

Working class 'always less likely to get into acting and film making', says research

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Working class people have always been much less likely to find jobs in creative industries such as acting and film making, and there was no golden age of classless meritocracy, says a new study.

Three researchers used data drawn from Census records back to 1971 to challenge the common idea that it is harder now than in the past for working class people to get creative jobs.

They found that people whose parents had held the most privileged occupations, such as doctors, lawyers and senior management, were over four times more likely to be working as actors, musicians, artists, programme makers and in other creative roles than those from a working class background. This disparity did not significantly change across the period studied, from 1981 to 2011.

Employment data shows that the proportion of people from a working class background in creative jobs was higher in the past. But this was

because there were more working class people in the 1980s and not because it was easier for them to find creative jobs.

The researchers are Dr. Orian Brook and Dr. Dave O'Brien, of the University of Edinburgh, and Dr. Mark Taylor, University of Sheffield.

Dr. Brook told the British Sociological Association's annual conference in Glasgow today [Thursday 25 April 2019] that "people from working class origins have a dramatically lower probability of working in creative jobs that those from the privileged class – but this has not changed over time."

There was a widespread feeling that it was now harder than before for working class people to get into acting, with actors such as Ian McKellen, Julie Walters, Christopher Eccleston and David Morrissey expressing concern.

"But our research shows that creative occupations have always been characterised by over-representations of those from privileged social origins, with little evidence of a classless meritocracy."

Dr. Brook said that among the oldest people working in creative jobs, those born in the 1950s, 16% were working class and 12% from the highest managerial and professional background. Among the youngest studied, those born in the 1980s, the figures were 8% and 25% respectively.

"These changes demonstrate why core creative workers now in their fifties rightly see those now entering the occupations as being much more privileged than their peer group of the same age," said Dr. Brook.

"When they entered creative [jobs](#) many more of their colleagues were from working class backgrounds than the [young people](#) they see entering creative work now. But this mirrors broader

changes in society."

The changes reflected changes across the workforce as a whole over time, and were not because those from a working class background found it harder now than before to get a creative job – their chances were the same today as before.

"There is no evidence that this is a new phenomenon, and there was no golden age of classless access to creative employment," said Dr. Brook. "We have shown that cultural work, for the population born in the 1950s and after, has always been socially exclusive."

Education could reduce but not end the disparity – a graduate whose parents were in the highest managerial and professional class was nearly twice as likely to gain [creative work](#) as a graduate from working class origins.

- The researchers compared people from the highest socio-economic category – defined as 'higher managerial and professional occupations' – with those who parents worked in semi-routine occupations or routine occupations. They used the ONS Longitudinal Study which drew on national Census data. For more details of the project, see: createlondon.org/event/panic-paper/

Provided by British Sociological Association

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