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Culture is a meritocracy: Why creative workers' attitudes may reinforce social inequality

Abstract

The attitudes and values of cultural and creative workers are an important element of explaining current academic interest in inequality and culture. To date, quantitative approaches to this element of cultural and creative inequality has been overlooked, particularly in British research. This paper investigates the attitudes of those working in creative jobs with a unique dataset, a web survey of creative workers' attitudes (n=2487). Using principal components analysis and regression, we have three main findings. First, in contrast to Richard Florida's thesis on the attitudes and values of 'the creative class', our respondents' attitudes were no more meritocratic than those of the general population. Second, those with the strongest belief in meritocracy in the sector are those in the most privileged positions, specifically those are best-rewarded by the sector. Third, our research provides support for existing qualitative research on attitudes in the cultural sector, in which the worst-rewarded workers are most aware of structural inequality. We conclude that the attitudes held by creative workers, and who holds which attitudes, make it unlikely that access to the sector and trajectories of individual progression within the sector will change. These findings also have important implications for current public interest in whether access to creative work is limited to those from privileged backgrounds.

Keywords

cultural workers, principal components analysis, inequality, attitudes, meritocracy

'I am in the company that I wish to keep, ever since I was young. I wanted to be with people who left race and religion and age and gender and shoe size and things outside the door when they came. People who are in our profession don't have those discriminations. I wanted to be with those people. I wanted to be, I wanted to hang out with the boys in the band, I wanted to be part of the sisterhood' Joanna Lumley

1: Introduction

Speaking on reception of her BAFTA Fellowship, at the 2017 BAFTA Television awards, the well-known actor Joanna Lumley sought to capture what she felt were the best qualities of her industry. Describing her desire to be part of the 'great circus', the 'fellowship' that is the British cultural sector, Ms Lumley painted a picture of co-operation across the various roles and occupations producing culture, and a shared sense of openness and anti-discrimination. As this paper demonstrates, this is a picture shared by many cultural workers. Lumley's belief in an open and fluid occupational sector is set against the backdrop of broader social, public policy, and academic concerns about the nature of the cultural sector.

These concerns are focused on questions of inequality in culture. They have come in the form of international media controversies such as #oscarssowhite, and of more technical questions of workforce composition and skills (House of Lords 2017). This set of public concerns has been underpinned by a tradition of research that has bloomed in the last decade, focused on questions of the labour market(s) for culture. This research has been cross-disciplinary, ranging from media studies (e.g. Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010) to sociological perspectives (Conor *et al* 2015, O'Brien *et al* 2016).

This paper addresses both the public concerns as well as the sociological literature on cultural work by exploring the attitudes of those working in the sector to broader questions of inequality, of 'getting in' and 'getting on' in cultural and creative occupations. To date the major research intervention on cultural workers' attitudes has been Florida's (2002) research

that aimed to establish the existence of a 'creative class', with more open, tolerant, eclectic and meritocratic attitudes than the rest of the (American) society in which they lived.

In the British context, from where our data is drawn, there is a tradition of qualitative engagement with ethnographic and interview data that has revealed a variety of orientations towards 'getting ahead' in cultural work (see O'Brien and Oakley 2015 for a review), including theorising the sense of guilt or failure when confronted with the structural inequalities endemic to the creative sector (McRobbie 2016). Our present study is unique as it explores these issues quantitatively, drawing on attitudinal research literature which contextualises cultural workers in terms of broader social understandings of inequality.

As a result, the paper makes three core contributions. Our analysis shows cultural workers, in surprising contrast to the Floridian (2002) thesis of being open and meritocratic, have attitudes to inequality that are broadly similar to the general population. We demonstrate that, in our dataset, those with the strongest attachment to meritocratic views, that the cultural sector rewards hard work and talent, are those in the highest paid occupational locations. In support of McRobbie (2015), we find that younger respondents who are well paid are less likely to hold critical or socially transformative attitudes, offering qualified support for the idea of individualisation as a useful lens with which to view the cultural sector.

The paper's academic contribution, focused on quantitative, empirical study of workers' attitudes, also has importance for public, media, and policy discussions. The view of the arts as potentially socially transformative, rewarding talent and hard work, has an important place in

how the cultural sector is narrated in contemporary society (e.g. Hancock 2016). It is present in Lumley's vision of the cultural sector as the 'sisterhood' and the 'boys in the band'. Our data and analysis suggests workers in the sector share this narrative. However, if it is the case that those working in the sector believe in its fairness, in light of the recent relentlessness of media reports on inequality in culture, the prospects for social change may be rather limited. To explore this point further, we begin by discussing existing research on cultural work, move through a discussion of academic understandings of social attitudes towards meritocracy, before presenting our data, analysis and the conclusions supporting our academic and, more publically troubling, conclusions.

1.1: Studying cultural and creative work

There are longstanding academic debates, research programmes and disciplinary traditions associated with the study of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs). We can think through this literature as having three phases and three distinct forms associated with a range of differing positions on the virtues, or otherwise, of working in a cultural or creative job. The first consists of those writers and policy makers who have attempted to theorise what cultural and creative labour *is*, and where the specific boundaries of creative occupations can be drawn. Second there are the debates around inequalities in cultural and creative work, with some (e.g. Florida 2002) arguing for cultural jobs to be seen as a blueprint or model for the rest of society, while others are much more critical of working life in cultural and creative industries. Finally there is more recent literature aiming to theorise creative work's relationship to broader social trends,

including urban policy (Evans 2000), gender (Luckman 2015, Conor *et al* 2015), management practice (Harney 2015) and cultural theory itself (exemplified by a recent collections by Banks *et al* 2013).

Understanding what, exactly, constitutes CCIs has been a longstanding problem. The original advocates for taking cultural production seriously as part of the economy (e.g. McRobbie 2002) were directly concerned with highlighting both the transformative and in some cases emancipatory nature of cultural production and its potential for economic and, in the case of cities and local jurisdictions, political impact (see O'Brien 2014 for a detailed discussion of this history). However, the eventual establishment of cultural and creative industries in the form recognised across Britain and Commonwealth nations broadened out the set of occupations to include a focus on the production and control of intellectual property, bringing computer services and IT into an expanded set of 'creative', as opposed to merely 'cultural', industries.

This conception of cultural and creative industries has repositioned the act of 'creativity' at the centre of the occupational boundary drawing exercise to delimit the creative and cultural industries from other parts of the economy. For the purposes of this paper, and to speak to the context of the DCMS/UK model of creative and cultural occupations, what follows uses nine overarching sectors of the economy (IT, software and computer Services; Advertising and marketing; Music, performing and visual arts; Product, graphic, and fashion design; Publishing; Film, TV, video, radio, and photography; Crafts; Architecture; Museums, galleries and libraries), corresponding to 30 individual occupations.

The recent expansion of discussions over the impact of cultural and creative labour on a range of intellectual and social sectors has been crucial to reinforcing the perception of cultural and creative work as worth of specific study (see Oakley and O'Connor 2015 for a summary). In addition to the research base there has been, in both the UK and USA, extensive media and public discussion of these issues. There is considerable interest in the issue of inequality in access to cultural work, the implications of this access for representations, and then the subsequent relationship to cultural consumption (Allen *et al* 2017).

1.2: What do we know about inequality in cultural and creative occupations?

The story of cultural and creative occupations as 'meritocratic' was at the centre of Florida's (2002) *Rise of the Creative Class*, a text that did much to set the tone for public policy debates and served as a point around which critical research was orientated. Subsequent academics however (summarised in O'Brien 2014) did much to suggest that the narrative of a creative class was confined only to those with the privilege to be able to join. Critical research made it clear that there is a mismatch between narratives of an open, meritocratic, set of occupations and the structural barriers to those who are not the 'default' affluent, white, middle class male.

We can use McRobbie's (2016) recent work as a key example here. She identifies the tension between the structures of cultural labour markets and the narratives associated with work within those subsectors of the economy. Cultural work is narrated as open to everyone, while entry is denied to those without affluence (in the form of unpaid internships), those without

social connections (usually in the form of elite education), and those deviating from a norm of able-bodied youthfulness. Her theorisation draws on critiques of working conditions (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010; McRobbie 2002) in cultural occupations, institutional barriers to access (Conor et al 2015) and the limits of cultural occupations' contribution to the creative economy (Oakley 2014).

The questions as to how cultural labour markets are structured (e.g Koppman 2015, O'Brien *et al* 2016, Gill 2002, Saha 2015, Conor *et al* 2015) have been shown to have a close relationship to individual workers' attitudes. In some research this is related to shared cultural attitudes, for example in Koppman's (2015) demonstration of the role of taste in matching affluent origin candidates to jobs in advertising. For others, for example Childress and Gerber's (2017) analysis of visual artists' ethical orientations towards financial elements of the market for their labour, attitudes structure the very possibility of having a sustainable career in a cultural occupation. To return to McRobbie (2014), who offers the most fully theorised understanding of attitudes and labour markets, we see the cultural workers' commitment to their occupation offering a sense of identity. This vocational element (Dubois 2016) is powerful enough to see cultural workers forego occupations with more stability and employment protections in favour of cultural work.

This commitment is in the face of a labour market for occupations that is deeply exclusionary. Recent analysis of 2014 Labour Force Survey (LFS) data in the UK (O'Brien *et al* 2016, Oakley *et al* 2017) demonstrated the overrepresentation of those from professional or managerial

occupational origins across the cultural sector, with particular issues in publishing, music and design. Underrepresentations of women were especially acute in film, TV, radio and photography, an underrepresentation matched by low levels of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the cultural and creative labour force. The analysis also indicated pay gaps according to gender and class origin in many of the occupations surveyed, suggesting even where those from outside the white, male, middle class origin 'norm' of cultural occupations were working in the sector, they potentially faced lower rates of pay.

This analysis of the cultural labour force raises two questions. On the one hand there is a question of how this social structure is experienced, something of which the existing literature surveyed above has offered a detailed overview. Second, and less well developed in existing work, is the question of how these structures are perpetuated through attitudes and assumptions of those occupied in cultural labour. There is thus still a need to understand how barriers to getting in and getting on operate. Here understanding broader attitudes towards inequality, as a route to understanding how these attitudes function within creative work, is essential.

1.3: What do we know about attitudes to inequality?

Crucially, it does not follow that inequalities in CCIs mean that people working in or around CCIs believe that the sector is unequal: for example, people in the sector may erroneously believe that people from different class backgrounds are paid the same. In addition, people may acknowledge that inequalities exist, but they may believe that inequalities are just and

fair: they may believe that success is overwhelmingly determined by talent, and they may believe the most talented people happen to come disproportionately from privileged backgrounds.

Both within and beyond the CCIs, people's beliefs about inequality take a number of different dimensions, including both knowledge *of* inequality and normative beliefs *about* inequality. McCall and Chin (2013) investigate what people believe the ratios between the highest- and lowest-paid workers in organisations are and what they should be. They find that not only do people believe that high and low pay should be closer together, they also significantly underestimate actual discrepancies, believing that the income distribution is more equal than it actually is. Loveless and Whitefield (2011) investigate more generally questions of 'social inequality', asking whether levels of social inequality where people live are too high, about right, or too low. Isaksson and Lindskog (2009) investigate whether people believe that government should intervene in order to change the situation.

Here, we focus on *perceived inequality of opportunity* (Brunori 2015). This dimension is measured by presenting respondents with a battery of items, and asking how important each of those is in terms of getting ahead. Respondents who report that coming from a wealthy family, knowing the right people, and having been born a man are all essential to getting ahead might be considered to perceive inequality of opportunity as high, while a respondent who considers those items to be not at all important, while holding ambition and hard work as essential, might be considered to perceive inequality of opportunity as low. These responses

can be considered to incorporate both knowledge and normative beliefs. It is impossible to determine exactly how much people's success can be attributed to their hard work, but the literature generally finds that people who are better-informed about workplace conditions perceive inequality of opportunity as higher. Batteries of this form have been used in large-scale social surveys including the General Social Survey in the USA, and the International Social Survey Programme[1].

Studies using these batteries of questions tend to find that people's beliefs about inequality are that processes err on the side of fairness, with overall higher scores on items like 'hard work' than 'coming from a wealthy family'. However, this varies internationally, with people in richer countries generally believing that processes are fairer than do people in poorer countries (Brunori 2015). In addition, men generally perceive greater inequality, as do older people (Hanson and Wells-Dang 2005), while the relationship between perception of inequality and education varies cross-nationally (Hanson and Wells-Dang 2005; Reynolds and Xian 2014).

However, while these relationships vary cross-nationally, the correlations between attitudes themselves are relatively stable. Both Hanson and Wells-Dang (2009) and Reynolds and Xian (2014) use factor analysis on the batteries of questions in order to either construct or validate scales; in this way, they investigate whether people who rate 'being a man' as important rate

[1] It has also been shown that different measurements of attitudes to inequality are related: those who believe inequality to be greater are also more skeptical of equality of opportunity (McCall and Chin, 2013)

'talent' as being less important. In both papers, there are fairly coherent scales constitutive of effort, hard work, and similar. These are described as either 'meritocracy' or 'human capital'. Higher scores on these scales correspond to more egalitarian beliefs about how society works. Both papers also find *two* scales that can be considered to be in tension with this, 'ascriptive' or 'structural', and 'discrimination' or 'friends and family'. The first of these consists of race, religion, and gender; the latter consists of coming from a wealthy family and knowing the right people. While high scores on each of these scales both correspond to less egalitarian beliefs about how society works, they are also distinct from each other; it is plausible to believe that discrimination takes place because of who you know rather than more fundamental demographic issues. Finally, Hanson and Wells-Dang find a fourth factor, with the heaviest loadings coming from one's own education and the education of one's parents. This can be seen as being relatively orthogonal to questions of fairness; it is possible to construct narratives around education being used as an arbitrary barrier to entry, and around it being a way to suitably train people for roles.

In addition, while these dimensions differ in their perceived inequality of opportunity – those with higher scores on meritocracy are likely to perceive inequality of opportunity as lower, while those with higher scores on discrimination are likely to perceive it as higher – the dimensions are not at odds with each other. As they are constructed via principal components analysis, the dimensions are relatively independent of one another. In addition, it is not incoherent to simultaneously hold that it's important to be hard-working and talented *and* to be a white man from a wealthy family: someone holding such a position might recognise

structural discrimination, while believing that privileged people can only get ahead if they are also talented and hard-working. Similarly, some people score low on all these dimensions; this might reflect that they believe that who gets ahead is more-or-less random, or indeed that the things that are important in terms of getting ahead weren't mentioned in the battery of questions.

The relevance of these attitudes to the cultural and creative industries is clear. Brunori (2015) shows that, in general, people in rich societies tend to think those societies are meritocratic. However, if the creative class hypothesis is correct (Florida, 2002), and people working in the cultural and creative industries tend to be more left-wing and more liberal than the overall population, with attitudes of tolerance and openness and a commitment to meritocracy, it follows that those people are likely to at least think more critically about who gets ahead. This is particularly salient, given both the research surveyed earlier in this paper which shows structural exclusions in cultural jobs, and the fact that these structural exclusions are well-known to participants (see eg Friedman and O'Brien 2017 on the acting profession). As a result, one would expect people working in the cultural and creative industries to be more conscious of processes of social reproduction, and more critical of meritocratic accounts of the cultural sector in which the cream rises to the top.

The cultural and creative industries are, of course, not a monoculture. Even if overall attitudes within the sector are more sceptical of a meritocratic account of success as compared to attitudes across society, structural effects may persist. These effects would be as a result of

overrepresented groups being less likely to acknowledge the inequalities that may have smoothed the processes leading to their own professional success.

In the event that members of groups who experience exclusion are more alert to the exclusion itself, we would expect faith in meritocracy to be weaker for those groups of non-white, non-male, less affluent origin individuals, and for communities that are under-represented in cultural work and experience exclusions from cultural labour markets. However, as our data will demonstrate, the picture is complex, showing a cluster of occupations whose practitioners have a strong belief in the meritocratic nature of cultural work, albeit one that is strongly socially stratified.

2: Data and methods

Data were collected over the period 21 September-20 October 2015, via an online survey hosted at the Guardian under the headline 'Do you work in the arts, culture, or creative industries? Take our survey on diversity in the sector.' The survey was launched as a part of a partnership between academics and a range of cultural organisations seeking to understand issues of inequality in the sector, accompanying a series of events on the same topic across England; this partnership is described at more length at this link. At its launch, the survey was hosted prominently on the newspaper's website, and was repeatedly publicised across social media across the lifespan of the survey. This included publicity from prominent organisations across the cultural sector, including Equity, the Musicians' Union, Arts Council England, and several others.

Because of this recruitment method, this is a non-representative sample and should be treated in that way. While results may be indicative of a population of people working in the CCIs, they also may not; conclusions are limited to those participants who opted in to the survey. However, as the introduction has indicated, these issues are supported by existing, more representative, survey material. In the design of the survey, questions around people's work, their social origins, and demographic characteristics were designed so that responses could be compared with those in the rolling and nationally-representative Labour Force Survey (LFS), while questions about social contacts were designed to be comparable with those in the Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion survey (Bennett et al, 2008). By using comparable questions we can identify how different the sample is from the population its members are drawn from.

These efforts have been made to benchmark the sample against the population against which its members have been drawn from, precisely because of the difficulties associated with recruiting a large sample of people working in the cultural and creative industries. Recent work on the social composition of the cultural and creative industry workforce (O'Brien *et* al 2016) has been limited to analysis of the LFS. While the LFS is nationally representative, it consists of relatively few people working within the sector, and contains no attitudinal questions at all. The LFS is an ideal data source for understanding the social makeup of the CCIs, but not for understanding more specific labour practices within the sector, nor for understanding attitudes and beliefs within the sector. Data were therefore collected through this online

platform and with partners to maximise responses from the CCIs on the practices and beliefs not covered by LFS.

In total, there were 2540 responses to the survey, of which an estimated 53 were duplicates, leaving a total of 2487 cases. Duplicates were identified on the basis of identical responses to free text fields if applicable; for those respondents who did not use free text fields, duplicates were identified as cases where age, browser, and postcode coincided. This sample of 2487 people working in the cultural and creative industries represents the largest survey of this group of which we are aware. The survey involved a total of 7 sections. The first was on people's roles in the cultural and creative industries: their broad sector, their specific job, what they mainly do in their job, and whether that job is their main source of income. The second was on how long they've been working in the sector, and what they had done before if they had not only worked in the cultural and creative industries. The third asked detailed questions about their sources of income and outgoings, while the fourth asked about their experiences of working without pay. The fifth, which we analyse in this paper, investigated respondents' attitudes towards what is important in getting ahead in their sector, while the final questions asked about social contacts and relevant demographic questions (including questions on social origin).

Here, we focus on the questions about getting ahead. We use the battery of questions described above about perceived inequality of opportunity, validated in a variety of different national and cross-national contexts (eg Brunori, 2015; Reynolds and Xian, 2014; Hanson and

Wells-Dang, 2015). In most surveys, the question is asked 'Please tick one box for each of these to show how important you think it is for getting ahead in life…', and presented with a series of items. In this case, the options remain the same, but the stimulus is changed to 'Looking at your creative occupation as a whole, how important do you think each of these is in getting ahead?'. Responses to these questions should be seen in the context of the questions that precede it; immediately before these questions, respondents were asked about income and about working for free.

The analysis proceeds as follows. First, we report descriptive statistics of each of the items within this bank of questions, and for relevant indicator variables. Second, we describe principal components analysis on this same bank of questions, in order to identify whether these items can be reduced to a smaller number of latent variables. Third, we use regressions to understand how attitudes towards inequality vary between groups, whether those people in more privileged positions and from more privileged backgrounds are more likely to find the cultural sector fair and equitable. Analysis was conducted in Stata 14.1, and graphics were prepared in R using the ggplot2 package.

3: Results

3.1: Descriptive statistics

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for relevant indicator variables, and Figure 1 shows the distributions of responses to each item in the bank of questions about getting ahead, on a scale from "not at all important" to "essential".

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for independent variables used in analysis

Variable	Mean	N
Disability status	0.22	2487
Ethnicity = white	0.88	2090
Education = degree or greater	0.82	2487
Age (sd)	36.97 (11.05)	2468
Gender		
Male	0.31	2486
Female	0.69	2486
Other	0.01	2486
Sector		
Advertising/marketing	0.06	2486
Architecture	0.01	2486
Craft	0.02	2486
Design	0.06	2486
Film/TV/Video/Radio/Photography	0.08	2486
IT	0.02	2486
Museums/Galleries/Libraries	0.15	2486
NA/Other	0.1	2486
Performance/Music	0.29	2486
Publishing	0.07	2486
Visual Arts	0.12	2486
Income		
>5k	0.28	2487
5-10k	0.1	2487
10-20k	0.16	2487
20-30k	0.24	2487
30-50k	0.17	2487
>50k	0.06	2487
Parent's occupation		
Senior manager	0.19	2486
Traditional professional	0.18	2486
Middle/junior manager	0.09	2486

Modern professional	0.29	2486
NS-SEC 3-7	0.24	2486
Time in the industry		
>6 months	0.08	2486
6 months-1 year	0.05	2486
1-2 years	0.09	2486
2-5 years	0.19	2486
5-10 years	0.21	2486
More than 10 years	0.38	2486
Region		
East of England	0.05	2347
West Midlands	0.04	2347
East Midlands	0.03	2347
North East	0.03	2347
North West	0.07	2347
Yorkshire	0.05	2347
South East	0.11	2347
London	0.45	2347
South West	0.06	2347
Wales	0.04	2347
Northern Ireland	0.01	2347
Scotland	0.07	2347

Figure 1: descriptive statistics of attitudes towards getting ahead, from “not at all important” to “essential”

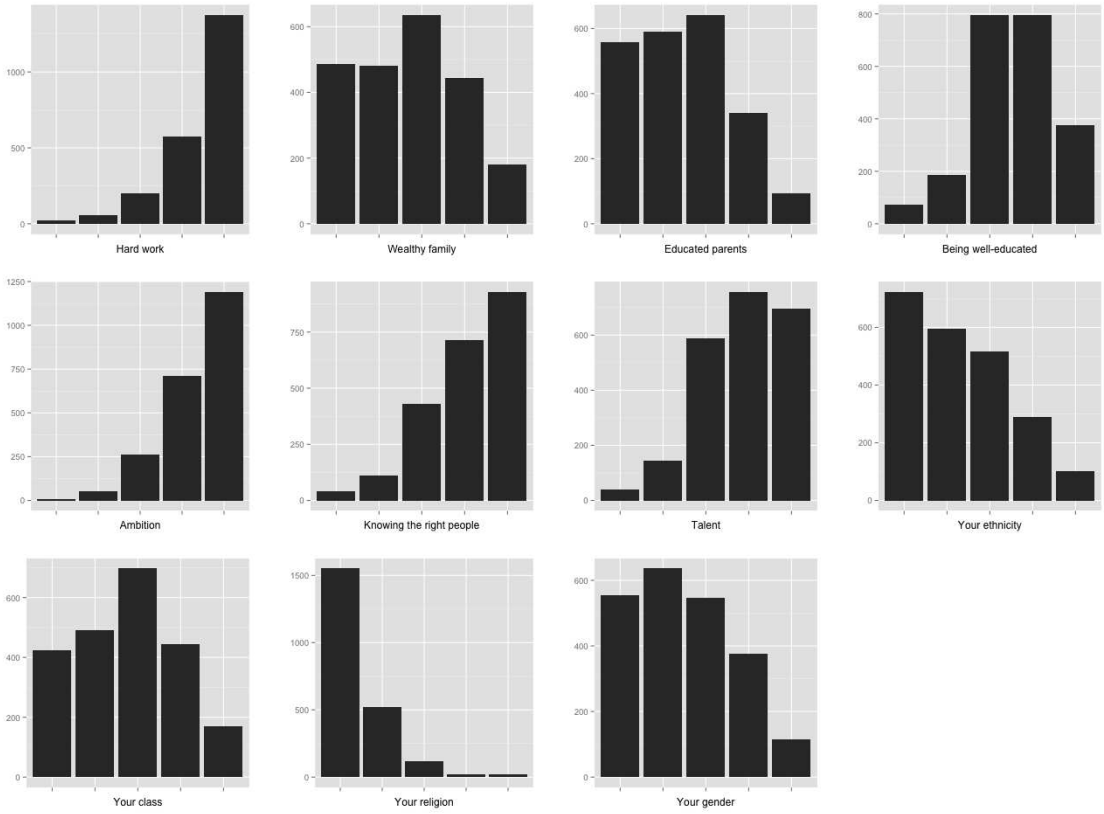


Table 1 shows that the distribution of parts of the CCIs in the survey are different from the national distribution from the Labour Force Survey (O'Brien *et al* 2016, table 1), most conspicuously by the underrepresentation of workers in IT (2% compared with 29%), and the overrepresentation of workers in performance and music (29% compared with 9%) and in museums, galleries and libraries (15% compared with 3%).

A relatively high percentage of respondents (22%) reported at least one disability; in most cases, this related to mental health. Most respondents had at least an undergraduate degree (82%, compared with 64% across the CCIs). A large majority of respondents (69%) were

women, while the only CCIs that are predominantly women in the LFS are women are museums, galleries and libraries, and publishing (O'Brien *et al* 2016, table 1). Respondents were generally poorly paid: 28% received less than £5k pa from their practice, with only 23% receiving more than £30k pa. Only 24% of respondents classified both parents as being in anything other than professional or managerial jobs, indicating that the sample overwhelmingly consists of people from what might be classified as 'middle-class backgrounds'. This is an even smaller fraction than in the CCIs as a whole (O'Brien *et al* 2016, table 2). 88% of the sample identified themselves as white, a slightly smaller fraction than the CCIs overall, and a similar figure to that of the overall UK population; however, this looks unusually white given that a huge 45% of respondents were based in London, which was overall 60% white at the 2011 census. Finally, the mean age in the sample is just under 37 (compared with just over 41 for the CCIs overall: O'Brien *et al* 2016, table A2), and relatively few respondents are new to their sector, with just 13% having worked in it for less than a year.

The CCI workers that make up our survey are clearly different from the CCIs across the Labour Force Survey in a number of ways. We have more actors, musicians and other performers, while we have fewer programmers; we have more women; we have more people living in London. Given recruitment was opt-in, participants are those who recognise themselves as working in the cultural and creative industries, and who find out about a survey hosted at the Guardian (likely through unions and relevant professional bodies). Indeed, these are the sectors who receive more of the celebratory discourse around the cultural and creative industries, in spite of representing a relatively small part of their workforce and an even

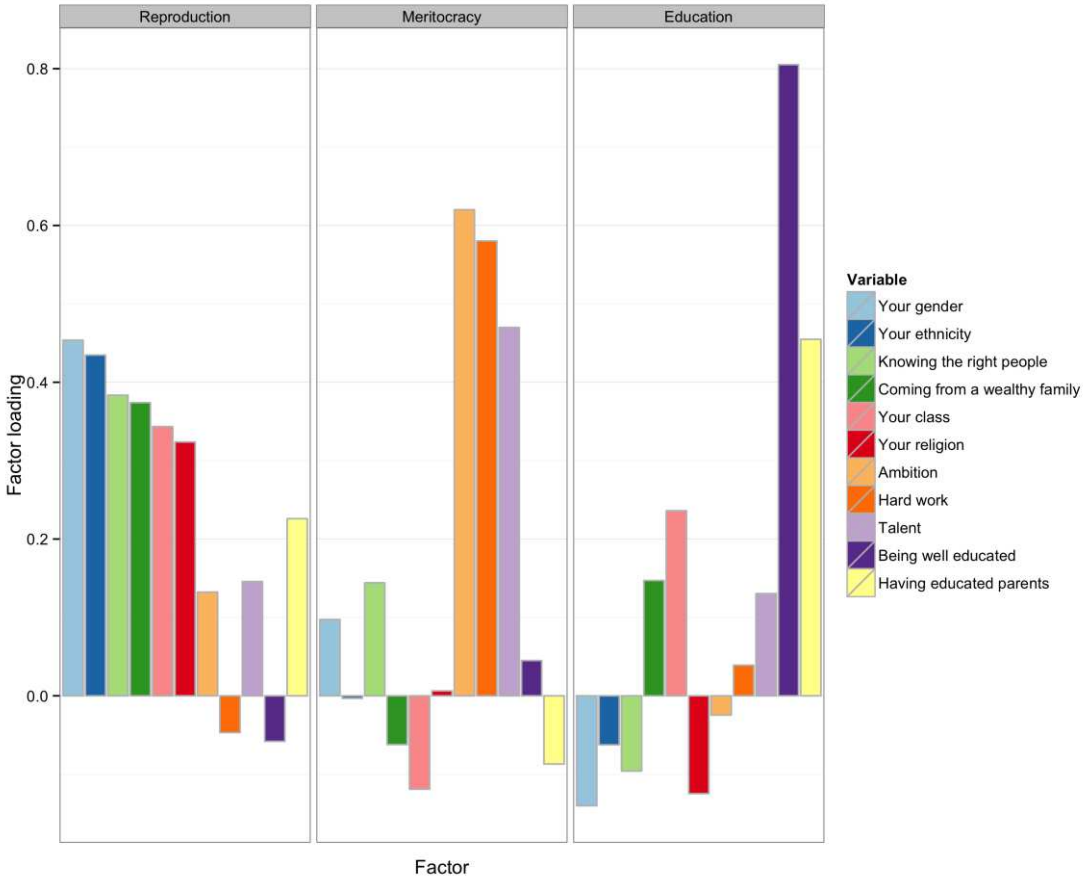
smaller part of contribution to GDP for which they are often lauded. In this way, it is closer to representing an ideal type image of the CCIs: probably young, highly-educated women in London whose parents had middle class jobs.

Figure 1 shows that the highest-rated attribute overall for getting ahead is 'hard work', rated 'essential' by 62% of the sample, and followed closely behind by 'ambition', rated 'essential' by 54% of the sample. At the opposite extreme is 'your religion', rated 'not important at all' by 67% of the sample, followed by 'your ethnicity' at 35% (and another 25% 'not very important'). In general, figure 1 indicates that attributes associated with a meritocratic account of the CCIs are more highly-regarded than attributes associated with an account consistent with reproduction, with one exception: 43% of the sample responded that it's essential to know the right people, with another 32% responding that it's very important. These results are broadly similar to those in other studies, indicating that our CCI respondents hold similar attitudes about inequality of opportunity in their sectors as people living in rich countries do about the societies in which they live. Whether this is in tension with the creative class thesis depends on one's reading of it. On the one hand, a naïve reading of the thesis suggests that the CCIs genuinely are more open, meritocratic and fair than the rest of society, so it's entirely appropriate that people within that sector are more likely to report that talent and hard work are essential than class and coming from a wealthy family. On the other, as section 1.2 shows, there are major systematic inequalities in the CCIs. Holding these attitudes suggests either our respondents are unaware of these inequalities, or that they believe that the processes leading to these inequalities are legitimate.

3.2: Principal components analysis

As with other studies using the same or similar questions, in order to identify latent variables representing broad attitudes towards getting ahead we use principal components analysis and conduct a varimax rotation, with a minimum eigenvector value of 1. This analysis retains 3 factors, with loadings shown in figure 2, and with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy of 0.85, providing support for the use of principal components analysis.

Figure 2: loading of each attitudinal variable onto three principal components



This analysis retains three distinctive factors, which we have labelled ‘reproduction’, ‘meritocracy’, and ‘education’. Each of the variables intuitively associated with a reproduction account – gender, ethnicity, knowing the right people, coming from a wealthy family, class, and religion – has a weighting on the ‘reproduction’ factor of over 0.3; the same is true for ambition, hard work, and talent on the ‘meritocracy’ factor. A third factor is dominated by ‘your education’, although ‘having well-educated parents’ is also prominent. Each item in the battery of questions has a loading of at least 0.3 onto exactly one factor.

The crucial difference between these results and those in the other papers described above is the fact that non-meritocratic variables are all in a single factor, while in other work these variables can be distinguished into ‘friends and family’ and ‘discrimination’. In other studies, it is consistent to hold that being well-connected is crucial for getting ahead while factors associated with more explicit discrimination, such as racism, are not salient. Instead, here, they are coherent in a single ‘reproduction’ factor. The other factors, ‘meritocracy’ and ‘education’, are consistent with what’s seen elsewhere.

This means there are three basic dimensions of attitudes for people working in the CCIs. People who believe that coming from a wealthy family is important tend to also believe that knowing the right people is important, as are class, gender, and ethnicity. We do not see the difference seen in other studies, in which people who believe that knowing the right people is essential do not necessarily believe that class, gender, and ethnicity are. In our data these attitudes tend to coincide. On this basis, discussing attitudes to success among people working

in the CCIs as distinguishing between people's belief in meritocracy, in social reproduction, and in education is validated by the analysis. The next stage is to identify who holds which of these attitudes.

3.3 Regression results

Is it the white men from middle class backgrounds who are most likely to believe that culture is meritocratic, and that social reproduction does not have a major role to play? In this section, we report the results of regressions with each factor as a dependent variable, to understand which variables most strongly predict attitudes. There are three parallel models, across which the independent variables are the same; the differences are the dependent variables.

We have chosen independent variables to understand whether people who are structurally advantaged in the CCIs are more likely to believe that the sector is meritocratic than those people who don't have those structural advantages, whether white men people from middle-class backgrounds who don't report disabilities are the most likely to believe that the processes that underpinned their success are basically fair. We also reflect on respondents' current position in the sector, measured through their longevity and through their current pay, to reflect on whether meritocratic attitudes are also held by those most able to make decisions in the sector. If those who determine how hiring works in the CCIs are also those who think that the current process is meritocratic, it is unlikely that this process will change, and patterns of inequality reflected in the sector will persist.

While tests for multicollinearity do not raise questions, with the only variance inflation factors over 10 deriving from the squared age term, the second dependent variable is left-skewed (see figure 2), with models predicting this variable showing deviations from a normal quantile-quantile plot, and with heteroskedastic residuals. Because of these issues, we use robust standard errors to account for the divergences from the assumptions of simple ordinary least squares regressions.

Table 3: regression results with column headings representing depending variables.

	Reproduction	Meritocracy	Education
Disabled	0.404***	-0.0721	0.0785
Ethnicity = white	-1.076***	0.21	-0.0368
Education = degree+	0.0908	-0.114	0.192**
Age	0.0536	-0.0528*	0.0124
Age squared	-0.000635	0.000489*	-0.00014
Gender (base = male)			
Female	0.239**	0.272***	0.103
Other	1.661	-0.307	0.331
Sector (base = advertising/marketing			
Architecture	-0.185	0.0319	0.417*
Crafts	-0.815*	0.526*	-0.477*
Deisgn	-0.246	0.334*	-0.311*
Film/TV/video/radio/photography	0.329	0.201	-0.267
IT	0.162	-0.298	-0.671**
Museums, galleries, libraries	-0.0947	-0.439**	0.138
NA/other	0.31	-0.0286	-0.0288
Peformance/music	0.522**	0.098	-0.203
Publishing	0.277	-0.243	0.277*
Visual arts	0.407*	0.075	-0.0855

Income (base >5k)			
5-10k	-0.133	0.137	0.184
10-20k	-0.415**	0.161	0.139
20-30k	-0.795***	0.187	0.157
30-50k	-1.027***	0.384***	0.122
50k+	-1.423***	0.681***	0.142
Parents' occupation (base = NS-SEC 3-7)			
Senior manager	-0.24	0.0544	-0.118
Traditional professional	-0.253*	0.262*	0.0278
Middle/junior manager	-0.195	0.0766	-0.116
Modern professional	-0.129	0.137	0.12
Time in sector (base >6mo)			
6mo-1yr	0.0864	-0.0689	0.0954
1-2 years	-0.0536	0.0145	0.0281
2-5 years	0.0421	0.0484	0.0916
5-10 years	-0.0316	-0.0394	0.0853
10 years+	-0.00314	0.0131	0.104
Region (base: East of England)			
West Midlands	-0.247	0.429*	0.0157
East Midlands	0.0742	0.0712	0.0879
North East	-0.252	0.103	-0.227
North West	0.00628	0.0215	-0.0296
Yorkshire	-0.0943	0.0614	-0.0541
South East	-0.0653	-0.0769	0.0479
London	0.352	-0.156	-0.0233
South West	0.122	0.0861	-0.036
Wales	-0.16	0.154	0.0327
Northern Ireland	-0.642	0.493*	-0.325
Scotland	-0.0824	0.0537	0.0254
Constant	-0.305	0.696	-0.599
N	1985	1985	1985
R squared	0.1715	0.0648	0.0516

Of the three models, by far the highest R squared value is from the model predicting the 'reproduction' factor. We follow by briefly summarising the results of each model, followed by reflection on the results across all three.

We first address the model predicting the 'education' factor. The only things associated with large coefficients[2] for this factor are respondents' own education levels, and the sector in which they work. People working in each of publishing and architecture hold particularly high scores on this factor. This is unsurprising, as in the case of architecture holding higher-level qualifications in the discipline is necessary in order to practice, while in publishing a large fraction of workers have postgraduate qualifications. Meanwhile, people working in IT are particularly unlikely to think education is important to getting ahead.

Other than those variables, though, no other is strongly associated with this factor; this is also reflected in the particularly low R-squared for this model.

The model predicting the 'meritocracy' factor varies by more of the independent variables, although several still have relatively small associations. Younger people have higher meritocracy scores, although the difference between an 18-year old and a 25-year old are smaller than those between a 48-year old and a 55-year old, as shown by the quadratic term. Women score higher on this scale than do men. Sector-wise, people in each of crafts and design have higher scores than the average, while people working in museums and galleries

[2] While these tables include stars for significance testing, this is misleading as the sample was not randomly selected from a population. Because of this, we focus mainly on effect sizes, highlighting differences between groups, rather than measures of statistical significance.

score lowest of all on this scale. Crucially, people's scores on the meritocracy factor increase as does their income, with very large differences between the highest and lowest parts of the scale. However, differences according to parents' occupations are smaller. People from traditional professional backgrounds score higher than others, but not wildly, and the differences between other parental backgrounds are marginal. Regional variation is fairly low. This model has a scarcely higher R-squared than that for education, implying that it is not the case that groups who are more systematically advantaged within the cultural sector are more likely to believe that the processes through which people get ahead are more legitimate compared with people who do not have those same systematic advantages.

The model predicting the 'reproduction' factor reflects that of the 'meritocracy' factor in some ways, but not all. Women score higher on this factor, as they do on meritocracy, and there is even less regional variation. The differences in income and parents' occupation reflect those for 'meritocracy'. However, while the differences for people from traditional professional backgrounds are roughly as negative as they were positive, the differences by one's income are even larger. However, while on the 'meritocracy' factor there were only small differences by disability and ethnicity, on 'reproduction' people with disabilities score moderately higher than people without disabilities, and white people score drastically lower than non-white people. Finally, occupational differences also vary: here, the groups with highest scores on "reproduction" are those working in performance and music, and in visual arts.

When we compare the three models, it is immediately clear that the starkest differences are found in the model predicting belief in social reproduction: this model has both the highest R-square and the largest coefficients. In some ways, this reflects the larger variance within this category: almost everyone thinks that hard work and talent are important in terms of getting ahead, with the crucial differences in the 'meritocracy' scale being between the highly-paid and everyone else. By contrast, mean scores on the items that make up the 'reproduction' scale are lower, and differences on these scores differ more consistently across groups of interest. While the crucial difference on the 'meritocracy' scale was about pay, the differences between the high- and low-paid on reproduction are twice the size of those on meritocracy, with additional differences on ethnicity and disability. Surprisingly, women score higher than men on both of these scales.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is the relatively small coefficients associated with respondents' backgrounds. The only significant differences between those people whose parents had non-managerial or professional jobs are those whose parents were traditional professionals. This is surprising for two reasons. The first is that one might expect that the magnitude of the differences in incomes between people of different class backgrounds, discussed above, would translate into differences between these groups in their recognition of how one becomes successful. The second is the moderate numbers of people reporting believing that 'coming from a wealthy family' and 'your class' are important to getting ahead. While these numbers are dwarfed by those for 'knowing the right people' and 'your talent', it seems here that the belief that class background is moderately important does not map on to

people from different class backgrounds having different attitudes towards what is important in getting ahead.

One concern with the models is that, due to the sampling method, they might disproportionately weight people who might not be classified as working in the CCIs in other sources of data: for example, people earning small amounts of money from their practice, and people whose main source of income is not their cultural and creative practice. In order to assess whether these results are driven by these groups of people, we also run the model excluding first people whose main source of income is not their cultural and creative practice, and second excluding people whose earnings from their cultural and creative practice are less than £5,000 pa. Making these changes leads to no estimates changing by as much as two standard errors.

More generally, these results make fairly grim reading for those who hope that inequalities in the cultural and creative industries might diminish. As shown in figure 1, almost everyone believes that hard work, talent, and ambition are essential to getting ahead, while class, gender, ethnicity, and coming from a wealthy family are not. People in better positions in the sector – those who are the most highly-paid, and most likely to recruit and elevate the next generation – believe most strongly in the meritocratic account of the sector, and are most sceptical of the role of social reproduction. Most strikingly, these attitudes persist whether people come from privileged backgrounds or not. It seems that once people have achieved success within the sector their attitudes towards how one achieves success are similar

regardless of background, and in spite of the substantial body of literature suggesting different experiences and barriers based on one's background.

4: Discussion and Conclusion

There is a straightforward positive reading of these results: The workers who responded to our survey think that the sector is more or less fair, with hard work being the most important thing for getting ahead, and the least important things being religion, gender, ethnicity and class. However, this account is complicated by asking who, exactly, thinks that these are the most and least important things respectively. The people in our survey data who are least likely to say that the process of getting ahead reflects more general social reproduction are highly-paid non-disabled white men.

We might answer the question 'what do cultural workers think about inequality?' by saying 'the same as everyone else'. This is a surprising finding given the Floridian (2002) narrative associated with the sectors supposedly more open, tolerant and meritocratic attitudes. It is also worth remarking on in the context of the discussions that opened this paper, whereby the sector is not 'the boys in the band' and 'the sisterhood', rather it is much as other parts of contemporary society in its attitude towards inequality. There are surprises – for example, survey respondents' attitudes towards the importance of knowing the right people and coming from a wealthy family load onto the same single factor as your ethnicity and your class, and women score higher on both the meritocracy and reproduction factors – but there is nothing here that indicates that the attitudes of our survey respondents are radically different from

those working in other sectors, or in none at all. This may imply that awareness of issues of access to the CCIs have not got through to this section of people who work in them, or at least to any greater extent than the general population. This might be considered surprising, given how high-profile the debate around issues of access were at the time of data collection. Alternatively, it may be that the issue was high-profile but survey respondents rejected accounts in which access to the sector was unequal; this may have felt necessary in order for people to justify their own success, preferring to feel that their success in the sector was due to their own individual traits rather than more general structural issues. This may be particularly relevant given that the people whose account is most in the direction of fairness are the people who are most handsomely rewarded by the sector. Indeed, this sits in the context in which there are two different dimensions through which cultural workers express their attitudes towards inequality – reproduction and meritocracy – and it is not just the case that the better-rewarded are more likely to ascribe success to talent, but that they are even more likely to deny the relationship between success and structural factors.

However, one surprising finding, given the recent academic focus on class (e.g. Allen *et al* 2017) and its impact on the CCIs, is the relatively weak relationship between attitudes towards inequality and class origin. Even if we account for the fact that self-reported descriptions of what kinds of jobs people's parents had is likely to weaken any true relationships, the differences are substantially smaller than for those variables relating to people's present conditions. This is surprising, as one might expect that survey respondents whose transition into working in the CCIs has been relatively smooth, via elite (expensive) institutions and the

ability to work for free for long periods without hardship, would be less likely to see structural barriers, whereas those people who have directly experienced them would be more likely to do so. This is, at least, the narrative one expects given public discussion of inequality in access to the sector. It also suggests the need for more work on the causal, rather than just the correlative, relationships between class inequalities and production, consumption and representation in CCIs (Allen *et al* 2017), so as to better explain, in our dataset, the relatively weak relationship between social class origin and attitudes.

While we must be cautious about generalisation, given these results, there is no reason to imagine that the situation we have discussed is likely to change. According to analysis of our survey respondents, access to the CCIs is still constrained by structural factors. These structural factors are predominantly recognised by those in the sector in precarious positions, whereas those in stronger positions are more likely to generate a meritocratic narrative of how people end up in their positions. It is difficult to see where the impetus for the situation to change will come from.

This paper has explored attitudes prevailing within cultural and creative occupations, with a focus on inequality. This focus aimed to respond both to media interest in inequality and cultural jobs, as well as extending current academic understandings of cultural and creative work. It offers important implications for future research. First, as the discussion has indicated, attitudes towards inequality in the sample are in keeping with broader social attitudes, suggesting cultural and creative labour is neither more nor less well disposed to social critique

than other occupations. Concurrently, this finding casts doubt on research that suggests these occupations exhibit *more* meritocratic attitudes than the rest of society. Both critical and 'creative class' claims for the uniqueness of cultural work should be treated more cautiously.

Second, the findings and discussion query the transformative potential of the cultural sector, given that it displays a belief in the meritocratic nature of cultural jobs and that belief is stronger in those with higher incomes. These attitudes are at odds with research on both the shape of the labour market for cultural work (O'Brien and Oakley 2015) and the composition of the cultural workforce (O'Brien *et al* r 2016).

Indeed, the evidence that the younger and the higher earning, respondents have higher 'meritocracy' scores means this political project may be further in doubt. This may add weight to those authors (e.g. McRobbie 2016) seeking to account for cultural and creative labour through forms of individualisation associated with theories of neoliberalism. More research work on connecting attitudes in a range of nations beyond the UK to broader theories of cultural work may prove fruitful here.

The positive reading, which is associated with the idea that people think the sector in which they work is fair and meritocratic, is most troubling, given the research that has revelled the structural and overwhelming inequalities within cultural work. As a result, we should expect more media attention to address questions of access, representation and consumption but there is little indication that these controversies will challenge the faith individual cultural workers have in the role that hard work and talent plays in getting in and getting on.

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