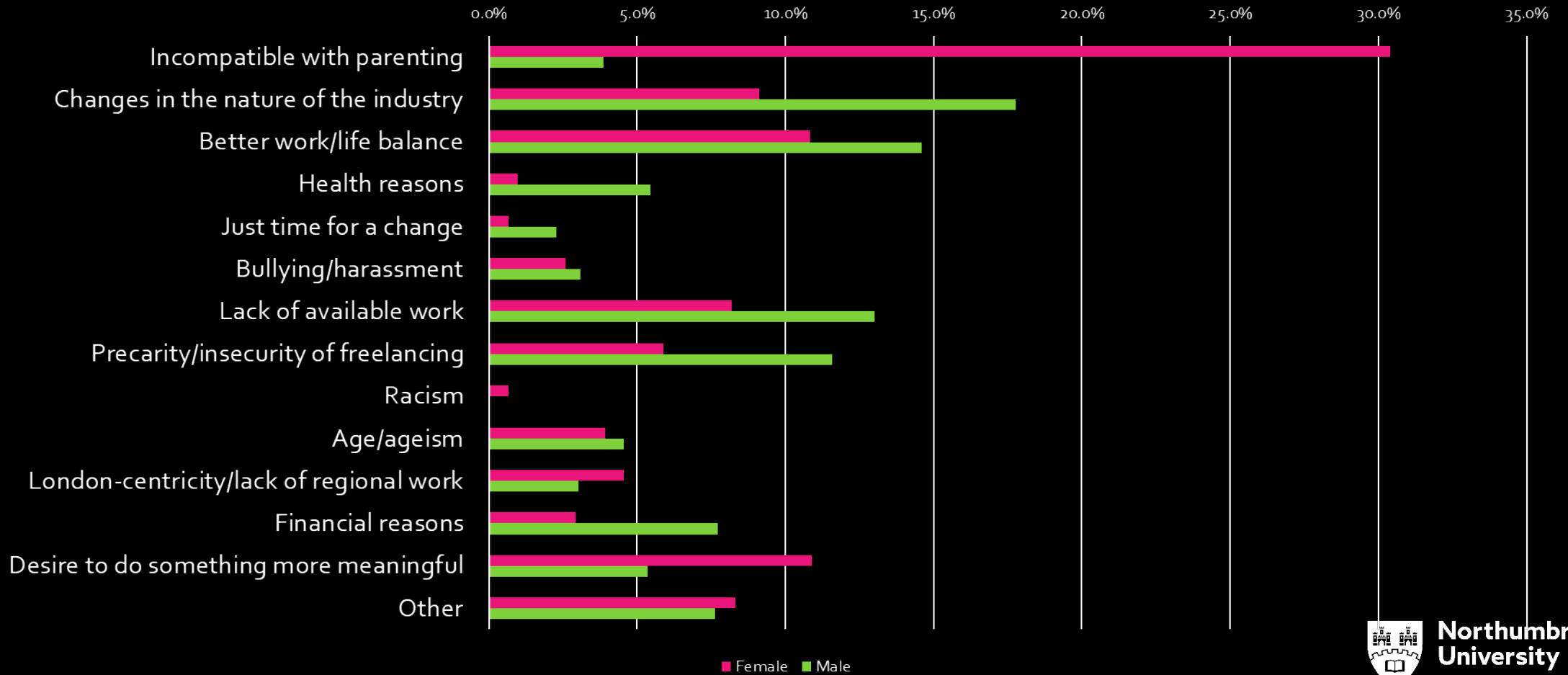


Why did they leave?



Why did they leave?

Primary and secondary reasons combined - male vs female



Women leave earlier

- Women sampled on average 12 years younger than men
- Women on average spent 8 years less in the industry
- Women who gave parenting as prime reason for leaving, left the industry on average 10 years earlier than all males surveyed
- Ties in with our earlier survey of 1,100 film & TV workers, showing that gender balance at entry level was 51% female; those with 11-20 years of experience were 42% female; those with more than 20 years experience, 21% female

What people loved/missed Women leave earlier

Most enjoyed their time in the industry... from 1 absolute hate to 10 absolute love, 7.9 was the average (only 2 picked below 5). They missed:

- privileged access to locations and people (53)
- crew camaraderie (51)
- variety of no two days the same (50)
- creative opportunities (49)
- satisfaction of a completed production (49)
- learning about new subjects (46)
- the buzz of working under pressure (40)

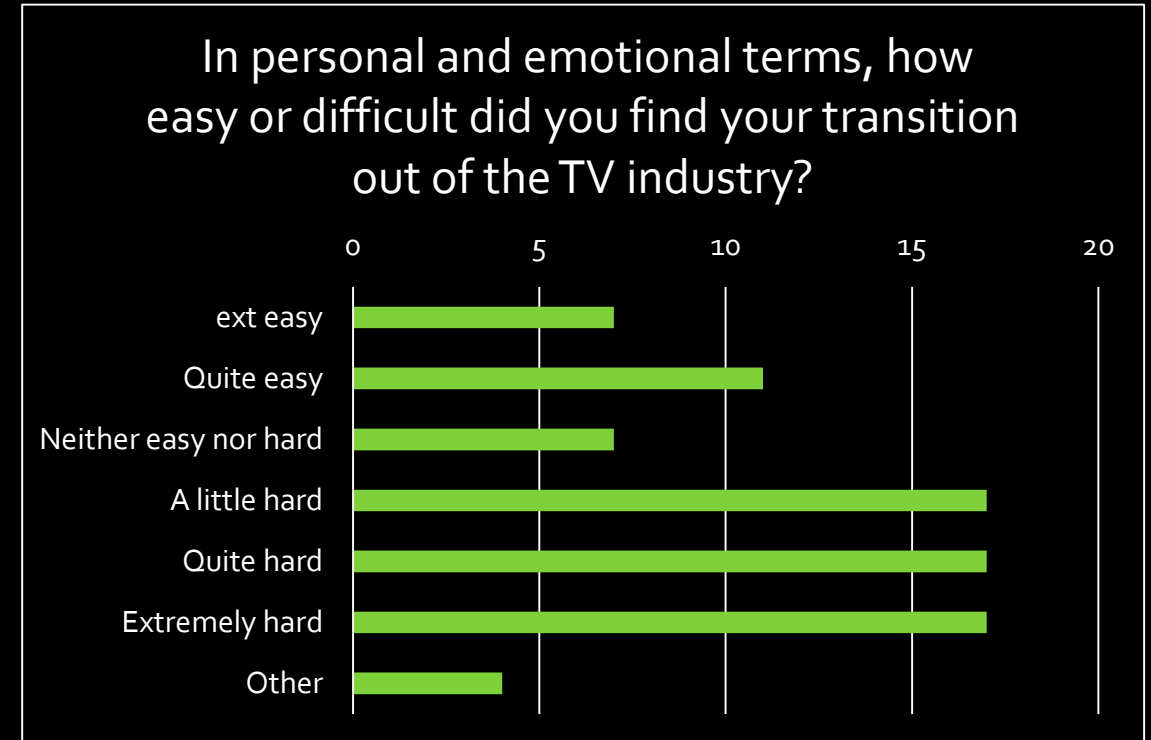
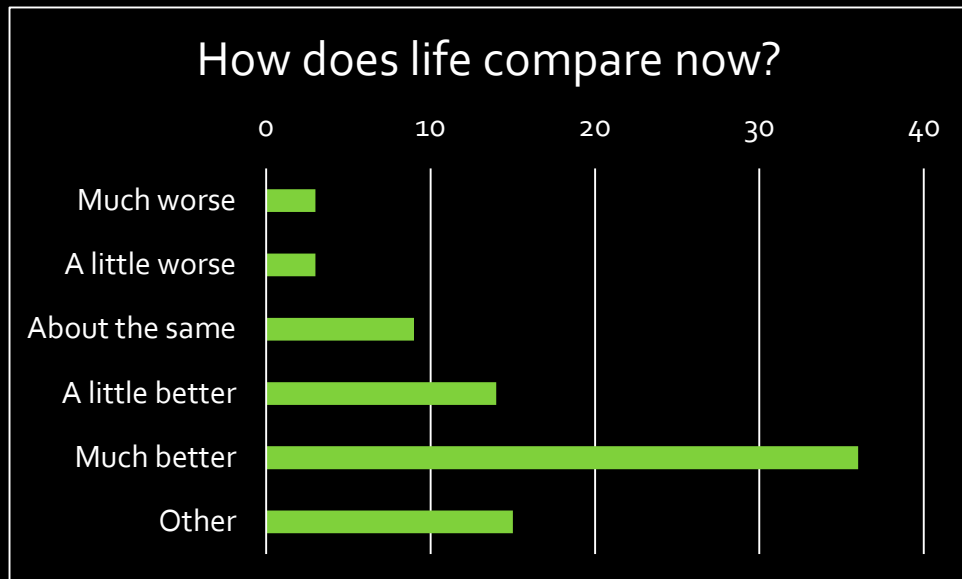
What would have kept people in the industry? What people loved/missed

Respondents were asked to 'identify one single thing in the industry that should be changed, that would have made it possible for you to stay'. Themes included:


- Time/hours (14)
- More flexible working (jobsharing, homeworking) (13)
- More security (long term contracts, permanent roles) (10)
- Better pay (7)
- More understanding towards mothers (4)
- More part-time roles (3)
- Maternity pay for freelancers (2)
- Others included more kindness, less ageism, more regional work, more regulated work environment, better conditions generally, and more professional development/nurturing of individuals

What people loved/missed What would have kept people in the industry?

Very few serious regrets...



...but it wasn't easy



Insights from interview

What people loved/missed

- Family factors mentioned by 41 out of 61 interviewees
- 41 also mentioned aspects of the culture of the industry and its (lack of) care for people

Other common themes:

- financial and budgetary pressures
- working hours (especially in terms of length, and lack of flexibility)
- disillusion with changed working practices and content being commissioned
- geographic location
- unpredictability, insecurity and precarity of freelance work
- a desire to do something more meaningful

Family Insights from interview

The following narrative sums up many of the challenges most commonly expressed, from a mother who could see

...nothing in production that was compatible with having a family unless you were happy to never see your kids. I returned to work after having my first child. I had been promised flexible working hours, to leave the office or the edit no later than 5pm to return home for childcare. The reality was it was massively frowned upon by other women at exec level downwards. Commissioning editors expected team members to be in edit until at least 6pm in a central London location and this was not sustainable or desirable for me as a parent without a live in nanny and the sacrifice of not making it home to zone 5 for bedtime. I paid out so much in childcare and with such a negative impact on my family that I felt I had no choice but to leave the industry. My choice was either never see my kids, or work in production, so I left.

Culture Family

I had to leave work at (broadcaster) one day to look after my son – the director said to me, 'Be very careful about telling people you have a child – I wouldn't have employed you if I'd known'

Talk of babies is really unwelcome – no one wants to hear about sleepless nights or difficult drop offs, it is unspoken. If you talk about it you end up being seen in a really particular light – I was caught with a pram by a work colleague and felt like I was having an affair...

You're meant to be this ideal worker - willing to drop anything and say yes to anything that comes up - and with kids you can't be that person...

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TV is in the dark ages – it pretends not to be, but it is. I regularly saw, and regularly see, appalling work practices, but the culture is that you're just lucky to have a job – that culture is completely wrong



Lack of role models Culture

I had lost my love of TV when I started to look around and saw all the single ladies – you know, this wasn't what I wanted for my life – or if they did have kids they had worked their way up to Executive Producer and never saw their kids... I just thought – I don't want to be like any of you women.

When I looked for role models above me, I could only see one female with kids doing well – as a production manager... I couldn't see the role model I wanted: a working Mum who could juggle kids and looked happy doing it – I couldn't see anyone like that in the industry. That frightened me – was it possible, will I be the only one?



Working hours (not just women!)


Lack of role models

TV was 'a monster in my life... all-consuming... I was 20 years old and working 70 hour weeks; really fun, but a shallow and work-based existence'

'...that was fine, I enjoyed it, but in any other line of work you'd say 'I'm not doing that' - no one was paid extra for working them.'

'Actually - what are you going to do? You're going to make the pot of coffee, drink it, get the camera kit ready and go to hospital... It isn't that somebody held the key to a door and wouldn't let me in because I'm a Mum; but if you're filming people's lives, it's quite difficult to have one of your own'

'You can't put your child in nursery not knowing how much it will cost... It's the unpredictability of hours; the nursery isn't interested if I have a month without work.'



Other themes

Working hours (not just women!)

- Definite theme of ageism, related to disposability, especially for men
- 'I didn't leave the industry – the industry left me'
- Feeling of both a woman's voice, and experience in general, being lost to the industry, to newcomers and therefore to audiences
- Barriers to returning – technology, confidence, but especially networks
- Geographic location – London unsustainable, not enough work elsewhere
- Unpredictability, insecurity and precarity of freelance work
- A desire to do something more meaningful

More research... identity loss and grief

Other themes

Very striking stories about the emotional difficulty of leaving a TV identity

Often articulated in terms of 'breaking up', 'bereavement' or 'grieving'-
interviewees in different stages of this process

*It's very bound up with who you are. I **am** a cameraman, it's not just a **job** of being a cameraman. It is an emotional thought – I've lost myself in a way ; I'm going to use the word 'bereavement' – if you can understand that... If you've been in the business a while, it is who you are, probably more than other industries.*

I found the experience of leaving really hard – I still dream about work 3 or 4 times a week; I really miss it terribly. I dream I am working in an office with old bosses from [name of programme], but there is no role for me and I don't know what I am meant to be doing. My brain is trying to work out what to do while I look for more work, I think. I'm not sure what will make it possible for me to leave that behind.

Love and loss

More research... identity loss and grief

'The career aspiration was fun... The first five years, it was really just a love affair. Reality came when I had a stable partner, and that clashed with 24 hour edits... I fell out of love with it' (former series producer)

'I would not want to be in TV all my life... leave TV and you're replaced a week later – how ever much you love it, it doesn't love you back' (former producer/director)

'There was a grieving process... TV had given up on me – a bit like a jilted relationship' (former director of production company)

'It felt like a really bad break up – but it was a relief too – knowing I don't have to do this any more!!' (former development producer)

Your job being a part of your identity 'makes leaving [the career] hard to envisage... like walking away from your wife because it might be better elsewhere' (former cameraman)

Conclusions

Love and loss

- Confirms the hypothesis that incompatibility with family is a major factor driving women unequally out of the industry
- Media Parents and Raising Films – examples of initiatives doing great work supporting men and women back into the industry – but more is needed
- Casualisation and over-supply create disposability, which sustains working practices that would be unacceptable in most other industries
- Many very positive stories confirm there is 'life after telly', but the loss of identity is very painful – for both genders



Thanks for listening

