

## **Ever hopeful?: Creative workers' contested search for meaningful employment through relational sensemaking**

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### **Abstract**

Why do creative workers consent to exploitative work and find meaning in work while evading meaninglessness? Our study investigates how workers locate meaning in precarious work situations using specific psychosocial mechanisms based on social values highlighting the separation between creative work aspirations and implicit meanings, versus structural, societal and rhetorical notions of work. In searching for meaningfulness and avoiding meaninglessness, creative workers respond by accepting, negotiating or rejecting their workplace situation. Findings suggest, that Hong Kong creative workers actively find deeper meaning in work responding to structural factors that undermine meaningfulness and cause meaninglessness, given that the origins are distinct and not mutually dependent. Secondly, while coping with external uncertainties and finding agency in internal work factors, creative workers redefine and reframe work boundaries as a form of sensemaking through relational ties and social networks, as an outlet for creative talents and as a coping strategy.