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– James Graham, playwright and screenwriter

Culture will keep you fit and healthy. Culture will bring communities together. Culture will improve your education. This is the message from governments and arts organisations across the country; however, this book explains why we need to be cautious about culture.

Offering a powerful call to transform the cultural and creative industries, *Culture is bad for you* examines the intersections between race, class, and gender in the mechanisms of exclusion in cultural occupations. Exclusion from culture begins at an early age, the authors argue, and despite claims by cultural institutions and businesses to hire talented and hardworking individuals, women, people of colour, and those from working class backgrounds are systematically disbarred.

As long as the inequalities that characterise both workforce and audience remain unaddressed, the positive contribution culture makes to society can never be fully realised.

ORIAN BROOK is an AHRC Creative and Digital Economy Innovation Leadership Fellow at the University of Edinburgh • DAVE O'BRIEN is a Chancellor's Fellow in Cultural and Creative Industries at the University of Edinburgh • MARK TAYLOR is a Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Methods at the University of Sheffield

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BROOK, O'BRIEN,  
AND TAYLOR

CULTURE IS BAD FOR YOU

Manchester

'The missing link in any discussion of class and culture.  
All you ever wanted to know and then some.'

Kit de Waal, author of *My Name is Leon*

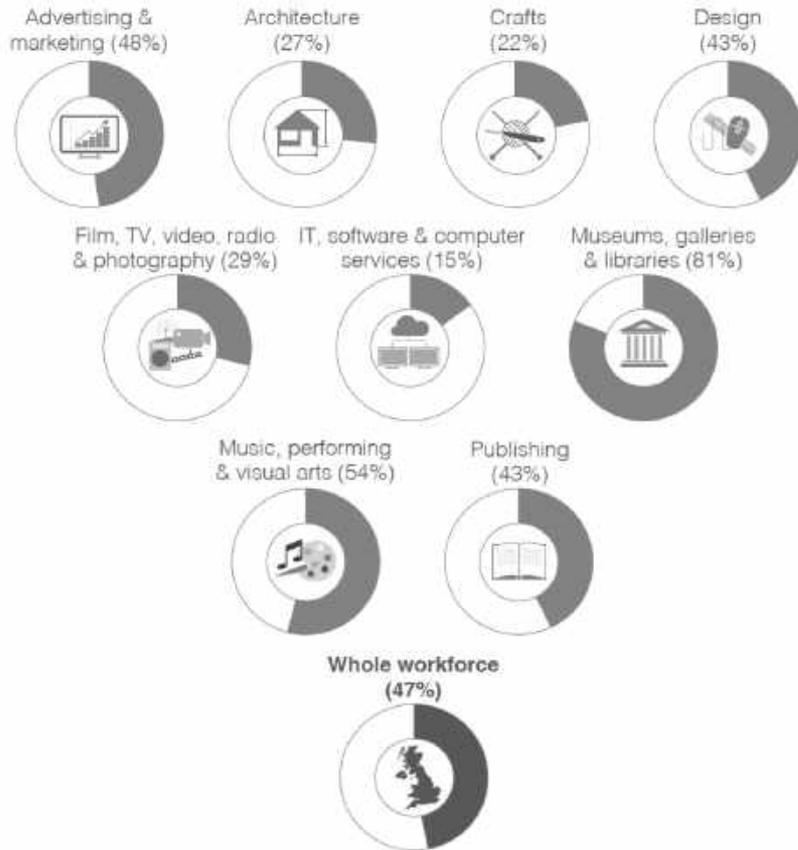
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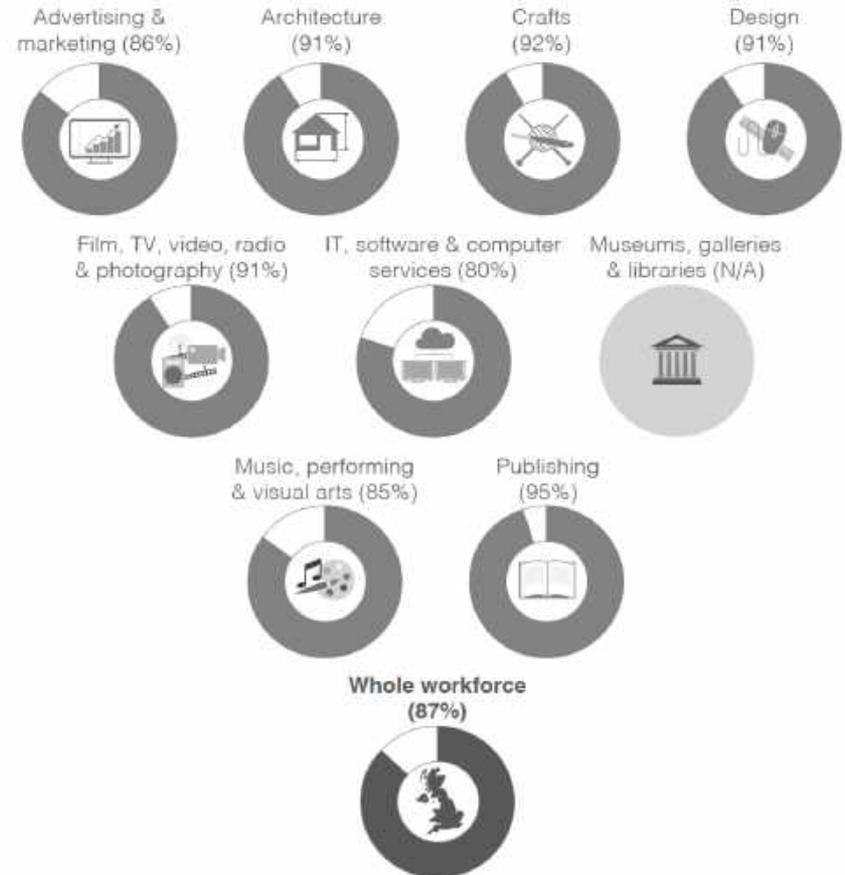
# What is the problem? Production



## Percentage women



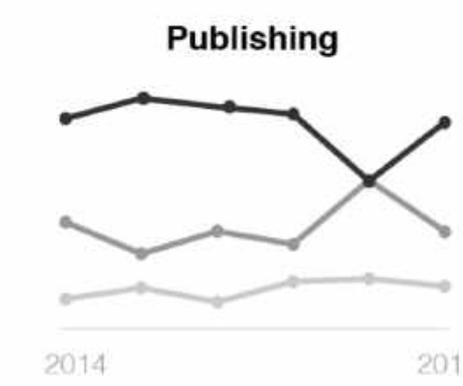
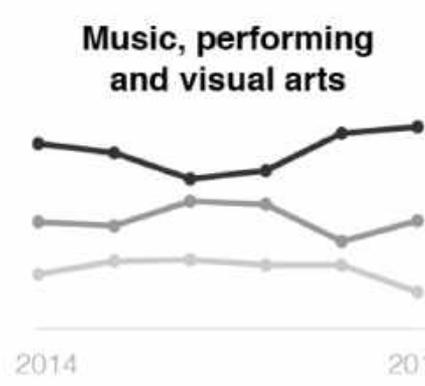
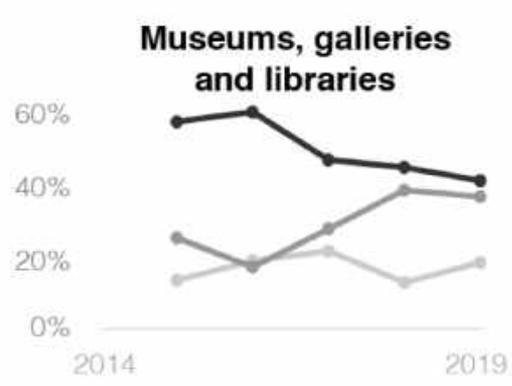
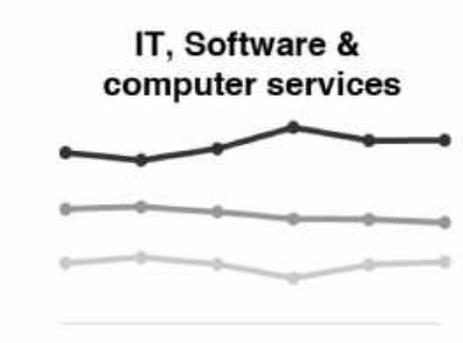
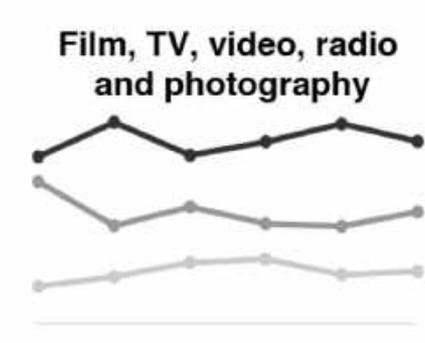
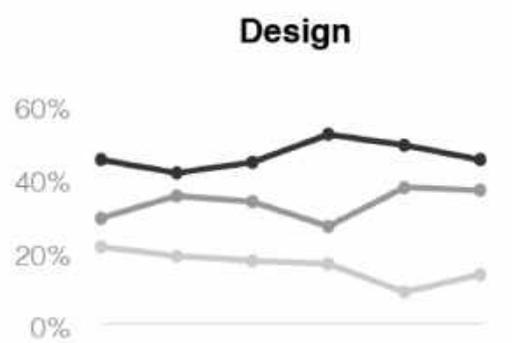
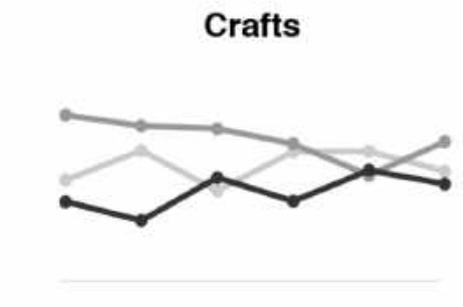
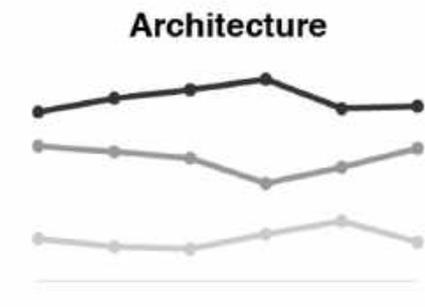
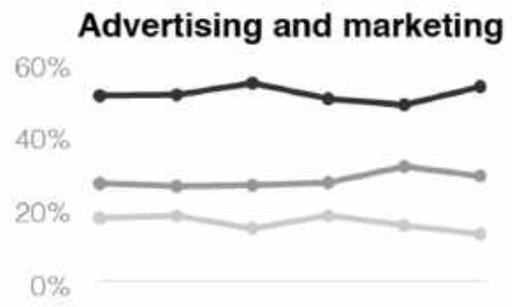
## Percentage white



Gender and race in the workforce (2020)



— Managerial/profesional    — Intermediate    — Working class



# ‘Everybody went to art classes as a child, didn’t they?’



- The importance of ‘cultural capital’ as a part of how we account for social inequalities
- Childhood cultural life is highly unequal
- Young elites given time and resources to explore arts and culture widely - omnivorousness
  - being open and able to articulate interest in a range of art and cultural forms
- People in creative jobs also more likely to have been encouraged as children

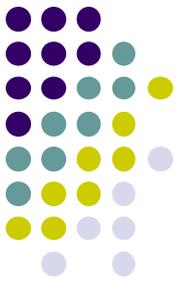


# When does inequality begin?

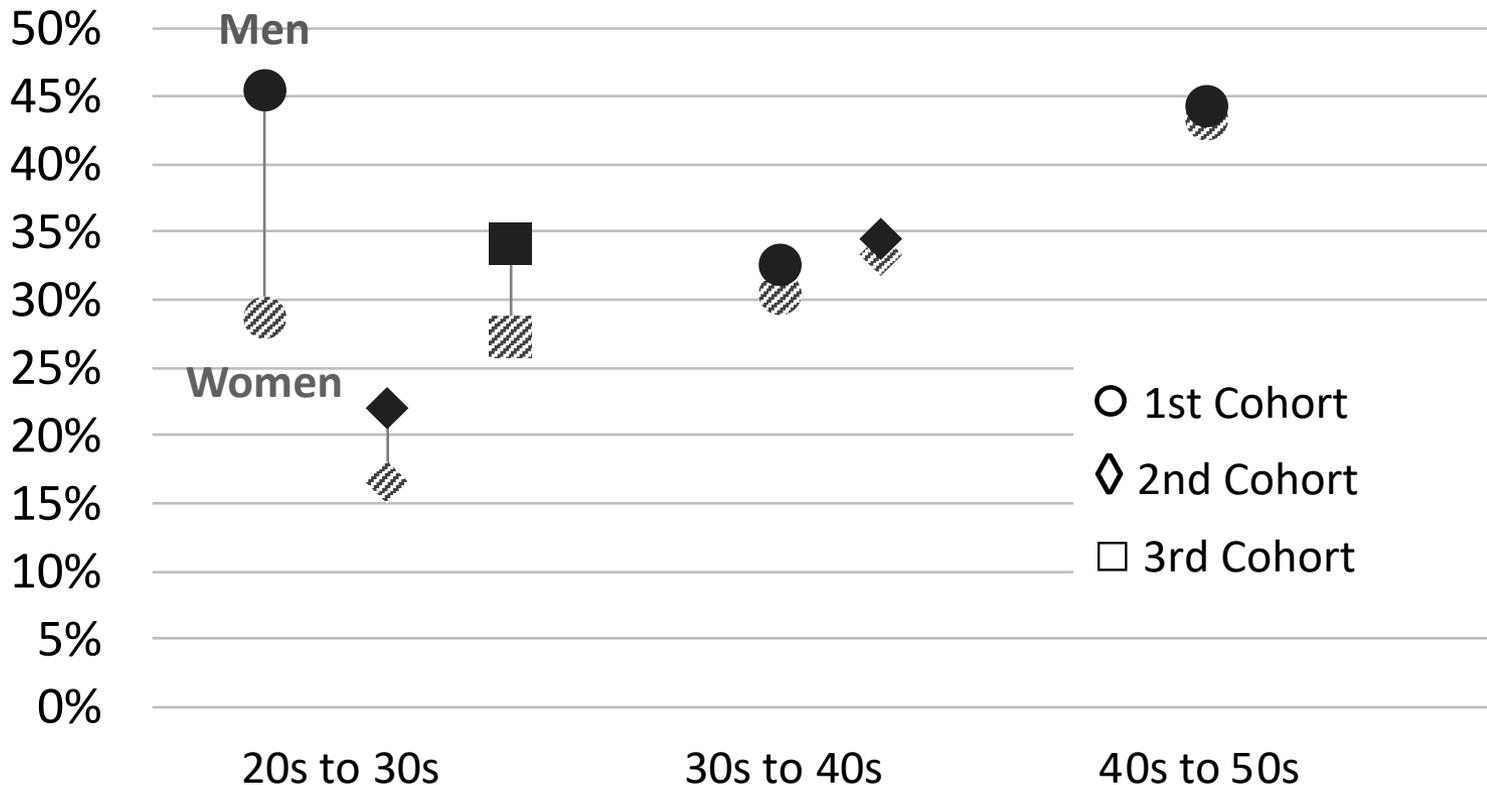
- *“Certainly, school would have been very encouraging. I was never short of colouring pencils and god knows what else. And art classes. I’m sure I went to art classes. Everybody went to art classes as a child, didn’t they? Something to do on a Saturday morning ... Didn’t we all? Didn’t we all do papier mache at some point in our lives? I did piano and horse riding. But yes, lots of books, lots of art materials, lots of trees, lots of animals. All of it, just all of it. **Very, very fortunate. Oh gosh, we went to the museum weekly ... An awful lot of things. I mean, I consider board games quite cultural given the right context. And there was always music playing. Yes, just the stuff you kind of imagine everybody else does as a child, but maybe they don’t. I don’t think so. I think it was more just a steady progression of influences and support, or nice comments or something. Just lots of small, steady progressions as opposed to one massive thing. There probably was one massive thing but it seems I had quite a busy childhood.**”*
- **Lydia, 20s, white woman middle class origin, artist**

# Women more likely to leave

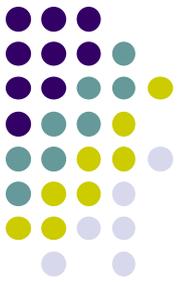
## ONS Longitudinal Study



**% same core creative occupation 10 years on**



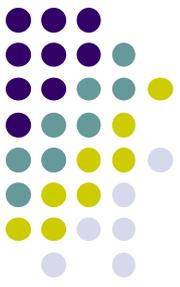
# Disappearing women



*“Most of the senior management are men, most of the junior curators are women. ... on the one hand, museums are very, very good at offering flexible working and long maternity leave and that makes a lot of people go "they're wonderful working environments for women then aren't they?" To me it begs the question, hang on, why is it only women requesting flexible working?”*

*“There seems to be this assumption that museum work, particularly at the lower levels is very feminised and you'll come in in your mid- to late twenties, you'll go off and have a baby in your early thirties and then you'll come back part-time or something. It's as if you're not quite taken as seriously after that. I don't personally, I don't have any children, ... but that's part of the reason why. I feel like there's this sense that a lot of women in museums they're just sort of middle class dabblers and they're not really serious about pursuing their career in the long run.”*

Stephanie, a working- class origin white woman 30s, museums



# Gender & Parenting

- Tendency to focus on childcare as key cause of women's absence misguided (Gill 2014)
  - Postfeminist 'unspeakability' of sexism
  - Implies easy fixes: affordable childcare and flexible working
- Association with motherhood affects how all women viewed as creative workers (Dent 2019)
  - We find it affects women regardless of parental status, and at all ages/career stages



- *“I got married and then I got pregnant ... they said to me, ‘Do you want to come back?’ I said, ‘Yes, I don’t think I can do the hours that I’ve been doing.’ ... So when I had a baby it was like ‘I can’t possibly do these hours.’ At that time it was like, ‘Well then, you can’t come back.’”*
- Jessica, white woman, 40s, working class origin, theatre



*“It was just, like, full on. I was the only person; I didn’t really have any staff. **It was just manic and I was back to working those hours that I was working before but just with small children** and the having put in place this variety of child minders and babysitters and neighbours and my husband. We juggled it because I really wanted to go back into it. **I didn’t feel at the time that it is a kind of thing that you could ask your employer – having been knocked back [previously] – I didn’t think it was fair going into [the theatre] to say, ‘Look I’ve got these small children and I can’t do 70- hour weeks.’** It just felt like, ‘Why am I even applying to them if I can’t do it.’ **This is the job. The job is this many hours ...** So I would say for the first two or three years, I was working the most unbelievable, crazy hours ... Then, I suddenly like, **I was just very, very tired and I really hadn’t seen my children for a couple of years.**”*

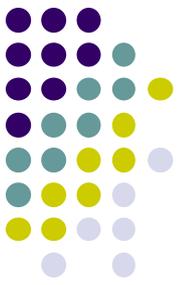
Jessica, white woman, 40s, working class origin, theatre



# Who is a creative worker?

- *“We went to Brazil, me and **all the female members of the cast and the crew we are all childless and single.** Everyone, **all the males that were out there all have kids, you know, because they have partners** who can do that while they continue to work in what is a lifestyle that doesn't really suit the stability that a child might need. ... Then ... a male artist might actually use that to shoot you down a wee bit. **You don't have children... I do.** You make a better artist but I have got children and you are lacking in that.”*
- *Jane, white woman, 40s, working class origin, music*

# The somatic norm (Puwar 2001, 2004, Meghji 2017)



- The Civil Service as credentialised and meritocratic....
- But expertise and objectivity inseparable from the ‘white, male, upper/middle class body’ (2001: 652)
- dissonance, disorientation, infantilisation and invisibility....or mimicry?
- ‘the racialised nature of white spaces, structures and language is not so easily visible to white people, precisely because whiteness is defined as the norm and the standard neutral space’ (Puwar, 2001: 656).
- The somatic norm for cultural workers is found in the open, liberal, meritocratic, and omnivorous cultural consumer

# “I was the only ...”



- *“When I go to industry events, I am still the only black person in the room and that, for me, is shocking. It's also very isolating. ...the only time that they'll come to me to discuss something to do with my race, not to ask me about the things that are my expertise. It's very, very frustrating.”*
- *“Any time there's a bit of funding to do with diversity, then suddenly we're flavour of the month. We don't hear from these people year on year and suddenly Oh yes, come and see us. Let's go for a drink,” Then the next bit of communication is, “Do you think we could have a letter of support.” It's not even a pretence at real partnership.”*
- Rachel, working class origin woman of colour, 50s, Arts & Music industry



## ...in a hostile environment

- *“I still feel like we're on an uneven playing field, I do. We're still having to almost justify our very existence. We've been up against a number of people and organisations who've felt that you're only getting the funding because you're black. That's absolutely not the case. At what point do people start thinking, "Well they might actually be good at what they do"? It feels like a continuing battle to be acknowledged for the quality of the work that we do.”*
- Rachel, working class origin woman of colour, 50s, Arts & Music industry

# Andrew's narrative



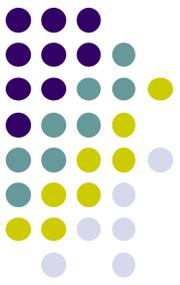
- *“If I remember correctly, I was the only person they saw, but I had something like a three-hour interview, with proper tasks, and, you know, all of that stuff. So, it wasn’t like they just let me walk in and sit at a desk. I left thinking I’d probably blown it, but then they did call me and offer me the job, so that was that.”*
- *“I knew almost nothing about [the art form], but I thought I would apply for that job and use my ignorance of it as the, sort of, central plank of my application. You know, if I can, through a position of ignorance, talk about [the art form] effectively, then perhaps we can persuade other people who are ignorant about it to understand it. Somehow, that worked.”*
- **Andrew, 40s, white man, middle class origins, publishing and performing arts**

# Inequality talk...



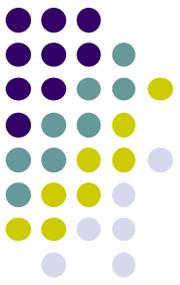
- *“Well, let’s start with gender, because that’s easy: Almost everyone who works in [my artform] is a woman, anyway. So, at least we don’t discriminate too badly against women generally, although, having said that, there is still, I think, a disproportionate... All the big famous choreographers are boys, and women do all the real work, and the men do the showy bits on the top....I suspect we are not the worst offender of any industry in the world, as far as that goes. I think I’ve got colleagues who would disagree with me quite fervently about that, but, you know, tricky one”*

# In the context of CCI's doing 'better'



- *“I feel like that question of diversity is a really important one, that I would happily grapple with for a long time, but I feel frustrated that I don’t have any answers for it. It was very interesting, doing a conference on it... a lot of the room was white, female, middle-aged, and, sort of, of a certain class, I suppose. It felt like everyone’s hearts were in the right places, and yet, we still didn’t know quite what to do about any of it. I want us to do something meaningful, and yet I don’t know what the thing might be. I just don’t know what the thing might be.”*

# Constraints on his ability to change the sector



- *“You put out an advert for a junior job at an arts organisation ... and you’ll be deluged with responses. There are hundreds of them. So, what are you going to do? **You’re going to pick the one with the best education, for the most part. You know, we can talk about diversity all we like, and we can mean it until our hearts are breaking, but in the end, when you’ve got one post to fill, you really don’t want to fuck it up.** That’s hard, and if we had infinite money and infinite time, you know, we could nurture more people from a less-qualified position.”*
- *“...we are forced, and I say this with some caution, **we are pretty much forced into maintaining the un-diverse status quo, because the damage has been done before we get to the point at which we could inflict any damage.** I dare say, we do our fair share of it.”*
- *“I’m just thinking about all the interviews I’ve done for placements or interns in the last four or five years, **I haven’t yet encountered one disabled person of any kind, as far as I know, applying for a job, so I have not been able to give them one.... Well, under the circumstances which I have actually experienced, it’s been entirely out of my hands.**”*

'If we truly believe that culture is a force for good in our communities and our lives, we need to urgently address our own shortcomings when it comes to inequality around who gets to experience, and who gets to make, art in this country. The data and testimonies in this important book are just the ammunition we need.'

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