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Eyes on the Prize: Young Women, 'Flexible Ambition' and the Creative Industries

Contemporary vocational advice discourses encourage workers towards flexibility and individualism. To be the successful subjects of late modernity they are expected to be ambitious but without fixed direction; to be open to the serendipitous and unforeseen employment and education opportunities that present themselves; and to break with the conventional impulses associated with traditional communities (of class, ethnicity etc). This paper disputes the observations of theorists like Ulrich Beck on the receding influence of class patterns on lives and biographical potentials in contemporary society. It draws on the life history narratives of three young women from diverse backgrounds each of whom have been employed in creative industries. It charts the subtle ways in which they are evaluated as worthy or unworthy, how unequal access to forms of social and cultural capital crucially constrains their life chances.