

# Abstract – Laine Goldman

*The Migrant Creative: U.S. Media Freelancers at the Border of a Changing Work Culture* is a collection of conversations with eleven established U.S. media freelancers across a diverse multimedia expanse. With more than one-third of U.S. workers taking on freelance by default and with growth predicted to be one-half of the population by 2020, it is critical to examine individuals who have successfully navigated this workstyle for 15 – 30 years. As one participant reveals, “Everyone is a freelancer now – they just don’t know it.”

The central question explores, “*What is the lived experience of a media freelancer at the border of a changing work culture?*” Social construction and appreciative Inquiry inform the theoretical framework for this research. The methodology is a mash-up of narrative research and dialogic approaches: polyphonic interviewing, autoethnography, collaborative research, performative social science, and narrative life histories.

What emerges is a compelling story that brings an appreciative gaze to the liminal lives of these project participants as they reframe the migrant creative experience – from one of a freelancer to a career improviser. These participants showcase a career dexterity that extends the parameters of freelance, moving beyond contracted assignments, to a more entrepreneurial experience by introducing their own project creation into the mix and combining a variety of workstyles – often at the same time. “*You have to be able to function as if you are on the frontier again. There’s no backup,*” suggests another participant.

The migrant creative experience is one of adaptation, improvisation, and recognizing that we are all connected. The 21<sup>st</sup> century reflects a shift from an “independent” to “interdependent” mobile reality. The new loyalty gravitates toward people not companies. This story of career sustainability is one that understands how we are relationally situated in our journey. Here the career improviser develops an appreciative focus, one that invites in the “other,” for this change has the capacity to not only jump-start creativity but also catalyze a more generative work environment. This high-level collaboration, one that welcomes change and divergent thinking, demands conversational engagement throughout the creative process. The story of these personal journeys speak of creativity as an authentic, interdependent process that breaks the age barrier and remains responsive to the dynamic face of the shifting media world. These migrant creatives are singlehandedly changing the construction of what encompasses a “real job,” and represent the face of the new work frontier.