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An addictive environment: New Zealand film production workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour

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Abstract
This article uses the theoretical framework provided by social models of addiction to interpret freelance film production workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour. The article suggests that the structural conditions of project-based labour within the film industry create a subjective experience in which the financial, creative, social and emotional rewards of employment are interspersed with the anxieties of repeated unemployment. The stark contrast between highly gratifying periods in work and highly aversive periods in between work produces an addictive psycho-social dynamic that repeatedly draws freelance production workers back into the industry. This process can only be fully understood by considering the relationship between employment conditions and subjective experiences as an integrated whole. The development of freelance film production workers' addictive relationships with the film industry is illustrated using qualitative data from in-depth interviews with 11 male and 10 female New Zealand freelance film production workers.

Keywords
addictive environment, film industry, project-based labour, subjective experiences

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Introduction

Academic interest in the various creative industries has increased markedly over the last two decades (see Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; McKinlay and Smith, 2009; Townley et al., 2009 for overviews). Research to date has pursued two main strands. First, macro-level research, which has sought to delineate and interpret the unique labour market and organizational characteristics of this economic sector (e.g. Davis and Scase, 2000; Ebbers and Wijnberg, 2009, 2010; Ferriani et al., 2009; Lampel et al., 2006). Second, more micro-level studies of the creative labour force, which have primarily concentrated on the strategies that freelance workers use to gain and maintain employment within a highly competitive, project-based labour market (e.g. Blair et al., 2001; Jones and Defillippi, 1996; Storey et al., 2005). As Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) note, there have been relatively few studies investigating the subjective experiences of freelance workers within the creative industries. Those studies that do exist consistently find that workers strongly dislike the financial insecurity, low wages, competitiveness and general unpredictability of project-based work and experience considerable distress and anxiety as a result of these working conditions (Dex et al., 2000; Ertel et al., 2005; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008; Paterson, 2001). These findings have led researchers like Ursell (2000, 2006) to investigate workers' motives for entering and, equally importantly, remaining, within industries that are renowned for their poor working conditions. Typical explanations have highlighted the intrinsic rewards of self-actualization and creative labour (e.g. Alvarez and Svejenova, 2002; Caves, 2000), the link between creative work and self-identity (Bain, 2005; Svejenova, 2005) and the social rewards deriving from work in high prestige 'glamour' industries (Nixon and Crew, 2004).

The extant research into creative workers' subjective experiences provides a range of valuable insights into their lives. However, it has tended to construct a fairly sharp dichotomy between the aversive extrinsic conditions of insecure, project-based labour and the intrinsic rewards of creative work. In consequence, creative workers are sometimes portrayed as somehow colluding with their own exploitation by freely choosing to remain within the creative industries because the actual or longed for, intrinsic rewards outweigh the extrinsic disadvantages. Gill and Pratt (2008) suggest that such explanations are problematic because they polarize the intrinsic and extrinsic features of the work environment rather than producing an integrated understanding of the ways in which creative workers experience the connections between different features of their work. They therefore risk oversimplifying creative workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour.

This article seeks to develop the insights provided by previous research by using the concept of addiction as a theoretical framework for understanding experienced freelance film production workers' subjective experiences of working within the New Zealand film industry. We suggest that this framework helps explain the reciprocal interplay between the intrinsic rewards of creative labour and the aversive features of project-based employment and illuminates the process by which freelance workers become increasingly attached to the film industry. The framework is derived from the language and concepts used by our respondents during their interviews, and encapsulates our attempt to explicate their subjective experiences of project-based labour.

The film industry

Filmmaking is essentially a collective creative enterprise that has the end goal of producing a commercially viable product. The financial costs and risks of filmmaking are considerable and economic considerations are a key driver of activity within the industry. The film industry in most countries utilises a system of project-based network organization in which diverse teams of highly skilled individuals are assembled for limited periods of time and disbanded once their part in a production is completed. The organization producing a film therefore consists of a range of different companies, sub-contractors and freelancers who interact for brief, highly intensive periods of work. The smooth functioning of the system is dependent on clear and well-established status hierarchies and organizational roles and strong social networks within the industry (Bechky, 2006). These facilitate the formation of relatively stable semi-permanent work groups (Daskalaki, 2010) comprised of individuals who have collaborated on a range of projects and share collective memories, skills and norms. Collectively these groups form 'latent organizations' that can reassemble into smoothly functioning film units at short notice (Ebbers and Wijnberg, 2009; Starkey et al., 2000).

From a purely economic perspective, network-based project organization is well suited to the uncertainties of filmmaking as it limits entrepreneurs' fiscal liabilities towards the labour force. The entirely project-based structure of the contemporary film industry does, however, have other organizational ramifications that are more problematic. O'Mahoney and Bechky (2006) point out that employers who use this system have few incentives to train contract workers or hire people who lack the relevant skills and experience. This tendency is exacerbated within the film industry by the lack of formal training opportunities, a strong reliance on experiential learning and the very high reputational and financial cost of mistakes. Davenport (2006) suggests that this has resulted in a static industry that seeks to mitigate uncertainty by relying heavily on re-using past strategies, systems and labour to ensure successful outcomes. The common perception of project-based film organizations as more flexible, innovative and highly skilled than traditional organizations may therefore be a chimera.

Project-based organizations only provide workers with short-term employment. In consequence, freelance film production workers expend considerable time and energy cultivating the intertwined social and professional networks that will enable them to secure future employment (Antcliff et al., 2007; Blair et al., 2001; Jones, 1996). Networking and reputation maintenance are key mechanisms for gaining and keeping employment within an industry that relies almost exclusively on personal contacts and recommendations when allocating work. Networking is thus an act of self-enterprise, which is essential to freelancers' economic survival (Blair, 2001; Smith, 2010).

Successful freelance film workers belong to both open and closed networks (Antcliff et al., 2007). Open network contacts are loose acquaintances that may be contacted or recommended to others when searching for work. Sharing open network contacts carries expectations of reciprocity but is perceived as a relatively weak obligation. In contrast, closed or project networks comprise people who have worked together previously and actively seek to re-create themselves as project teams whenever possible. Closed networks enhance employment opportunities and provide a degree of collective financial

and emotional security within a highly individualistic and competitive industry (Bauman, 2002; Delmestri et al., 2005). There is often a high degree of reciprocity between network members and strong levels of mutual trust that have been forged over time. There is also a sense of collective performance obligation, with network members striving to enhance both their own reputations and those of their teams (Patterson, 2010). The strong emphasis on social conformity and reputation maintenance within networks constitutes a mechanism by which the film workforce regulates its own behaviour in accordance with the exigencies of a project-based labour market. Social relationships between workers help to maintain and reinforce industry norms and working practises even when these are deleterious to the economic and psychological well-being of the workforce. For example, freelancers may be pressured by other network members to lower their individual rates in order to ensure the team's collective employment or to work excessive hours in order to maintain the network's collective reputation (Ebbers and Wijnberg, 2009).

While successful freelancers have a range of strategies for securing employment, they work within an industry context that is becoming increasingly adverse for most workers (Christopherson, 2008). In consequence, most freelance film production workers experience recurrent periods of unemployment during their careers. While many researchers have acknowledged the profound effects that the uncertainties of project-based labour have on freelance film production workers' subjective experiences and actions, there is little, or no, extant research that investigates workers' experiences of recurrent unemployment. In order to fully understand freelance film workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour it is important to recognize that for freelancers themselves periods in work and time between contracts constitute divergent aspects of an overall career gestalt. Producing a complete account of freelance film production workers' personal experiences of project-based labour therefore necessitates investigating the interplay between the structural and psychological components of both environments. The concept of addiction provides a theoretical framework for this task.

Social models of addiction

The modern idea of addiction first emerged in the 1880s and referred to people who, despite repeatedly attempting to remain sober, returned habitually to inebriation (Valderde, 1998). In recent years the concept of addiction has been broadened from its original focus on alcohol or drug dependence and is commonly used to describe habitual and excessive consumption in areas as diverse as gambling, shopping, Internet use and work involvement. This broader use of addiction has been criticized both for trivializing the effects of serious substance addictions and for pathologizing normal behaviour (Keane, 2002; Valderde, 1998). While these criticisms have some validity, we suggest that, used carefully, social models of addiction can provide a useful explanatory framework without pathologizing essentially normal behaviours.

Social models of addiction conceptualize addiction as a way of being in, and engaging with, the social world (Yates and Mallock, 2010). Within these models the key issue is not the substance being consumed, or the object of the addiction, but the patterns of relationships that the addicted person has with both the addictive object and the rest of their world. Addiction is conceptualized as the progressive intensification of the

addicted individual's relationship with the addictive object or activity with concomitant deterioration of other key relationships within their social world (Adams, 2008). Over time, the addicted person becomes ever more tightly attached to the addictive object or activity and increasingly disconnected from other relationships or activities. In consequence, the ways in which addicted individuals' experience and plan their lives and relate to other people and objects are increasingly shaped by their addictions, which eventually become the key organizing principle of their world (Molbak, 2010).

Both the agency of the addicted individual and the ways in which addictive behaviour patterns are shaped by the wider social, cultural and economic contexts within which people are embedded are emphasized by social models (Alexander, 2008; Heyman, 2009). A recurrent theme within this literature is that addictive behaviour patterns are escalating because the fiscal imperatives of global free-market economies undermine and fragment the complex social bonds that enable healthy human life, replacing them with increasingly competitive and individualized social structures. Deprived of the range of social bonds and activities necessary for healthy existence, people try and adapt to the resultant experiences of social isolation and alienation by investing the addictive object or activity with increased salience. While addiction necessarily involves individual agency and choice, the emotions and decisions that create addictive behaviour patterns occur within, and are influenced by, complex and multilayered social, cultural and economic contexts that the individual worker has limited power to alter.

Adams (2008) develops a stage model of addiction that provides a useful heuristic for interpreting freelance film workers' relationships with the film industry. He suggests that during the pre-addiction stage the individual is linked to an array of relationships, activities, physical objects and concepts. For example, the person might have ties with their family of origin, partner, children, friends, hobbies, past memories and future goals. In the case of a freelance film worker, employment in the film industry and self-concept as a creative individual form a key part of these connections but are balanced by connections to an assortment of other objects. While the range and intensity of an individual's different linkages will vary over time the non-addicted film worker remains embedded in, and invested in, a network of interconnecting relationships.

As the film worker develops an increasingly addictive relationship with the industry both the quality and quantity of other relationships is diminished. At this point the work environment meets a variety of emotional needs that were previously met through a range of other connections. For example, friendship links with people outside the workplace weaken and friendship needs are met predominately through work. The person's system of connections is now more vulnerable because it is heavily invested in the one key relationship with the film industry. However, while work is available, the system is capable of meeting the addicted individual's needs across a range of areas and the intense focus on work is likely to be perceived as rewarding and valuable.

These rewards are abruptly withdrawn during the periods between contracts. The freelancer remains heavily invested in and dependent on work to fulfil a range of psychosocial needs and has few other resources when access to the work environment is curtailed. The disruption of the work relationship therefore generates considerable distress and the main focus of attention becomes recapturing the key relationship with the

work environment. In consequence, periods between projects tend to intensify rather than diminish the freelance film worker's psychological involvement with the industry.

Many work situations contain potentially addictive features; however, relatively few generate addictive behaviour patterns that are as intense as those found within the film industry and other, similarly structured, creative industries. We suggest that two key features of project-based work within the film industry make this environment exceptionally well suited to the development of addictive relationships with work by the film labour force. First, the large oversupply of labour and strong competition for work ensures that workers must commit wholeheartedly to any project in order to gain and retain work. Second, the project-based organization of the industry ensures that, while in work, people are intensively involved with an intrinsically rewarding, highly social enterprise to the exclusion of nearly all other connections but are then disengaged from active participation with the industry between projects. Film workers, therefore, tend to oscillate between the emotional highs of work and the emotional depths of unemployment more frequently than workers in other industries. Consequently, workers' self-identity as creative individuals becomes linked to their ability to gain employment and is strong while they are in work and less secure when they are between contracts. Taken together, these conditions create an addictive psycho-social dynamic that repeatedly draws freelance workers back into the industry. This dynamic can only be fully understood by considering film production workers' subjective experiences of both work and unemployment as complementary aspects of an integrated whole.

Research design

The New Zealand film industry

The New Zealand film industry is centred in the capital city of Wellington and is a small player in a very competitive global market. Financially, the industry is heavily dependent on gaining overseas funding from Hollywood corporations and is continually competing with other countries for highly mobile offshore capital. The industry's primary selling points are its geographical uniqueness, technological expertise and a ready supply of cheap and experienced labour. The industry is non-unionized with strong resistance to increased unionization coming from international film financiers, local film producers and the New Zealand government.

Government policy concerning the industry is framed primarily in economic terms (Jones and Smith, 2005; Kaino, 2007; Prince, 2010). The industry is seen as contributing directly to the economy through the tax and revenue windfalls garnered when big-budget, internationally-financed films are made using New Zealand locations, crew and technology, and indirectly through the increased international profile of New Zealand that benefits other key industries such as tourism. This perspective has enabled successive governments to side-step issues concerning the quality of working life within the New Zealand film industry and to enact labour laws that entrench the marginal employment status of freelance film workers as self-employed contractors (Clark, 2010). Current legislation means that benefits such as holiday pay, sick pay, superannuation and the right to bargain collectively are unavailable to self-employed film workers.

The local industry is dominated by a few key local players with established reputations who have proven ability to secure international financing. The small size of the industry ensures that social networks and 'latent organizations' within the industry are tight knit and limited in number. The maintenance of strong collaborative relationships and a good personal and professional reputation is therefore essential to securing repeat employment. Work in film-related areas – such as corporate communications or corporate film production – is limited, increasing workers' reliance on film contracts and heightening the financial and psychological problems of insecure, project-based employment.

This research took place in Wellington in 2008. Freelance film production work was difficult to obtain during this period as several high profile, Hollywood financed, productions such as *Lord of the Rings* had fairly recently finished and new large scale international productions such as *The Hobbit* were still in the negotiation stage. The small size of the New Zealand film industry makes it particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in the availability of work and means that individual films can make a considerable difference to labour market conditions. The limited availability of employment at the time that this research took place may have influenced respondents' accounts by making the negative aspects of freelance project-based labour more salient than they would have been if the research had taken place when the local industry was more buoyant. While the specific locale of the Wellington film industry did not create an entirely different social milieu to other film industries, locating this research within its specific geographical and temporal context helps situate the interaction between structural conditions and respondents' subjective experiences.

Respondents

Respondents were accessed through the first author's personal connections with industry insiders. These contacts then facilitated access to a wider group through their personal and professional networks. The 21 respondents were selected to provide a gender-balanced and diverse mix of experienced film production workers within the Wellington film industry. Fourteen respondents were working on a film project at the time of their interview and one was between contracts. Six production workers who had recently left the industry were included to provide insights into the triggers for, and difficulties of, leaving the industry (see Table 1 for respondent details).

Methodological framework

The research utilised interpretative phenomenological analysis as a guiding methodological framework (Brocki and Wearden, 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Essentially, this approach to qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret the experiential world of participants through careful and sympathetic analysis of events and issues that respondents find personally significant. Interpretative phenomenological analysis has commonalities with other social constructionist approaches to qualitative research but places greater emphasis on exploring respondents' personal experiences than some approaches. While some research within this tradition is idiographic (e.g. Shinebourne and Smith, 2009), most research focuses on shared experience and aims

Table 1 Respondent details

Gender	Age	Marital status	Years in industry	Work areas
Male = 11	Mid 30s–50+	8 partnered 3 single 6 with dependent children 3 childless	7–30 years 8 still in industry, 3 left within past year	Model making, special effects, art dept, dialogue coach, design engineer, assistant director, director
Female = 10	Mid 20s–50	7 partnered 3 single 4 with dependent children 6 childless	3–20 years 7 still in industry, 3 left within past year	Makeup, sculptor, designer, producer, casting supervisor, production manager, transport coordinator

to capture commonalities in respondents' experiences of a specific phenomenon. The key aim of most researchers is to identify and interpret the common patterns in respondents' ways of thinking and feeling about, and making sense of, personally significant social contexts. Within this research the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis as a methodological framework shaped both the interview questions and the data analysis.

Interviews

Respondents were interviewed individually by the first author in non-work locations. All interviews lasted over an hour with several exceeding two hours. Interviews were loosely structured and were designed to explore respondents' subjective experiences of project-based work. The interview guide covered a variety of topics including entry into the industry, working conditions, time without work, networking and social relationships, intrinsic rewards of filmmaking, work-life balance, training and career development, gender issues and exit from the industry. Interviews were taped and then transcribed by the first author.

The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis influenced the interview questions by directing our attention as researchers towards greater exploration of the emotions and meanings associated with the topics in the interview. To give an example, one of the earliest interview questions asked respondents to describe how they entered the industry. The majority of respondents described their entry as resulting from a mixture of chance events and connections with key people rather than from a conscious decision to seek out a career in the film industry. At this point, the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis as a methodological framework helped sensitize us towards asking further questions about respondents' initial feelings about the industry, the ways in which those feelings had changed and about the meanings they attached to these changes. The conceptual framework we used thus helped us to consciously shape the interview questions towards the exploration of respondents' emotional responses to their work and to their explanations of these experiences.

Analysis

The methodological framework also shaped our analysis of the data. Many analytic strategies in qualitative research concentrate entirely on the thematic dimension of the analysis and neglect the expressive or emotional content of the data. Use of interpretative phenomenological analysis helped us to pay more careful attention to the emotional tone of the transcripts and to consciously consider the ways in which meaning was conveyed not just by what participants said but by the ways in which they expressed themselves.

The transcripts were each read several times by both authors and a three stage analysis of the data was carried out. In the first stage each transcript was examined individually to identify key themes for that respondent. This involved assessing both the amount of interview space devoted to an issue and the emotional intensity associated with a specific theme. Where possible, respondents own language was used to develop the key themes for that person. In the second stage, the key themes and emotional tone of different respondents' accounts were compared and contrasted in order to identify commonalities or discrepancies between transcripts. Finally, the emergent themes from the entire data set were re-appraised to interpret the relationship between the structural conditions of project-based labour within the Wellington film industry and respondents' subjective experiences of work.

Findings

Becoming addicted

The addiction literature suggests that addictive objects and activities have three key properties that shape the addicted person's attachment to them (Adams, 2008). First, addictive objects and activities initially supply strong emotional rewards with few obvious disadvantages. Second, addictive objects have characteristics that facilitate the rapid intensification of the addictive connection. This may be through physical addiction or through a range of cultural mechanisms such as social reinforcement for addictive behaviours. Finally, addictive objects can trigger rapid disconnections from other key relationships, which quickly intensifies the addicted person's relationship with the addictive object or activity.

Respondents' accounts of their relationship with the film industry suggest that film work possesses many of the characteristics necessary for the rapid establishment of an addictive relationship. Most respondents described their relationship with the film industry in intense and emotionally-charged language. For many, working in the industry was a way of life rather than a job and their sense of self was strongly invested in their work. Despite this, all respondents were highly ambivalent about filmmaking, with four respondents using the term addiction to describe their relationship with the industry and another 13 describing themselves as feeling somehow compelled to repeatedly return to a work environment that they saw as damaging their financial, physical and emotional well-being.

Fourteen of the 21 respondents described their first jobs in the industry as resulting from chance encounters rather than a conscious decision to enter the film industry. For many respondents these early experiences were highly rewarding and the negative aspects of the industry were discounted. Sam,[1] a freelance special effects technician in his mid-30s with 14 years industry experience explained:

> I had a diploma in graphic design and he said you should speak to X he does film. I'd never even heard of film happening in New Zealand. So for about three months I just went in there – it was probably one of my best work experiences because I didn't have anything to prove. I wasn't being paid and I just had a go at anything. I was so taken with the fact – wow, I'm working on a movie, wow there's X that I wasn't really present to the money.

Similar feelings of excitement were recounted by Deborah, a personal assistant in her 40s who had just left the industry after nearly 20 years:

> I was quite unbearable to share a house with – I'd be this sycophant at work and then come home and have nothing left – but of course they [flatmates] loved the stories – what was going to happen, who turned up, all these famous people rocking up for a chat. Yeah it was fun. Those were the good things I guess – but you know I was in such a place of exhaustion that my opportunities for learning were really low.

Several respondents also recalled being unconcerned by their rapid disconnection from other key relationships during their early days in the industry. Sally, a line producer in her 40s described her early years in the industry by remarking:

> I was 18 and I just thought it was a glamorous life and amazing and I loved it. It always came first and a lot of things suffered in those early days, relationships, family, friends, everything was put on hold until the job was finished. In the early days it never concerned me to miss out on those things, but it does now.

Respondents' portrayals of their current connection with the film industry were noticeably different, often conveying the impression of entrapment within an intense and difficult relationship. Sam described his current feelings towards the industry by commenting:

> The film industry is kind of like an addiction in a lot of ways, because when you are on a job you're totally consumed by it. Then as soon as it's over you're like – 'Oh my God when is the next one going to be on'. You hear Peter is working on this or that this project is coming to New Zealand – 'oh really – oh wow – oh cool', and you kind of get your hopes up again and that keeps you going until such time as you hear that it's not.

Similar comments were made by Hillary, an experienced producer in her late 30s with 12 years industry experience:

> I'm truly at the mercy of events that come up. And in a way to be let go would be a total relief, you know permission to be free to find other options. But while I still get work I'm quite

> addicted . . . make hay while the sun shines, it's that kind of mentality. I constantly think about how to get out. But because all my hours are consumed trying to survive at work I can't see how to get out. It's a love/hate relationship.

Most freelancers interviewed in this research described a serendipitous entry into an industry that was initially perceived as glamorous and exciting. During these early years the pressures of film work were either discounted or seen as a relatively small price to pay for the social and creative rewards on offer. To use the terminology of addiction, respondents initially experienced only the highs of film work and ignored the adverse aspects of the industry. After several years as freelancers the allure of the industry had diminished for most respondents. While all respondents emphasized the continuing creative rewards of their work, they also highlighted the practical and emotional problems of project-based employment. As in many addictive relationships, the focus of respondents' emotional relationships with the industry had shifted from enjoying the relatively uncomplicated high of the early years towards a more complex relationship in which the rewards of creative labour were offset by the recurrent emotional lows created by the repeated withdrawal of work.

The creative high

In order for addictive relationships to develop addictive objects or activities need to offer psychological rewards that the addicted person cannot obtain elsewhere. For respondents in this study the main attraction of film work was the lure of collective creative labour. All respondents cited opportunities to work creatively themselves and to collaborate with like-minded others on joint creative projects as the primary rewards of film work. This applied to both those respondents who were employed in clearly artistic occupations and those in less obviously creative positions. According to Ned, an experienced model maker who had recently left the industry after 15 years:

> Most of the people involved in the film industry are artistic, that's why they are there. It's hard work and unglamorous most of the time, nevertheless it's a creative process and you will find that most of the people involved, whether they are lighting or gaffers or grips, model makers or special effects, whatever, they are still reasonably artistic people.

The psychological rewards of collective creativity were clearly described by Alan, an art department head in his 30s with 10 years industry experience:

> From an artistic point of view there is a definite energy and pace that I quite like. From the madness and chaos you can actually come up with some incredible work and you couldn't have contrived it outside of that crazy environment. It's a collaborative energy that is created by pressure, by unreasonable deadlines and last minute changes.

Respondents in less obviously creative roles expressed similar sentiments. Jane, a transport coordinator in her 30s explained:

> Transport gets really badly done by – you don't get treated as a priority yet everybody relies on them. The lack of organization is just unbelievable and the demands on you are huge because if you don't get your cast member up there for shooting on time you know everybody's waiting for you. But I do actually enjoy it – it's such an unusual and cool thing to be part of and it is slightly addictive that whole creative environment.

The creative rewards of filmmaking came at a considerable cost to participants' health and non-work relationships. All respondents described working on a film as an all consuming process that left them with no time or energy for other relationships. Susan, an art department assistant in her 30s recounted her experiences of working on the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy:

> Rings was exceptional – like a large family creating this masterpiece together. But Rings just about crippled everyone – most people were unwell or looked 10 years older at the end of it. The hours were just so huge and you live and breathe with each other – you go on location and there are four of you to a room and you're up at three in the morning for work and home at 11 at night. I couldn't do the hours now – I was turning 30 when we finished – it's crazy – I should still feel young and vibrant and I feel old. It just pushes you more than anything else.

The highly charged, emotionally and intellectually stimulating context of working on a project was often followed by a withdrawal phase when respondents were unemployed, physically and emotionally exhausted, socially isolated and unclear about their future prospects. All respondents highlighted the stark contrast between this phase and the creative highs of the work environment. Several described experiencing considerable depression when a contract ended with some resorting to prescription or non-prescription drugs to cope with this period. This phase generally only ended when respondents secured a new contract or actually started work on a new project. Ian, a special effects technician in his mid-50s who had worked on numerous big budget feature films, highlighted the depression and low self-esteem many workers experience at the end of a large project:

> I remember when the end of X came. I was working with a lot of other people from New Zealand and when it came to a close a lot of other people too went into depression. We'd spent so much time together and it was hyper, full on . . . then it suddenly stopped. You start thinking 'oh god, I'll never get employed again' and all these thoughts go through your mind . . . then the phone rings and they want you there tomorrow and you're into it again.

The addiction literature often suggests that the stark contrast between the all consuming high of the addicted state and the psychological and physical lows of withdrawal contributes to the addicted person's desire to re-experience the addictive high (Graham et al., 2008). Respondents' descriptions of the collective creative peaks of filmmaking and troughs of unemployment mirror this pattern. During film projects, freelancers are creatively engaged, constructively focused and totally enmeshed within a self-contained and rewarding environment. Once their contract finishes, freelancers are often left unoccupied, fatigued and socially isolated. Under these conditions the lure of the next project is heightened as it offers both the promise of future enjoyment and an escape from the vicissitudes of unemployment.

Social relationships

The addiction literature suggests that the addicted person's connections with family and friends can be severely damaged by their involvement with the addictive object or activity (Orford, 2001). In many cases, the addicted person replaces these relationships with a set of social relationships or friendships configured around the addictive object or activity. These relationships may have the same outward features as non-addictive relationships and are often both intense and highly rewarding for those involved. However, they tend to be more fragile than other relationships because the primary link between people is the addictive object or activity. As a result, the emotional bonds between people have a propensity to deteriorate rapidly if the core addictive object is removed from the relationship. This can be highly distressing for addicted individuals if their other relationships are fragile or non-existent. Consequently, they are often drawn back to the addictive object or activity in order to rekindle the personal connections attached to it.

Respondents' descriptions of social relationships within the film industry suggest that the structural conditions of project-based labour within the film industry facilitate the development of professional and personal relationships that share some of the characteristics of personal relationships found within addictive social networks. Bechky (2006) has described the pressure cooker creative environment of filmmaking as a temporary 'total institution' in which workers are removed from their normal surroundings and thrust into a cloistered, intense world where they work and socialize exclusively with members of the same project for periods of weeks or months. Many respondents described the close professional and personal relationships that resulted from this situation as one of the rewards of filmmaking, while simultaneously recognizing the often short-term and context-dependent nature of the relationship. Sally, the line producer, commented:

> If you're away from home on a long job you become an instant family and you tend to work and play together. Boy, the stories I could tell. It can be quite hard when the job is finished, you do feel kind of let down . . . you've had these intense relationships . . . then suddenly you are ripped apart and when you haven't got the common bond of the job you find you haven't got a lot in common with those people outside the job.

Within this research, successful women seemed to pay a higher price than men for their achievements and to have a more addictive relationship with the industry. Both male and female respondents highlighted the intense work involvement of successful women in production-related roles and observed that these women often relinquished their non-work lives in order to achieve career success. Several respondents described some higher powered women as relying entirely on their work to fulfil their emotional and social needs, which occasionally resulted in problematic working relationships with colleagues. Male and female respondents differed in the explanations they gave for this situation. Males tended to see the New Zealand film industry as an exploitative but non-gendered environment and to stress the individual choices made by women. In contrast, female respondents highlighted the gendered nature of power within the industry and suggested that women who wanted success had little option but to focus entirely on their careers and relinquish other sources of friendship, identity and self-esteem. Susan, the art department assistant, was considering leaving the industry because of the damage she felt film work did to women's lives:

> It's a male run industry and it is hard. Most females will be in production and they become known as the production spinsters. First in, last out. They are very good at their job (but) it replaces all those relationships that they have to give up on . . . 'I'm not going to have kids, I'm not going to bother having a partner' and that's why they bury themselves in work. Well that's an individual choice but it's not my cup of tea . . .

Similar comments were made by male respondents, although men tended to discount the structural issues facing women, focusing instead on the problems that women's intense work involvement could cause within the workplace. Michael, an assistant director in his late 40s observed that:

> Women seem more prone to becoming what we call film widows. They will be first in at six in the morning and they will still be working away at 12 at night . . . unfortunately, what happens is that when you are in a job that is totally consuming it becomes all your life. They become difficult to work with because it's not actually about the job it's about their emotional state.

Working in project-based film production is a short-lived experience in which production teams are formed, work together intensively for a limited period and are disbanded at short notice. The personal relationships formed during these periods are, in many ways, akin to the relationships formed in addictive contexts as they are created through a shared focus on the addictive object that is forceful enough to exclude other attachments. The restricted social contact that freelancers have with each other between projects is also a feature of film relationships that echoes patterns described in the addiction literature. The relatively limited social contact between freelancers during periods of unemployment is perhaps surprising given the intensity of working relationships and the importance of networking but makes sense within the context of an insecure and competitive labour market. Successful freelancers often collaborate repeatedly with the same colleagues and develop close professional and personal ties with these individuals. There is, however, a limit to this camaraderie, as freelancers will often be in competition with each other for work on the same projects. There is, therefore, a continual tension within freelancers' industry relationships, with professional and personal loyalties potentially conflicting with economic self-interest. One way in which the freelancers in this study managed this tension was by having limited purely social contact with each other between contracts. While this helped to disguise the intensely competitive nature of respondents' relationships with each other, it also heightened the social and professional alienation respondents experienced during periods of unemployment and increased their desire to return to the communal environment of filmmaking.

Economic insecurity

The project-based structure of freelance work meant that respondents' finances were often precarious. While some respondents eventually left the industry because of the financial insecurity, others described a process of intensified involvement created by the ongoing need to secure new contracts. All respondents commented that during their early years in the industry they were unconcerned by the negative financial implications

of a competitive, project-based labour market. As respondents aged, the adverse economic effects of project-based employment became more salient and had a greater impact on their lives. All respondents discussed economic issues at considerable length, highlighting the psychological insecurity and inability to plan financially associated with this form of work. Patrick, a highly successful art director in his early 50s, with 20 years industry experience and several international awards, described a financial situation typical of many freelancers:

> I'm finding it a struggle to keep in operation . . . I'm not where I want to be in my life. I'm at the top of my game in the film side and basically my builder or plumber is more successful financially than I am. Intellectually and creatively it is working for me, but financially it really hasn't been a winner.

For many, the constant financial pressure worsened dramatically when they were between contracts, bills were mounting and no new work was available. The uncertainty of these periods meant that respondents were often unable to occupy themselves constructively and struggled with depression during periods of unemployment. Workers with family commitments felt the financial insecurity particularly acutely, with several eventually leaving the industry for this reason. The long hours and intense commitment of film work meant that workers' partners usually carried the primary responsibility for maintaining family life, which sometimes restricted their own opportunities for paid employment. This heightened families' financial vulnerability and could also affect relationships within the family. Several male respondents with children described the humiliation of claiming state benefits to provide for their families and noted that at these junctures they would accept almost any work rather than remain unemployed. Alan, a set painter in his mid-30s with two small children explained:

> Jenny always talks about when I'm not working. If I don't have a start date on another job I last about a week and then I start to get really scratchy . . . grumpy . . . oh god what's going to happen next – I've heard about this other job but so and so might get it, I might not get it. It's the uncertainty, you can't plan anything. You can't say I've got two months off let's go and have a holiday and then I'll start work and I'll earn this much. You can't do that – it's all hand to mouth.

The highly individualistic process of contract negotiation is a difficult one for freelance film workers who are often at their most anxious and vulnerable during negotiations and therefore more likely to accept poor pay and conditions simply to ensure new work. Respondents who had been in the film industry for a decade or more all depicted an environment characterized by decreasing pay rates and increasing competition, with several describing themselves as feeling trapped within a downward financial spiral they were powerless to change. The invidious, and increasingly common, industry practise of 'pencilling in' exacerbated workers' financial and psychological insecurities. This practise essentially means that workers are expected to be available for a project if it eventuates but have no formal contract or start and finish dates and receive no financial recompense if the project is delayed or cancelled. For most respondents, the effect of this convention was to keep them strongly psychologically engaged with, and financially

dependent on, the industry while they were unemployed. As in addiction, workers became increasingly focused on achieving the next contract or 'fix' in order to escape the financial consequences of a project-based labour market in which they had very limited bargaining power.

Leaving the industry

Social models of addiction emphasize the complex psychological and practical problems that addicted individuals encounter when they attempt to relinquish their relationship with the addictive object or activity (Orford, 2001; Vaillant, 1988). Essentially, social models of addiction suggest that the addicted person is faced with the prospect of severing the central relationship in their world without having a secure set of replacement social connections in place. The prospect of relinquishing this one core relationship is therefore experienced as highly threatening and is often resisted even when the addicted person recognizes the damaging effects of their addiction. Re-establishing a system of viable connections with the social world is usually a slow, difficult and painful process for the addicted person and the temptation to revert to the security of the addictive relationship is strong. Consequently, the process of relinquishing the addictive relationship often involves multiple attempts. Reversions are highly probable during an addicted individual's first attempts at change and the intensity of the connection with the addictive object or activity is usually re-established quite rapidly. This occurs because the framework for the addictive relationship remains strong while alternative systems of social connectedness are still fragile. While some reversions are permanent, others are temporary and help the addicted individual recognize the importance of establishing other systems of connectedness.

Respondents' descriptions of leaving the film industry contained several parallels with the processes described in the addiction literature. During their interviews all respondents discussed the difficulties of quitting the industry. For some, these difficulties were primarily psychological and revealed their intense ambivalence about leaving an industry that they found highly aversive in some respects but that also provided an important outlet for their creative talents, a key part of their self-identity and much of their social life. For others, the obstacles were more concrete and highlighted the difficulties of establishing alternative careers. The six respondents who had left the industry permanently all described a drawn out process of repeatedly deciding to leave freelance film work and then returning for one final project before finally relinquishing their industry ties. In contrast to permanent employment, where resignation is irreversible, the project-based structure of film work facilitates this type of vacillation by continually supplying workers with opportunities to leave and re-enter the industry.

The network-based structure of film work compounded freelancers' ambivalence about leaving the industry. In contrast to some other forms of project-based employment, where networks maybe crucial to securing employment but the work itself is relatively individualized, filmmaking is an intensely social enterprise with a heavily inter-dependent task structure. Latent organizations of well-coordinated freelancers are therefore crucial to the industry and production companies generally contract senior personnel on the assumption that they can quickly assemble an experienced team.

These teams have strong normative rules that are transgressed if freelancers wilfully damage team cohesion by rejecting suitable contracts. A decision to reject contracts while searching for alternative employment therefore carries both the economic risk of expulsion from a highly-valued closed network and the social and moral stigma of disappointing and alienating friends and colleagues. The social demands of project-based labour can thus create a context where freelance production workers can repeatedly feel obligated to accept contracts despite seriously considering leaving the industry.

Workers who do transgress against industry norms can experience severe social sanctions as other workers seek to distance themselves from potentially damaging relationships. Deborah, a former personal assistant in her early 40s recounted the rapid professional and social isolation that effectively ended her career after she turned down a follow-on contract with a famous director:

> I was completely exhausted and emotionally frazzled so I took the opportunity to resign. When I got back to [home] all these people that I had connected with were just like – snap- never seen me before. The only professional contact I had was [name]. Even at the film premiere and the post thing – it was like - no one spoke to me . . . I didn't have anything to offer because of where I found myself at the end of it all.

Workers who had made a firm decision to leave were still faced with the practical difficulties of securing alternative employment. These problems were compounded by the small size of the New Zealand economy that meant that permanent employment in related work areas was very limited. Respondents were also hampered by employer prejudices against film workers, with several respondents commenting that traditional employers seemed concerned about their reliability and worried that they would become restless in the more sedate environment of mainstream organizations.

The film industry's reliance on experiential learning and personal recommendations rather than formal qualifications created further problems as respondents often had high skill levels but few formal qualifications. All respondents recognized the importance of retraining or gaining further qualifications but several highlighted the difficulties of doing so while still continuing to work in the film industry. Donald, a design engineer in his late 30s with 17 years industry experience explained:

> It's very difficult to further your education. There are courses I want to do but I just can't do them. I can't put my name down on a piece of paper saying I'm going to start there and finish there, it just won't happen. If someone rings up I'm gone.

Some respondents had tried to develop alternative employment by running small businesses that used their creative talents alongside their film work. However, the exigencies of film work seldom combined successfully with the financial strains and time commitments associated with the start up of a small business. Film contracts often took priority and in consequence most of these small businesses failed because respondents were tied up on a film contract. As several respondents noted, the psychological and practical difficulties of getting out of the film industry were often as great as the difficulties of gaining entry.

In conclusion, freelancers who had decided to leave the industry faced the dilemma of keeping their film careers going while trying to introduce changes that would eventually enable them to leave the industry. This process was complicated by the project-based network structure of filmmaking which, on the one hand, allowed repeated re-entry into an industry they had decided to leave and, on the other hand, delivered severe psychological and financial sanctions if respondents transgressed against the social norms of the industry. The pressures for intense involvement exerted by the industry were compounded by the uncertainties of finding employment outside the industry. Consequently, many respondents repeatedly returned to the addictive securities of film work, despite disliking the adverse effects of the film industry on their lives and the lives of their families.

Discussion

Alexander (2008) suggests that the minimally regulated free market economies that increasingly characterize 21st-century global capitalism create the structural conditions for increasing addiction by weakening the complex webs of cultural, historical, geographical and interpersonal bonds that underpin healthy psychological functioning. Like many other writers (e.g. Bourdieu et al., 1999; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1998), he argues that people cannot be psychologically self-sufficient and that there is a profound and enduring interdependence between the individual and society. In healthy societies this interdependence enables people to meet both their core needs for social belonging and long-term security, and their equally important desires for individual autonomy and achievement. Free market economies undermine their citizens' essential psychosocial integration by creating highly unstable, individualistic and competitive social systems that subjugate most aspects of human existence to the exigencies of market forces. In consequence, many people experience some diminution of the complex networks of social ties that are essential to healthy psychological functioning. The resultant sense of psychosocial dislocation is psychologically painful and triggers attempts to establish alternative mechanisms for social integration. The narrowly focused lifestyles that characterize addictive behaviour function as one form of substitute for the more complex and diverse forms of psychosocial integration that have been destroyed by free market economic structures.

Social models of addiction conceptualize addictive behaviour patterns as adaptive responses to varied combinations of internal emotional states and external circumstances. From this perspective, the primary issue becomes that of understanding the adaptive meaning of the actions people take within specific contexts, rather than determining the voluntary or involuntary nature of their behaviour. As Alexander (2008) points out, from a subjective perspective people generally experience their own behaviour as simultaneously involving a complex mix of voluntary and involuntary activities and choices over which they have very varied degrees of control. Although social models of addiction assume that addictive behaviour patterns are adaptive and involve conscious choice they emphasize the frequently sub-optimal long-term consequences of these choices. Heyman (2009) argues that most situations involve a range of possible choices and outcomes. In many cases, the most individualistic, short-term choice has the least initial cost and the

most obviously rewarding outcome, although it may have detrimental long-term consequences. Accordingly, people often make adaptive choices that have initial benefits but that may damage their longer-term interests. To give an example from the New Zealand film industry, the recent dispute between the New Zealand actors' union, Warner Brothers and Peter Jackson over union representation on *The Hobbit* movie (Clark, 2010) pitted the actors and their union against equally poorly protected but non-unionized crew, with many freelance production workers marching for the right to work on the long-awaited blockbuster movie. The exigencies of project-based labour thus created an industrial context within which many freelancers saw the short-term gains of securing relatively immediate employment as more valuable than the longer-term and less certain potential benefits of industry-wide, collectively-negotiated, working conditions.

Analysing New Zealand freelance film production workers' experiences of project-based labour using the theoretical framework provided by social models of addiction reveals the intensely addictive qualities of the industry. Film production in New Zealand is organized around a highly individualistic free market economic model that ensures workers continually compete with each other for scarce and insecure work. This undermines collective relationships and loyalties within the labour force and creates a social context where workers are vulnerable to the sense of social dislocation that Alexander (2008) identifies as a key precursor for addiction. Once in work, a contrasting set of conditions prevail and film production workers experience a strong sense of social cohesion, collective purpose, creativity and achievement. These experiences are highly rewarding, generate a strong sense of personal identity as a film worker, and create a strong attachment to the industry. This attachment is further strengthened by the intensely demanding nature of film work, which frequently circumscribes workers' opportunities for non-work social integration and alternative sources of identity.

The psychological rewards of film work are produced in the service of short-term, free market economic goals rather than being the enduring outcomes of stable social systems. Consequently, workers' emotional gratification is short-lived as freelancers are jettisoned immediately their economic utility ceases. Huws (2010) proposes that many creative workers gain a genuine sense of involvement and self-realization from their work. Relinquishing ownership of their work at the end of projects creates a recurrent and painful sense of alienation that is often closer to consciousness than the more continuous alienation described by many contingent workers in more routine jobs (e.g. De Cuyper et al., 2008; Forde and Slater, 2006). The tension between involvement and alienation is particularly salient in freelance work as the worker simultaneously relinquishes both the specific creative product and guaranteed employment within the industry. In Huws' words, the freelance creative worker is recurrently 'poised at the moment of alienation' (2010: 511) caught between the desire for authentic work and the realization that this work is highly precarious. The uncomfortable psychological contradictions of this position are temporarily resolved when workers are engaged in a creative project. The recurrent possibility of rejection inherent in freelance project work thus tends to strengthen freelance creative workers' addictive relationships with work.

During periods between contracts, freelance workers are largely disconnected from the intense psychosocial rewards of the film world but have diminished psychosocial and

economic resources outside this milieu. Workers' sense of psychosocial dislocation is, therefore, considerable and their sense of personal, professional and social identity becomes increasingly fragile. As workers' main source of psychosocial integration is still the film industry, the insecurities of unemployment trigger attempts to restore the severed relationship with the work environment. Freelancers' own anxieties consequently ensnare them within the industry and help recreate the adverse structural conditions that disadvantage them both materially and psychologically. The twin pillars of highly insecure, individualistic, labour market conditions and intensely demanding, but highly collective and creatively rewarding work, operate synergistically to create an addictive psychosocial environment that repeatedly draws freelance film production workers back into the industry.

Although this research focuses on film production workers' experiences of the New Zealand film industry the concept of an addictive psychosocial environment can be used to interpret creative workers' subjective experiences of freelance project-based labour in other creative industries. The extent to which the concept is applicable will depend on the similarity of differing employment contexts to the conditions described here. As many social theorists have pointed out, people's subjective experiences and actions are both shaped by, and collectively shape, institutional contexts (Giddens, 1984; Weick, 1995). Differences in labour market conditions within the various creative industries will therefore be reflected in the perspectives and actions of creative workers themselves. These differences in organizational context need to be addressed when considering the relevance of this model of addictive relationships to other creative industries.

Empirical research into the experiences of workers within cultural industries such as film, theatre, television, fashion, music and new media work consistently reveals a pattern of intense, but often ambivalent, involvement with creative sectors that are characterized by insecure employment, long and irregular hours and, in many though not all industries, increasingly low pay (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011; McKinlay and Smith, 2009; McRobbie, 2007; Neff et al., 2005; Perrons, 2003). In these sectors, workers' experiences and labour market conditions seem very similar to those described here. In contrast, creative workers in areas such as software engineering are often well paid, have considerable negotiating power with employers and can move comparatively easily from one freelance project to the next. While the culture of long work hours and intense worker involvement evinced in other creative industries is also apparent in this domain (Cicmil et al., 2009) and may generate addictive relationships with work by damaging workers' opportunities for non-work social integration, the personal economic consequences of addictive work relationships will obviously be less damaging in creative sectors with a shortage of skilled staff.

The effects of context on subjective experience can be further illustrated by examining creative industries where employment conditions have changed radically during people's careers. Several studies of the UK television industry have explored experienced professionals' views of both the current freelance labour market and the previous era of relatively secure salaried employment within the BBC or ITV (e.g. Antcliff, 2005; Dex et al., 2000; Paterson, 2001, 2010; Ursell, 2000). Many respondents in these studies indicated that they were as strongly involved with their work creatively when employed on more permanent conditions but felt more secure because they knew they would have

continuing employment when a project ended. Respondents also indicated that permanent employment enabled them to maintain non-work ties to a greater extent than under the current freelance regimes. These findings suggest that, where workers find the intrinsic aspects of work psychologically rewarding, the intensified involvement forced by insecure labour market conditions may advance addictive patterns of work involvement by forcing workers to obtain most of their psychosocial ties from the work environment.

In conclusion, many writers have emphasized the importance of theorizing the relationship between the extrinsic working conditions and subjective experiences of workers in the various creative industries. Workers' acceptance of poor labour market conditions has been a particular concern of many writers, with some arguing that the intrinsic rewards of creative labour function as tools of control, encouraging self-exploitation by the creative labour force (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). We suggest that social models of addiction increase our understanding of the relationship between labour market conditions and subjective experiences by providing a theoretical framework for interpreting creative workers' intense attachment to their work. The freelance film production workers studied here are a vulnerable and underpowered group working in a highly competitive and insecure industry. This research suggests that the structural conditions of project-based labour within the New Zealand film industry create a subjective experience in which the repeated financial, creative, social and emotional highs of short-term employment contrast with the insecurities of repeated unemployment. The linked mechanisms of highly rewarding periods in work interspersed with highly aversive periods between contracts produce an addictive psycho-social dynamic that enmeshes freelance production workers within the industry. This dynamic can only be fully understood by considering the relationship between structural conditions and subjective experiences as an integrated whole.

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