



# The promised land? Why social inequalities are systemic in the creative industries

Why social inequalities are systemic

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of why social inequalities and discrimination remain in the creative industries.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper synthesizes existing academic and industry research and data, with a particular focus on the creative media industries.

**Findings** – The paper reveals that existing understanding of the lack of diversity in the creative industries' workforce is conceptually limited. Better understanding is enabled through an approach centred on the creative industries' model of production. This approach explains why disadvantage and discrimination are systemic, not transitory.

**Practical implications** – The findings suggest that current policy assumptions about the creative industries are misguided and need to be reconsidered. The findings also indicate how future research of the creative industries ought to be framed.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides a novel synthesis of existing research and data to explain how the creative industries' model of production translates into particular features of work and employment, which then translate into social inequalities that entrench discrimination based on sex, race and class.

**Keywords** Discrimination, Audiovisual media, Equal opportunities, Audio-visual industries, Creative industries, Creative industries, New world of work, Social inequality

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

The creative industries have become a key feature of government economic policy across the world, expected to drive GDP and job growth and accelerate urban regeneration (e.g. Clifton *et al.*, 2009; European Commission, 2012; Ross, 2009; UNCTAD, 2008). Of particular appeal to policy makers is the promise that the creative industries will deliver this socio-economic development offering employment opportunities for all regardless of sex, race or class and so free of the old social inequalities in work and employment (Florida, 2004).

The aim of this paper is to expose key conceptual shortcomings in this promise. We argue that in focusing on creative talent other important characteristics of the creative industries are overlooked. These omissions matter, we argue, because they disable a comprehensive account of the creative industries' model of production and this model, we further argue, contains systemic social inequalities. Based on a novel



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synthesis of existing research we explain how the creative industries' model of production translates into particular features of work and employment, which then translate into social inequalities that entrench discrimination based on sex, race and class.

The paper uses the latest available data from the UK's creative media industries[1] to illustrate our arguments. This selection is deliberate. The UK has been a policy leader in promoting the creative industries, including the creative media industries, i.e. TV, film, radio, interactive media, animation, computer games, facilities, photo imaging and publishing (Skillset, 2010). These industries comprise the majority of the 14 creative industries in the UK identified by Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2001), employ up to 80 per cent of workers in the creative industries as defined by the UK government, generate two-thirds of creative industries' revenue and often feature as "target" industries for policy makers[2].

The paper begins by reviewing the debate about creative industries and economic policy, focusing on the promise of a new, meritocratic world of work. The next section then outlines the model of production typical for the creative industries, the resulting work and employment conditions and how these conditions translate into barriers to participation and advancement for particular workers. The subsequent section discusses conceptual and policy implications arising from the finding that, given their present model of production, social inequalities in work are systemic to the creative industries. To conclude, the paper proposes directions for future research that might inform better policy making.

### **The creative industries, economic policy and the promise of a new world of work**

The creative industries are commonly defined as those industries "supplying goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value" (Caves, 2000, p. 1) and that "have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent" (DCMS, 2001, p. 5). They are typically taken to comprise the commercial and non-commercial industries of architecture and design; film, television, video, radio and publishing; fine arts; music and the performing arts; software and computer gaming; advertising and crafts (e.g. DCMS, 2001; UNCTAD, 2008). Supported by the work of US economic geographer Richard Florida (2004), policy makers the UK and internationally have turned towards these industries as drivers of significant economic and employment growth, and which would also attract new talent and thus facilitate urban regeneration (Oakley, 2004; Ross, 2009). Across the EU, the USA, Asia and South America, central and local governments have launched taskforces to develop the creative industries and establish creative clusters, villages and quarters.

From its inception, economic policy that relies on the creative industries as a catalyst of socio-economic development has been strongly contested. Critics have argued that job growth has not been as strong as expected (Warhurst, 2010) and that the respective policies have been devised without substantive research of work and employment (Oakley, 2004). Consequently, creative industries policies have been argued to represent little more than "hipsterization strategies" (Peck, 2005) that exaggerate the extent of creativity's mainstreaming in the economy (Warhurst, 2010) and oversell the feasibility of economic transformation through creativity (Rainnie, 2005; Oakley, 2006). Despite this criticism, policy attention has continued and even consolidated around the creative industries in the UK and elsewhere (e.g. Cable, 2010; European Commission, 2012; UNCTAD, 2008).

An important aspect of the creative industries' continuing appeal with economic policy makers is the promise that they will provide "new avenues of advancement" and "full opportunity and unfettered social mobility for all" (Florida, 2004, pp. 79, 321). The creative industries' decisive resources are individual talent and creativity, which are seen as "everyone's natural asset to exploit" (Ross, 2009, p. 40) with everyone thus a "homo creator" (Howkins, 2001, p. XIV). Moreover, creative workers allegedly mistrust "rigid caste systems" (Florida, 2004, p. 78) and have a self-interest and moral imperative to overcome old social divides by "tapping the creativity of the many and thus ensuring that all are integrated into the Creative Economy" (p. 321; also Mellander *et al.*, 2012). Consequently, the creative economy, Florida (2004) argues, is a meritocratic economy in which participation and advancement depend on creative talent, and are thus not hampered by sex, race or class as they have been in the past.

While Florida has been the most prominent and influential voice amongst policy makers (Ross, 2009), belief in the creative industries' potential to deliver a new, meritocratic world of work is widespread (e.g. Howkins, 2001; Friebe and Lobo, 2008). Even the usually grounded Banks (2007) argues that the creative industries have "progressive tendencies" leading to "miniature democracies in the workplace" and, more broadly, "new modes of life" (p. 166). As such the creative industries portend a bright future it is alleged, "trailblazing approaches [...] from which the rest of the economy and society can benefit" (Work Foundation, 2007, p. 16).

### **From production to work and employment to social inequality**

The creative talent that provides opportunities for participation and advancement is regarded by proponents as the decisive resource of the creative industries' model of production. Whilst we too regard the creative industries' model of production as decisive, we argue that other features of this model prevent rather than facilitate equal opportunities. This section outlines the model of production typical for the creative industries and demonstrates how this model translates into specific conditions of work and employment and how these conditions then translate into social inequality in work and employment.

#### *A project-based model of production*

Several commonalities distinguish the creative from other industries (e.g. Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Howkins, 2001): the centrality of individual creativity and talent, the importance of intellectual property, high sunk costs for the first unit of production and high product market risks. For the organisation of creative production, the latter, which Caves (2000, p. 2) has labelled the creative industries' "nobody knows" property, is particularly important. Consumer demand for creative products is volatile, dependent on subjective taste, trends and fashions, and only a small percentage of creative products are profitable (see also Hesmondhalgh, 2007). In response to high-risk product markets, Caves (2000) points out, a specific model of production has evolved that prioritises flexibility to minimise fixed (sunk) costs and potential losses. This flexibility is achieved through project-based production. Projects require only a temporary commitment of resources and allow for an easier attribution of costs and surpluses to a particular creative output. They also allow for resources to be brought together across organisational boundaries and focused on the required creative production (Eikhof, 2013). Organisational production is therefore replaced by production in networks or "project ecologies" (Grabher, 2002; also Caves, 2000; Windeler and Sydow, 2001). In these ecologies, suppliers, manufacturers and

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distributors collaborate, sharing and exchanging ideas and skills. The structures, practices and relationships in this model of production are “intentionally ephemeral [...] predicated on constant change, not stability, organised around networks, not rigid hierarchies, built on shifting partnerships and alliances” (Byrne, 2000, p. 46). In this respect, within the UK creative media industries, there has been a “shift from ‘in-house’, vertically integrated forms of programme production to ‘network’ processes” state Davis and Scase (2000, p. 59). In film and TV, for example, big broadcasters such as the BBC and ITV, independent production companies and freelance workers co-operate on a project-by-project basis (Blair, 2001; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2009).

*Work and employment in the creative industries*

The project-based model of production has consequences for work and employment. First, project-based production impacts on the organisation of work and employment. Across the creative industries, work is undertaken by project teams or “motley crews” of diverse talent (Caves, 2000, p. 5; Eikhof, 2013). These teams are brought together for specific projects – for example, in the creative media industries, the shooting of a film or television series (Blair, 2001) – and disband upon project completion. Consequently, employment too is centred on projects and is thus predominantly temporary. In film and TV, as much as 90 per cent of workers are employed as freelancers (Davis and Scase, 2000; Skillset, 2008a). In Blair’s (2001) case study of the UK film production, crew members worked on 1-11 projects per year, the average being five projects. Projects typically lasted about 50 days but their length and thus workers’ employment varied from one day to 44 weeks. Employment instability is thus endemic in these industries. In all, 74 per cent of film workers had been unemployed and sought work at some stage in the previous 12 months prior to the Skillset (2008a) survey, with 30 per cent spending a substantial 11-29 weeks out of work. With workers not able to rely on steady employment, wage instability is a major challenge (Dex *et al.*, 2000). As a script supervisor interviewed by Randle and Culkin (2009, p. 101) explained: “Finding and negotiating work is the hardest part. Doing the work is the fun. Finding the work is the job”. Importantly, project based, temporary employment typically also requires workers to bear the costs and risks of insurance, social security, sick pay, maternity leave, etc. (Gill, 2002).

Second, project-based production has consequences for training and entry into the creative industries. As projects are only temporary, there is little potential benefit for employers in financing apprenticeships or other industry-wide training schemes. Instead, industry entrants work as runners and assistants and acquire the necessary skills and capabilities via “learning by watching” (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998). These entry-level workers are often low paid – despite almost all (85 per cent) floor runners being graduates, annual pay for this job averages just £8,805 (Skillset, 2008a) – or even unpaid, working as interns for expenses only or “copy and credit” (BECTU, 2009a; Randle and Culkin, 2009). The incidence of such unpaid labour is increasing. In the 1960s just 2 per cent of film industry workers were working unpaid before obtaining a paid job (Skillset, 2008a); by 2010 this figure had risen to 38 per cent overall and around 50 per cent in radio, film, TV and publishing (Skillset, 2010). Whilst entry-level workers effectively pay for their own training through forfeited earnings, even at later career stages it is still workers, not employers, who bear the costs of and risks associated with formal training and development (Gill, 2002; Skillset, 2010).

Third, project-based production impacts on recruitment practices. Because project budgets and schedules are usually tight, there is no room for error in recruitment (Caves, 2000). Producers or directors therefore rely on tried and tested collaborators or

workers recommended by trusted colleagues. Consequently, project teams are typically recruited via personal networks (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2009; Randle and Culkin, 2009), “semi-permanent work groups” (Blair, 2001) or “cliques” (Manning and Sydow, 2007). Industry data confirms these academic accounts. The vast majority (78 per cent) of creative media workers were recruited into their current job informally, most contacted directly by their employer or by someone with whom they had previously worked (Skillset, 2010). Across the film and animation industries only 12 and 8 per cent of workers, respectively, had heard about their first job through an advertisement (Skillset, 2010). Informal recruitment is common across hierarchical levels within the creative media industries – in film, for example, producers hire only the heads of departments, who then recruit their departmental teams from their contact books (Blair, 2001). Similarly, in journalism commissioning editors base hiring decisions on “seeking someone they can trust” (Sutton Trust, 2006a, p. 10). Workers in the creative industries thus have to constantly actively achieve and maintain such trust: “Network”, comments Karren, an aspiring actress quoted in Lewis (2000), “It’s no accident that the word ‘work’ is in there”.

Fourth, project-based work in the creative industries exhibits specific typical working patterns. Tight deadlines make long and unsocial working hours including evenings and weekends the norm rather than the exception, and geographically dispersed work locations require frequent and substantial travelling (Gill, 2002; Randle *et al.*, 2007). In total, 14 per cent of the creative media workforce work more than 51 hours per week, with freelance-dependent sectors such as film and independent TV production reporting the longest working days (Skillset, 2010). In film production, for example, around 60 per cent of respondents work more than 11 hours a day and over half (52 per cent) had or expected to stay away from home (Skillset, 2008a). Thus, to participate in creative production, workers have to be available for extended working hours at night and weekends and be geographically mobile.

No doubt individual creative talent is important. However, the above synthesis highlights four other important features of work and employment in the creative industries’ model of production: irregular income and high-employment insecurity, low or unwaged entry-level jobs, network-based recruitment practices and above-average requirements regarding workers’ temporal availability and geographical mobility. Again using the UK’s creative media industries as an illustrative case, the next subsection shows how these features impact on social equality in work and employment.

#### *Inequality and discrimination in the creative industries*

The first two features of work and employment discussed in the previous subsection, employment and wage instability and low or unwaged entry-level jobs, mean that gaining entry into and maintaining a career in the creative industries require economic capital. Aspiring entrants to the creative industries need to make good shortfalls arising from low or no pay. The economic capital required to do so is most readily available to workers with affluent parents: “I think that the reason that there are so many white middle class people in the industry is because those people can afford to do work experience for free, whereas the people whose parents can’t afford to support them [...] they can’t do the free work experience so they can’t quite get that step in” (industry researcher quoted in Randle *et al.*, 2007, p. 94). Once in the creative industries, workers need to buffer the monetary disadvantages of flexible employment. Substantial periods of unemployment and the need to finance training mean that many workers need additional income at least for parts of their careers to sustain working in the creative industries. Again, having financial support from parents is one

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option – and one more readily available to workers with middle class origins. The most common alternative is to secure income from work outwith the creative industries. Nearly half (47 per cent) of workers in film and TV surveyed by Dex *et al.* (2000) reported being dependent on other jobs, most prominently teaching. Workers in the creative media industries regularly work part-time in other industries in order to augment their income. Karren, the previously mentioned aspiring actress, has two CVs for example: one for her TV and film acting experience, the other for her extensive work experience in the hospitality industry waiting tables (Lewis, 2000). However, having to pursue other, non-familial sources of income can constitute a double disadvantage, limiting the time available for creative work and curtailing opportunities for networking and sourcing work. As a screen writer who held two jobs, one within and one outwith the creative industries, explained in Randle *et al.* (2007, p. 110): “When you’re working, you can’t write, and when you’re writing you can’t earn money”.

The third feature discussed above was workers’ reliance on relationships and recommendation for recruitment. Because of such recruitment practices, sustaining a career in the creative industries requires access to industry networks. Again, the relevant social capital that facilitates such access is more readily available to children from wealthier families. In Thanki and Jefferys’ (2006-2007, p. 114) research on the media industry, one respondent explained that “a lot of middle class white people have links into the media which they can tap, you know – Mummy, Daddy, Auntie [...] somebody might work somewhere, know somebody”. As an independent film director cited in Randle and Culkin (2009, p. 105) explained, familial social capital not only helps to access employment but also financial resources: “to be honest with you [...] I’m starting this one up because I have some investors in Beverley Hills and in New York that are going to help me out [...] my dad’s, sort of, business associates”. Such social capital is less likely to be available to workers from working class or ethnic minority backgrounds, who often feel excluded from this “contacts culture” (Thanki and Jefferys, 2006-2007). “They are closed shop kind of places”, an ethnic minority filmmaker stated in Randle *et al.* (2007, p. 69), “These are people who invite each other around to their houses for dinner, they all go out together, they’re in that sort of world, and they don’t let anyone else in”. What provides inclusion and helps limit job insecurity for some workers creates barriers for others, resulting in a “white middle class monoculture” in the creative media industries (Randle *et al.*, 2007, p. 91). The importance of networking also disadvantages female workers. Gill (2002) describes how the lack of transparency prevailing in the “clubby atmosphere” of new media networking fosters discrimination against women. “Give me a formal hierarchy any day over the fake democracy and pseudo-equality of this work!” said one female respondent (p. 83). The informality of social capital obscures the “old boys networks” that women and other workers from ethnic minority and working class backgrounds find hard to access. “Employers essentially employ people like themselves [white, male] [...] this is not necessarily just by race, but by class and gender”, stated a respondent in Thanki and Jefferys (2006-2007, p. 114).

The fourth relevant condition of work and employment in the creative industries concerns its working patterns. The unsocial working hours and geographical flexibility required in the creative industries add further constraints for workers with childcare responsibilities, and such workers are predominantly female. Women find it particularly difficult to reconcile the long, unsocial working hours and working away from home with care commitments (Banks and Milestone, 2011; Gill, 2002; Skillset, 2009). As one of Randle *et al.*’s (2007, p. 64) female camera crew stated: “it’s an issue, the

unfriendly hours, especially if you've got kids around, because we'll routinely have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, go out and work a 12 h day and then get back at 10 o'clock at night". Many female interviewees in this study stated that having a successful career required them to put their personal lives on hold (similarly Banks and Milestone, 2011). Not every woman is able or willing to make this sacrifice: as we note below, there is notable attrition amongst early to mid-30s aged women working in the creative media industries.

These four conditions of work and employment in the creative industries result in significant outcomes related to workforce participation, career progression and pay. Women are under-represented in the creative media industries overall (38 per cent compared to 46 per cent of the UK's workforce as a whole) and particularly in older age bands, i.e. in positions with higher pay and influence (only 16 per cent of women in the industry are aged 50 or older compared to 25 per cent of men; all figures; Skillset, 2010). Ethnic minority workers are less likely to work in these industries (5 per cent compared to 9 per cent across the UK economy; Skillset, 2010) and are more likely to experience unemployment (Skillset, 2008a). In London, where more than half of the UK creative media industries' workforce is based, only one in ten creative media workers comes from an ethnic minority background compared with nearly one in four in London's workforce generally (Skillset, 2010). Data on workers' socio-economic background is difficult to obtain (Randle *et al.*, 2007) but higher education degrees can serve as proxies of socio-economic background (Wolf, 2002). Generally, over two-thirds (68 per cent) of workers in the creative media industries are graduates (Skillset, 2010) compared to under 37 per cent of the economically active working population in the UK as a whole. Moreover, while pre-1970 just over a third (36 per cent) of the industries' entrants held a degree, by 2010 the figure had risen to 68 per cent (Skillset, 2010). In journalism, the last 20 years have seen the share of the UK leading news journalists educated at private schools rise steadily to 54 per cent (compared to 7 per cent of the overall UK school population). Of those journalists who went to university, over half (56 per cent) were educated at Oxford or Cambridge (Sutton Trust, 2006a). This data suggests that there is a "systematic bias towards the better off" according to news editor Elliot Major (quoted in Sutton Trust, 2006b), with workers from working class backgrounds less likely to participate in the creative media industries.

Turning to pay, the mean annual gross income of creative media workers (£32,239) is higher than the average gross annual pay of full-time employees in the UK (£29,331; Skillset, 2008a). Nevertheless, familiar patterns of gendered difference prevail. Women earn less than men (£28,300 pa vs £32,950 pa), partly because they are over-represented in lower paid occupations such as make-up, hairdressing and costumes and, as we noted earlier, are under-represented in older age bands, i.e. at career stages with higher earnings (Skillset, 2010). Annual pay also varies by ethnic origin, with ethnic minorities again earning less than their white colleagues (£27,200 pa vs £30,600 pa), partly because they are over-represented in low-pay occupations such as cinema cleaning and have low or no representation in higher paid animation and special effects departments for example (Skillset, 2010). Moreover, clear pay band clustering differences indicate that ethnic minority workers are far less likely to advance to high-paid jobs. Previous analysis of Skillset data showed that pay gaps by gender and ethnicity remain when age and occupation are controlled for (Skillset, 2005), indicating the existence of gendered and racial pay discrimination. (Data on pay in relation to workers' socio-economic origin – that is, social class – is not available.)

Contrary to the optimistic accounts, data from industry surveys thus show no sign of a new, meritocratic world of work. Women, ethnic minorities and the working class are failing to gain parity of entry to and outcomes within the creative industries, with white middle class males faring much better.

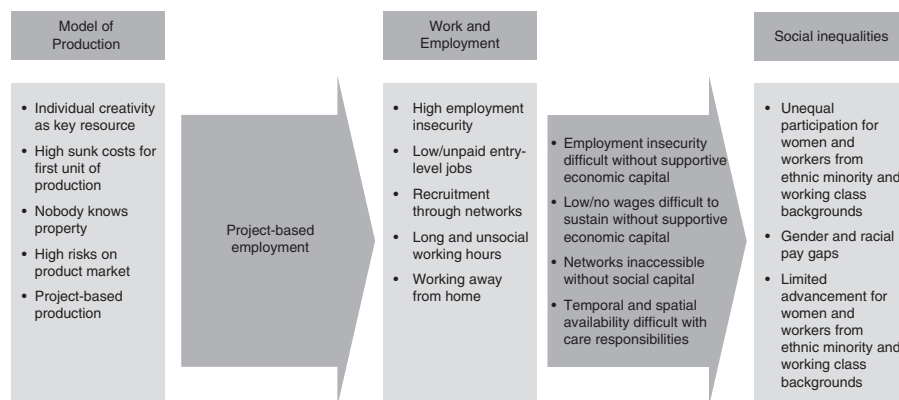
*It is the model*

This analysis can be illustrated through Figure 1. The creative industries are not just characterised by individual creative talent but also by a project-based model of production (Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Howkins, 2001). This model of production translates into project-based work and employment with high insecurity of employment and income, low or unwaged entry-level jobs, unsocial working hours, high geographical mobility and network-based recruitment. As a consequence, “getting in and getting on” requires financial capital for buffering low or no wages at entry level and the risks of flexible employment as well as extensive temporal and geographical availability and active professional networking. As not all workers are equally well equipped to meet these requirements, disadvantage and social inequalities result (see Figure 1).

Existing studies have related social inequality symptoms to singular features of the creative industries’ employment conditions. Ethnic minority workers’ lack of social capital, for instance, has been linked to network-based recruitment practices (Thanki and Jefferys, 2006-2007) and demanding working patterns have been identified as an obstacle to women’s careers in the creative industries (Skillset, 2008b). Our argument draws extensively on these studies. However, what this existing body of research has so far not done is considered the interaction between different conditions of employment and work and, more importantly, linked the symptoms of social inequality to their root cause: the creative industries’ project-based model of production. In this section, we have synthesised evidence from existing research to provide that fuller appreciation. Figure 1 summarises the insights gained from this synthesis. It points out that while the creative industries’ employment conditions may be a key cause of the social inequality symptoms, these conditions are themselves only symptoms of the project-based model of production prevailing in these industries.

**Towards a better understanding of social inequality in the creative industries**

To some extent, the persistence of social inequalities in the creative industries is recognised. Florida, however, tries to explain them away as mere “holes in the picture”



**Figure 1.**  
Translation of model  
of production into  
social inequalities



(Florida, 2004, p. 80), the result of a time-lag in socio-economic development as creativity becomes mainstreamed. In other words, they will disappear with time. However, Skillset's times series data demonstrate that social inequalities by sex, race and class remain unchanged (cf. Skillset, 2005, 2010). In contrast to Florida, Skillset views social inequalities as a result of attitudes and individual practices and suggests that there are "still some cultural shifts [...] needed to occur before women could achieve parity with men" (Skillset, 2008b, p. 21).

More critical analysts explain these persisting social inequalities through the lens of "capitals", in particular social and economic capital, the lack of which diminishes individuals' ability to succeed in the creative industries' employment system. For example, Randle *et al.* (2007) and Thanki and Jefferys (2006-2007) argue that ethnic minorities and the working class lack the appropriate social capital for access to and advancement in the creative industries (similarly for women see Gill, 2002). Elsewhere, these and other authors (e.g. Dex *et al.*, 2000; Randle and Culkin, 2009) focus on a lack of economic capital leading to an inability to buffer low entry-level wages as well as under- and unemployment and therefore to disadvantages for workers from less well-off backgrounds. Based on the "lack of capital" explanation, Randle *et al.* (2007) recommend better youth careers advice, targeted recruitment drives, paid training and work experience, alternative networks, networking events, role models, mentoring, formalised and standardised human resources practices. Elsewhere Maxwell (2004) outlines how BBC Scotland adopted diversity management in order to boost ethnic minority representation amongst its workforce. Undoubtedly these recommendations and initiatives would be helpful to some individual female, ethnic minority or working class workers. However, with the BBC initiative focused on "individuals as opposed to groups", it failed to induce the necessary "widespread organisational cultural transformation" (pp. 198-199) Maxwell notes. Given the evidence presented in this paper, this outcome is not surprising. Randle *et al.*'s recommendations would, and the BBC's initiative did, work to the creative industries' model of production. They are therefore incapable of substantively improving the situation of disadvantaged groups and overcoming the discrimination experienced by these groups as particular groups of workers. They are, at best, band-aids for individual workers and do not address the root causes of these workers' limited opportunities for participation and advancement.

Whilst these more critical accounts have some validity, they neither consider the interplay between different work and employment practices nor question why these practices exist in the first place. They provide therefore only partial explanations of why disadvantage and discrimination persist in the creative industries. The analysis presented in this paper exposes a more deeply rooted source of the problem: because of its project-based model of production, lack of equal opportunities for participation and advancement are systemic to the creative industries. Deepening the analytical perspective to include the model of production rather than just the lack of a specific capital within that model thus advances conceptual understanding: as long as this model of production persists, differences in the ability to cope with the work and employment conditions resulting from project-based production will mean that workers who are white, male and middle class will continue to fare better in the creative industries; conversely female, ethnic minority and workers with working class origins will fare worse.

Of course, social inequality in work and employment predates government and academic interest in the creative industries (e.g. Bourdieu *et al.*, 1981). For example, Ashley (2010) has aptly demonstrated how ethnic minority workers have limited participation in the legal profession, finding it hard to get an initial foot through the

door of law firms. However, despite the claim otherwise, these inequalities are continued and compounded with the creative industries. Notably, two aspects are important, and different, for the creative industries. First, it is because of a feature of their model of production – creativity as key resource – that the creative industries are offered as a catalyst for a meritocratic world of work with equal opportunities for participation and advancement. It is therefore imperative to propose and employ a conceptual framework that exposes how other features of that model of production significantly constrain equal opportunities and reproduce old labour market inequalities based on sex, race and class. While one feature of the creative industries’ model of production may offer a progressive promise of social equality in the workplace, other features of this model hinder such progress. Second, it is again the creative industries’ project-based model of production that makes the likelihood of reproducing social inequality even more problematic than in other industries. In their project-based model of production, project teams are constantly assembled, disassembled and re-assembled. Consequently, decisions about participation and advancement, “getting in and getting on”, occur more frequently than in other industries. This higher frequency in turn amplifies the negative impact barriers to participation and advancement have on individual careers and compounds the monoculture identified by Randle *et al.* (2007). To return to the door analogy, the creative industries have more frequently revolving doors through which the same types of workers repeatedly enter.

The conceptual development presented in this paper therefore shows: if what makes the creative industries distinctive and, at first sight, attractive is their model of production with its focus on individual talent and creativity, that same model of production with its project-based work and employment also exacerbates, not eliminates social inequalities in work and employment.

### **Conclusion**

Current national and international economic policy views the creative industries as a driver of socio-economic development and facilitator of a meritocratic world of work with opportunities for participation and advancement for all regardless of sex, race and class (Cable, 2010; European Commission, 2012; UNCTAD, 2008). However, as the UK creative media industries epitomises, a range of research and data exposes the persistence of social inequalities, showing that female, ethnic minority and workers with working class origins have less participation and advancement opportunities in these industries (e.g. Gill, 2002; Randle *et al.*, 2007; Skillset, 2010).

Existing research only partially explains this persistence. Beyond Florida’s (2004) insistence on a time-lag, workers’ lack of appropriate capitals is blamed (e.g. Randle *et al.*, 2007; Dex *et al.*, 2000). By contrast, we have argued that the model of production is decisive in creating the “lack of diversity” problem. Disadvantage and discrimination in the creative industries, as currently configured, are systemic. Unlike previous research that recommends overcoming social inequalities by addressing unequal access to social and economic capital, our analysis shows that a meritocratic world of work cannot be delivered within the creative industries’ current model of production. We arrive at our conclusion through a new synthesis of existing research and industry data which focuses on the model of production, its implications for work and employment conditions and the implications of those conditions for social equality in work. This synthesis allows a more comprehensive understanding of work and employment in the creative industries that captures the whole model of production. This analysis reveals that persisting inequalities are not temporary or easily remediable.

This new understanding of the creative industries has implications for research and policy. While policy makers still advocate the creative industries as a motor of socio-economic development (e.g. Cable, 2010), industry insiders are starting to recognise the problems. Freelancers at a UK BECTU-chaired[3] debate claimed that an imbalance of power in favour of employers was leading to extended periods of unpaid labour, illegally low rates of pay, long working hours and nepotism. The union believes that the outcome is “a waste of resources in terms of education and training, lost hopes for so many talented individuals and [...] damage to the industry’s image” (BECTU, 2009b).

Given the importance of the creative industries in socio-economic policy in the UK (and elsewhere), there is a pressing need for more research of production within the creative industries and, with it, better understanding of work and employment. Assumptions and assertions must be displaced by evidence. This evidence can then form the basis for better policy making. Obviously any research should incorporate a concern with social divisions of labour arising from sex, race and class (see, generally, Bradley, 2007; Crompton, 2008; Vallas, 2012, respectively) – as well as the intersectionalities of sex, race and class (Kerner, 2012). However, to develop better understanding requires two further types of research. First, research is needed that analyses differences amongst the different creative industries and which investigates which industries do well/badly and why with respect to equal opportunities, and from which lessons can be generated about good practice. It might be that different creative industries, as with other different non-creative industries (Jung *et al.*, 2009), respond to different influences in organising work and employment: market pressures, statutory regulation or government persuasion, for example. It might also be useful to compare the creative industries with non-creative industries that also make extensive use of project work, for example, business consultancy (Fincham, 2006). Second, this research needs to be comparative by country in order to explore other possible models of production by which the creative industries are or might be organised (akin to the study of low-wage industries reported in Gautié and Schmitt, 2010) and in so doing might also pick up the socio-institutional effects that affect different types of workers’ participation in the national labour market (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). Such comparative research by industry and country will enable understanding of which features, if any, of the creative industries’ model of production prevailing in the UK are essential (cf. Stinchcombe, 1959) and which features could be changed in order to overcome the obstacles to equal opportunities for participation and advancement identified in this paper. In addition, the focus of this paper is one point in the circuit of capital – production. The reason is twofold: first it is this point that policy makers, following Florida *et al.*, most focus upon with the creative industries; second, it is at this point that the creative industries are expected to lever participation and advancement opportunities for all. It would be interesting nonetheless to apply our approach to other points in the creative industries’ circuit of capital, most obviously, work and employment in the distribution of creative output.

This research and its translation into policy thinking matter not just because the creative industries’ model of production is offered as the paradigm for the future of work (e.g. Leadbeater and Oakley, 2005; Work Foundation, 2007; see also Clarke and Patrickson, 2008 for career self-management in other industries) but because the creative industries continue to be posited as a catalyst for job growth in the current economic downturn (Clifton *et al.*, 2009; Cable, 2010; European Commission, 2012; UNCTAD, 2008). If the creative industries were to fulfil either or both of these functions, many workers’ experience of work and employment will be marked by

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continuing limited opportunities for participation and advancement. It is thus important that critically informed and conceptually sound research documents and, if possible, contributes to changing this situation. This paper has proposed some of the conceptual improvements required for such an undertaking.

#### Notes

1. Previously labelled the “audio-visual industries”.
2. It should be noted that there are some differences in the definition and scope in the UK with respect to employment and revenue figures both within DCMS documents and between DCMS and Skillset documents. For a discussion see Warhurst (2010).
3. Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) – is the trade union representing workers in the UK media and entertainment.

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