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Crafting the Institutional Self

Identity and Trajectory in Artistic Training and Creative Careers

by

Matthew S. Rowe

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Ann Swidler, Chair

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Professor Ming Leung

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Abstract

Crafting the Institutional Self

Identity and Trajectory in Artistic Training and Creative Careers

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This dissertation is a study of identity processes in two social domains: higher education and professional careers. Each chapter presents a distinct form of social identity and shows how it serves either as a resource to guide social participation (in the case of careers) or is a product of social participation (in higher education). “Institutional self” is a shorthand term for a pragmatic definition of identity, an ongoing process through which individuals make sense of their own capacities and trajectories as economic agents, in relation to the cues systematically produced in different environments. Each chapter of the dissertation develops a distinct conceptual model related to institutional self-formation, using empirical cases that are of interest to sociologists: the tensions of work in cultural production; formative stages of boundary-spanning careers; and college-level vocational training. Each fills gaps in the sociological research in these areas.

The data used throughout the dissertation come from 106 interviews conducted by the author with students, faculty, and graduates of one art school, Adams College of the Arts (43 students, eight faculty, and 55 graduates). The school is located in a metropolitan area on the West Coast of the United States, where interviews took place in 2012 and 2013. All participants are drawn from two academic departments at the school: Visual Design, centered on the discipline of graphic design, and Media Arts, a mix of several digital media applications. Subsequent qualitative analyses of interview transcripts were primarily inductive, involving several rounds of coding along with development of guiding questions that emerged from observed patterns in interviewees’ personal accounts and detailed work histories. Each of the dissertation’s three empirical chapters is presented as an independent research manuscript; introductory and concluding chapters frame the conceptual and empirical contributions of the project as a whole.

Chapter 2, “Boundary Work as Career Navigation in Design and Media,” looks at how creative workers use rhetorics of creativity to justify preferences for a wide range of working arrangements. Interviewees pursue one of two distinct forms of boundary work: segmentation and integration. Segmentation involves reproducing the institutionalized opposition between artistry and commerce in the temporal and spatial arrangements of working lives. Integration breaks down the boundary, merging the opposing motivations. Each finds expression in a range

of career-building practices, from maintaining separate creative projects, to becoming an entrepreneur, or leaving creative work altogether. In closing, the chapter questions the relevance of occupations as a place of sensemaking and belonging for skilled, contingent workers.

Chapter 3, “Self-Assessment and Self-Presentation in Disorderly Careers,” looks at a different set of career navigation strategies, based on ongoing accounting of one’s capacities in relation to the observed expectations of work roles and environments. The organization of American work has shifted fundamentally in the last few decades. Work in many skilled occupations now takes on patterns long found in creative fields: project-based work and “portfolio careers” that are disorderly, uncertain, and highly mobile. I find that young creatives continually evaluate their skills and personalities in market terms as they experience jobs in different contexts. These self-assessments lead to instrumental investment in “human capital”—both emotional and technical capacities—and self-selection into work roles based on a sense of fit with a firm, project, or industry. The chapter illuminates the experience of boundary-spanning careers, reviving an underdeveloped stream of micro-sociological career theory.

Chapter 4, “Crafting Identity: Two Approaches to Professionalization in Art School,” turns to college education as a training ground in occupational identification and preparation for boundary-spanning careers. Professional training is the dominant contemporary form of higher education in America, having surpassed the arts and sciences in the number of undergraduate enrollees and graduates, yet sociologists know little about how students experience the professionalization process at the college level. I find that two departments providing artists with training in commercial art practices create distinct pedagogic cultures within the same school. One prepares students for industry-specific work roles to which students peg their future trajectories; the other cultivates general competencies that are applicable across industries, leaving students to identify likely work roles and career pathways. The analysis provides a conceptually nuanced model drawn from cultural and organizational sociology that is applicable across settings of higher education.

The dissertation concludes with a brief closing chapter that provides an overview of the contributions of each chapter and the project as a whole. It closes with questions for future research that are directly and indirectly informed by these findings that may be useful for sociologists of the arts and media, work and occupations, and culture.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I think for me there's going to be a lot of fumbling around. And just trying to see what works for me. Because I might think, "Oh, I want this kind of job." But if I do get into that, I might hate it... What you want to do might not always make money, but you still have to support yourself somehow... You can't always choose what you want.

– *Lynne, art student*

As I graduated I was like, "I'm going to be an editor. This is what I've now proven I can make money doing." But... I didn't really have the love of it... I could do more than passable edits, but to get to that feature [film] level, I just didn't have the drive or the desire. And at the same time, my skills of brainstorming, coming up with creative solutions... really started getting used, and successfully... [Now] my realm of expertise has gone to web video, YouTube, search [optimization]... I'm just of that culture now. [And] it's kind of rare to have as much experience with it as I do... [I would be] building out a company's web video presence, [creating] a slate of programming for them, [and] producing that programming online... But they don't really have positions. Right now in [video] games media there's been sort of a culling... It's been a little rough.

– *Jacob, unemployed web video producer*

These quotations depict careers at a crossroads. Lynne and Jacob are both middle class and have occupationally-specific training, yet both express profound uncertainty towards work. Their uncertainty may not seem surprising; after all, college graduation and career transitions are stressful, challenging times. Indeed, studies show that creative workers like Jacob (and, soon, Lynne) often experience unpredictable transitions. But their accounts are notably different: the forms of uncertainty they face are distinct, as are their understandings of them. As an art student, Lynne has a surprisingly pragmatic disposition towards work, but her training has not prepared her to imagine herself in different job roles. Thus, her framing of career uncertainty is partial and fragmented. In contrast, Jacob has been working since he graduated from art school eight years ago. He has learned which roles suit him, what kinds of jobs lead to stable and rewarding work, and what it feels like to be in a fraternity of like-minded people, yet a lack of jobs in his sector leaves Jacob without a clear path forward. Although his working identity is well-formed, it remains flexible in the face of environmental instability.

On the surface, the difference between Lynne and Jacob's accounts is easy to understand, yet there is complexity within them that raises a host of interesting questions for sociologists. Lynne has less life experience upon which to draw in evaluating work and planning for the future. Jacob's self-image is shaped by his sense of his own capacities and personal trajectory in light of what he knows—and imagines—about contemporary labor markets and production processes. Through social media positioning, networking, and investments in training, Jacob responds to the challenges he faces based on this developing self-image. They are both engaged in an ongoing process of forming and reforming working identities, a process that, in turn, shapes their economic participation. In preparing for work in uncertain conditions, these aspiring

creatives give evidence of what I call the *institutional self*: understandings of the self, informed by cues that are structured in the social environment, and that serve as a resource for sensemaking and action. This is a pragmatic conceptualization of identity that adapts insights from theory of interactive socialization and more recent work on the cultural resources on which people draw to respond to the challenges and uncertainties of everyday life.

Sociologists have documented fundamental shifts in the structure of work over the last few decades, as more Americans work in temporary, contracted, or otherwise “nonstandard” arrangements. This pattern has important effects on the quality of work, the nature of contests over control over the work process, and the expectations of workers as they look beyond jobs and plan for careers. The people I spoke to during one and a half years of fieldwork express profound uncertainty. Those who are working cross every conceivable labor market boundary—changing occupations, industries, employment structures—in the search for stable and rewarding jobs. Yet, surprisingly, most of the interviewees manage this turbulence successfully. This project seeks to understand *how*: how workers engaged in flexible, “postbureaucratic” economic structures stitch together jobs to form careers while navigating across labor market boundaries; how they are socialized into fields where such shifts are the norm; and how occupationally-specific college education prepares them to do so.

The case I use to understand these dynamics is early- to mid-career creative professionals, as well as art students in the same two fields: graphic design and digital media. I chose to study creative workers for several reasons. Creative industries offer valuable lessons for the post-industrial “knowledge” economy more broadly, as they have long hosted the project-based work and “portfolio” careers becoming typical of other fields today. In addition, the competing logics guiding creative work are well understood by sociologists, who document tensions between artistry and commerce throughout fields of cultural production. Yet the many sociological studies of creative work leave notable gaps. Occupations such as graphic design and industries such as video games have hardly been studied despite their economic significance in the contemporary economy. Transitions and trajectories of workers engaged in nonstandard work remain poorly understood, in general. In addition, the project addresses gaps in research on vocational training. Many college graduates and skilled workers seem able to find meaningful, rewarding careers while also assuming a greater burden of risk and responsibility. I show how emerging creative professionals use identity-based techniques to manage labor market uncertainty, while most also avoid long-term economic insecurity.

The project’s primary conceptual contribution is to revitalize the sociological theory of careers as a form of micro-level social experience. Conceptualizing careers as an interaction or “negotiation” between individuals and social structures was a central concern of Chicago School sociologists and their direct descendants. In recent decades, sociological analyses of careers have prioritized structural dynamics, such as social networks and occupational vacancy chains. This dissertation re-centers the study of careers on the personal experience of meaning making, and asks how identification processes are informed by structured social participation.

Each of the dissertation’s three empirical chapters examines how young people entering the creative economy orient themselves amid constantly shifting circumstances. Art school graduates express flexible working identities as they seek to establish careers that are both stable and rewarding. These creative professionals approach the tensions they encounter in their work in various ways, each of which involves navigating the competing roles and motivations that are institutionalized throughout artistic labor. At the same time, art school graduates use an ongoing process of self-assessment to measure their skills and personal qualities in relation to what they

experience at work, and then use these metrics to make choices about how to proceed in their careers. Current art students engage in similar practices in an earlier stage, using classroom learning in occupationally-specific majors to hone distinct working identities and approaches to career formation. The accounts offered in each chapter are of ordinary, middle class (and middle class aspiring) people who seek a secure yet flexible place in the contemporary creative economy. I study their efforts to weigh options, assess available information, and identify opportunities. These efforts are mundane meaning-making practices, but they play a crucial role in shaping people's work experiences and their economic outcomes.

The remainder of this introductory chapter consists of: (1) a brief review of the bodies of scholarly work that set the stage for this research—literatures on precarious work, creative work, and identity—and identifies the project's contributions to each; (2) an overview of the data-gathering process; and (3) a preview of the three empirical chapters. Each empirical chapter is preceded by a brief statement of the relationship between the chapter and the overarching themes of the dissertation. They are followed by a concluding chapter that reviews and extends the concepts used in the analyses. Finally, a methodological appendix contains information not included in the brief descriptions of research methods found elsewhere, including complete interviewee demographics, interview guides, and recruitment materials.

Concepts and Contributions

Precarious work

In recent decades, sociologists have documented fundamental shifts in the structure of American work. Contingent or “nonstandard” work, such as freelance and temporary work, is expanding as more corporate functions are being outsourced to external providers (Cappelli 1999; Kalleberg 2000, 2009). The duration of jobs has declined significantly, along with career stability (Farber 2010; Hollister 2011). The effects of these changes appear to be distributed unequally—some studies find evidence of poor outcomes for middle-class workers (Newman 1988, 1993) while others note that skilled workers and professionals are protected from many of the most “precarious” labor market conditions (Kalleberg 2009, 2011). Enduring gaps in the data prevent sociologists from fully grasping how workers cope with these conditions and how many build stable and prosperous careers despite uncertainty (Bernhardt 2014).

The rise of contingent work arrangements exposes technical, creative, and managerial workers to confusion as to how to move forward in careers that seem to have lost their shape or purpose (Newman 1988; Kunda and Van Maanen 1999; Barley and Kunda 2004). Many professionals who once might have conducted careers within organizations, climbing the hierarchy, now find themselves untethered from organizational structures (Tilly and Tilly 1994; Barley 1996; Cappelli 1999). As a result of the “postbureaucratic” turn in the structure of work, more workers pursue their careers in a more “entrepreneurial” or self-driven manner—free to pursue their options, but also more vulnerable to market dynamics, lacking the protection of both state agencies and labor unions (Smith 2001; Neff 2012). This leads to “boundaryless” or “protean” career forms that are both more independent and less secure (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Hall 2002).

If careers in general are becoming more uncertain, this is most true during the school-to-work transition and in early careers. Young adulthood is a period of prolonged uncertainty and identity formation (Arnett 2014). Labor market entry is a crucial factor in shaping later outcomes, yet even college graduates are largely unprepared to undertake the responsibilities expected of them as working adults (Coleman 1984; Krahn, Howard, and Galambos 2012; Arum

and Roksa 2014). Young workers in general suffer from a lack of information and other resources they would need to move strategically in labor markets (Rosenbaum et al. 1990). While sociological research on the school-to-work transition gives a sense of the daunting challenges young workers face, it does not provide a conceptual framework for understanding how they learn from and adapt to early experiences with work. The early stages of careers are useful for illuminating the techniques workers use to adapt to labor market conditions, but research has not yet shown how young workers entering skilled occupations establish career trajectories in fields where high uncertainty and nonstandard work arrangements are the norm.

Creative work

Conventional wisdom in economics suggests that creative workers suffer poorer than average outcomes—paying a price for seeking desirable work in competitive markets—while some studies point out artists’ labor market resilience (Stern 2005; Alper and Wassall 2006; Menger 2006; Lindemann 2013). Artists routinely cross labor market boundaries, combining jobs and projects in different roles and economic sectors in the search of stable and creatively engaging work (Markusen et al. 2006; Throsby and Zednik 2011; Lingo and Tepper 2013; Lena 2014). Despite the evidence of boundary-crossing transitions in creative careers, sociologists who study them tend to focus on the opportunity structures found in particular industries, especially Hollywood (Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Bielby and Bielby 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Rossman, Esparza, and Bonacich 2010). Yet there is a range of structural arrangements within the field of cultural production (DiMaggio 1977) and Hollywood, the prototypical creative industry, is not a typical setting for creative labor. Unlike actors or lighting technicians, for example, graphic designers are in demand throughout the economy; thus they are likely to cross field boundaries as they pursue work opportunities. In addition, most creative workers do not enjoy the institutional protection of unions and guilds, which are well-established in Hollywood. And some creative industries, such as video games, remain almost completely unknown to sociologists despite their growing economic significance. Thus, although the cultural production perspective is well established, there remain substantial gaps in sociological knowledge about boundary-spanning work in creative fields.

One lasting contribution of sociological studies of creative work is the evidence of conflicting logics shaping production processes and the work experience. The tendency for firms and workers to experience tension between artistic and commercial motivations in the arts and media was first noted in the foundational studies that set out the research agenda for cultural production (Hirsch 1972; Faulkner 1973; Becker 1982). The concept of an art-versus-market opposition was significantly developed in Bourdieu’s work on artistic fields in France and remains a central theme of contemporary research on creative careers (e.g., Leschziner 2015; Gerber 2017). Artistry is defined by its charismatic aura, and the opposition of artistic and market-based status metrics informs hierarchies throughout artistic fields (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). This opposition also shapes practices and planning within organizations. Innovation must be balanced with genre-based expectations to achieve success with an audience; left unrestricted, artistic production may result in undisciplined and unsuccessful organizations (Hirsch 1972; Lampel, Lant, and Shamsie 2000; Jeffcutt and Pratt 2002). Those who make creative decisions within commercial enterprises also experience creation as a balancing act, yet the ability to do so is the source of the creative sector’s powerful draw for workers seeking personal autonomy and expression in their work (Fine 1996; Menger 2006; Leschziner 2007).

Faulkner’s work (Faulkner 1973, 1983; Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Baker and Faulkner 1991) remains preeminent for its sophisticated analyses of workers’ motivations and

practices in highly competitive creative fields. For example, Faulkner writes that composers of film and television music use “occupational scripts” to balance artistry with the demands their commercial employers, Hollywood producers (1983: 165). Just as they orient composers to the everyday tensions between creative autonomy and the constraints imposed by clients, these scripts provide career navigation by helping composers locate themselves amid the shifting circumstances of media production. Faulkner elaborates:

Hired hands—or artists? Are film composers subservient technicians skilled in working against time pressures and within worn commercial grooves, or independent creators able to balance the demands of commerce and creativity? Are they simple pawns in the television producer’s master plan, or dedicated professionals who demonstrate their extraordinary range, stay away from “bad” work, and get the job done? The commercial composer is all of these things. His career is shaped by the ways he handles these opposing tendencies... He quickly learns that what a film composer is, and when, depends on who he is working for, the conventions he is asked to work within, the dramatic materials he has to work with, and what he thinks he has to offer the project. (1983: 89-90)

Their work requires these artistic contractors to negotiate the conflicts associated with commercial employment—its “opposing tendencies”—on an ongoing basis. Although Faulkner’s studies do not examine workers’ transitions into or out of Hollywood, his nuanced approach to the social experience of work provides a core contribution, one on which this dissertation seeks to build.

Identity

The third conceptual building block of this dissertation is identity. I work with a pragmatic conceptualization of identity at the individual rather than collective level, treating identity as an organizing feature of personal experience that is durable across situations yet continually shaped through social experience. In this sense, identity as “a communicative and constructive relationship of a person to himself and to that which does not belong to the self” (Joas 2000: 160; cf. Frye 2012). This conceptualization was fundamental to the classic sociological studies of careers, which focus on individuals’ efforts to locate themselves within occupations and become integrated members of bureaucratic organizations (Becker and Strauss 1956; Hughes 1958; Strauss 1959). If the economic structures of working life have fundamentally shifted since that time, then it follows that the identification processes that undergird and reproduce participants in those structures are also shifting. For example, Barley and Kunda (2004) coin a new social category, “itinerant professionals,” to capture the self-conception and career-building practices of technical contractors. Yet like their 20th-century forebears, scholars of cultural production, and other recent students of occupational and professional socialization (e.g., Ibarra 1999; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann 2006; Gioia et al. 2010), Barley and Kunda neglect the dynamism of contemporary careers. Their analysis examines the diversity of responses that workers in Silicon Valley have to becoming contractors, while leaving unanswered the question of how workers move into and out of tech work. This dissertation complements these studies by looking at the early career stage as an identity formation process with enduring significance as workers traverse labor market boundaries.

My understanding of self-formation builds on contemporary cultural sociology to explore the role of social institutions in determining how identity building takes place. The “cultured

capacities” people use to form self-understandings and lines of action develop throughout life, shaped by the institutional make-up of social environments (Swidler 2001a). One of the core meaning structures upon which contemporary Americans draw is the therapeutic discourse of self-help (Illouz 2008; Silva 2012). Americans’ belief in self-improvement—combined with neoliberal policy regimes requiring workers to assume more risk—results in widespread self-blame among those who are affected by economic displacement (Sharone 2013). The spread of project-based work and the use of social networks for recruitment and hiring compel workers to professionalize their self-presentation around the clock, as well as to control their emotional demeanor while at work (Leidner 2006; Neff 2012). Appearing forever likeable, competent, and driven is a requirement of employability in many nonstandard work contexts (Smith 2010). This imperative dovetails with the American obsession with self-knowledge and emotional control as the route to a better life and a better career (McGee 2005). The emotion management of skilled workers and professionals differs from the standards of conduct imposed on service workers, which have been expertly analyzed in studies of emotional labor (e.g., Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993). Skilled workers have greater autonomy that shields them from such overt controls, yet they, too, inhabit affective expectations as a routine part of work and building careers (Leidner 2006).

This dissertation addresses a broader topic than emotion management, however, by looking at the meaning of work itself in the lives of contemporary Americans. Sociologists have been reluctant to consider work as a site of meaning-making. Despite some prominent studies showing that middle-class workers find work meaningful and that it constitutes a place of belonging (e.g., Jackall 1988; Lamont 1992; Glaeser 2000), the tendency among sociologists is to consider paid work as a site of political struggle. According to this view, the meaning workers derive from paid labor is superficial and mainly serves to obscure underlying power dynamics. Interestingly, while economic sociologists have considered the central role of interactive meaning-making in the construction of value and conventions of transaction, they have not looked at work or job-seeking in this way (Bandelj 2009). Scholars in management and organizations partially fill this gap, seeing middle-class workers as active agents in shaping their own workplace identities and experiences (e.g., O’Mahoney and Bechky 2006). Yet if the sociology of work takes an overly pessimistic view, management scholars are overly optimistic, granting workers too much agency in promoting their own interests. The result of these broad trends is an underdeveloped sociology of work and careers as forms of personal engagement with market structures, and an underdeveloped sense of how such meaning-making may, in part, determine the characteristics of career trajectories.

Conceptualizing the experience of career uncertainty

Work that crosses institutional boundaries—causing workers to move not only from firm to firm but across economic sectors and into new employment arrangements—is challenging because it introduces uncertainty and destabilizes self-identity. Strauss (1959: 108) observes:

Insofar as careers can be visualized and implemented because of the relative stabilities of those social structures within which one has membership, the continuity and maintenance of identity is safe guarded and maximized, and methods of maintenance and restoration are more readily utilized and evolved.

If careers are more tenuous, then they are also more uncertain in a cultural sense, as work loses its ability to serve as a consistent source of personal meaning. A shared premise of organizational

and economic sociology is that understandings, conventions, and standards of evaluation are institutionalized at the field level and become taken for granted (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012). A set of these contextually grounded expectations concerns job standards, hiring procedures, and career trajectory (e.g., Peterson and Anand 2004; Hermanowicz 2007). Crossing labor market boundaries means encountering unfamiliar expectations and routines. In the contemporary environment, the meaning of work itself—what one’s goals can or should be, how to conceive of one’s value in a labor market, and how to find jobs—becomes unmoored from workplace structures when workers are more free to create careers for themselves.

This dissertation asks how young workers orient themselves to unknown and perhaps unknowable conditions. Current research—while addressing the structural problems facing precarious workers and their outcomes—provides little guidance on how workers experience and manage career uncertainty. For example, Kalleberg’s *The Mismatched Worker* (2007) provides a comprehensive review of the ways that work can be unsatisfying, based on skill, compensation, geography, or temporality. Kalleberg emphasizes macro-level patterns and policy considerations, but provides little analysis of the micro-level factors that could enhance job matching. He does, however, mention two concepts that suggest a path forward: worker gravitation and job crafting. The “gravitational hypothesis” holds that “individuals eventually sort themselves into jobs that provide a good fit to their interests, values, and abilities” (Kalleberg 2007: 62). Neither Kalleberg nor the originators of this term (Wilk, Desmarais, and Sackett 1995) provide a model for what gravitation might actually look like on the ground. Second, Kalleberg references job crafting, a concept from organizational theory proposing that many workers have the motivation and agency required to change their jobs, making them more amenable to their skills and preferences (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001). Here, too, current research provides little evidence of how workers take advantage of this hypothetical situation. Moreover, research that focuses on the changes that workers experience within firms is limited in what it can reveal about the motivations and conditions of workers who routinely cross organizational boundaries. Conceptualizations of worker experience have not kept up with the trends toward nonstandard work and boundary-spanning careers.

Each chapter of this dissertation applies a complementary conceptualization of identity to processes of occupational training and career formation. Chapter 2 explores the meanings of creativity shared among graphic designers and digital media artists, and uses boundary work as a framing concept for identity-based career navigation. The opposition between artistry and commerce shapes the experience of work experience in creative fields. As they learn to recognize the features of work routines and environments that they prefer, creative professionals use a shared vocabulary of creative engagement to justify a wide range of career-building practices that either reinforce the opposition or break it down. Chapter 3 shows how the same group of creative workers navigates the turbulent early years of their careers by redefining and reshaping their personal capacities as they learn what is expected of them in diverse work roles and environments. I present this ongoing process of self-assessment and self-presentation as an additional model of identity-based career navigation. Whereas Chapter 2 examines the expressive dimensions of work and careers, Chapter 3 looks at how instrumental conceptions of the self as a market entity form and adapt to disorderly forms of career progression. Next, Chapter 4 looks at an earlier stage of the process, examining the malleability of occupational identity and the forms of professionalization that take place during vocationally-oriented college majors. The two academic departments that I study use contrasting models of training, resulting

in distinct modes of professionalization among students. Taken as a whole, the dissertation provides three conceptual models of identification drawing on empirical research on the formative stages of careers in the contemporary creative economy.

Research Methods

Each of the dissertation's three empirical chapters presents findings of a single data-gathering project. In this section I present information on the project's conception and overall plan; each subsequent chapter contains a more detailed discussion of the research methods that are most pertinent to its respective findings. Additional information on the research process can be found in the methodological appendix.

The research took place in 2012 and 2013 in a major metropolitan area on the West Coast of the United States. My plan was to recruit students, alumni, and faculty from one school in order to understand career formation in a specific group of workers from the very beginning. The first school that I contacted—which I call Adams College of Art—soon became an enthusiastic partner in the project. The school provided an ideal setting: small but with a broad range of programs, it has a strong but not elite reputation. It is a private institution with a long history which has sought to remain current by staying in touch with arts and media industries, major sources of employment in the region.

I chose to study careers in commercial art—rather than fine or performing arts—because I was drawn to the opposing motivations of artistry versus commerce on the formation of careers, and the sociological literature suggests that commercial fields are where the tension would be most salient. I solicited the participation of two of the college's academic departments—Visual Design and Media Arts—that prepare students for creative roles in commercial industries. The comparison between the departments was motivated by institutional differences between the two occupational fields. Following Faulkner, I assumed that the tensions between artistry and commerce that are institutionalized in each field would drive career processes. To my surprise, analyses of alumni interviews did not produce clearly identifiable patterns—regarding rhetorical practices, identifications, or job-seeking practices—by occupational cluster, thus rendering the comparison less informative. Instead, the chapters that consider careers look at all 55 alumni interviewees together and the typologies described in each chapter apply to both designers and media artists. This confluence suggests that while each economic field has its own characteristic structure and conventions regarding hiring and advancement, participants in different fields—or those who change fields—also share many of the same orientations and strategies. Tracking workers' movements across work roles and labor markets allows me to observe consistencies in interviewees' orientations and strategies as their careers span the traditional boundaries of workplace meaning, including occupation, industry, and field.

The dissertation's most surprising finding is the tendency of nearly all interviewees to approach creative work practically rather than idealistically. I expected to encounter resistance to market-based logics, and for the artists I interviewed to be harboring dreams of an art career while toiling in commercial jobs to support their creative passion. This was not the case. None of the creative professionals I interviewed for this project think of their career as only a day job. They embrace their work's capacity for creative engagement while often accepting roles of very limited authority, and they perform tasks that require technical expertise rather than imagination. At the same time, frustration with the constraints imposed by managers and clients is common. Instead of rejecting the constraints outright, however, these creative workers find ways to work

under them. As in Fine's (1996) study of restaurant cooks, a concern with quality is a unifying motivation; imagination and personal expression are far less important. Several interviewees in fact stated that they prefer not to think too freely about a project, since imaginative work is the most demanding. Instead, they prefer to leave the most creative—and hypothetically most desirable—work to others.

Even more surprising was current art students' acceptance of commercial applications of their skills as inevitable and desirable. These are young people who grew up drawing and painting. Most had never heard of graphic design or digital media before enrolling in art school, yet they soon chose majors in occupationally-specific commercial fields. Like the alumni interviewees, they harbor few illusions about the artistic self-expression to come in their working lives, instead prioritizing stable careers and job security. Part of the reason is undoubtedly this sample's unique demographic characteristics. Adams is unusual among art schools for attracting a student body that is diverse along both racial-ethnic and class lines. The school is known for being more generous with financial aid than the other art schools in its region, and tries to make itself accessible to first-generation college students, immigrants, and those who transfer from junior colleges. Adams has been successful at keeping its reputation strong and the quality of teaching high while opening access to less advantaged students. The result is an predominantly upwardly-mobile sample of art students and graduates. The use of art school as a ladder to the middle class is something I did not expect to encounter in the field, and have not yet written about in these chapters. I look forward to developing this aspect of the project in future work.

Preview of Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2, "Boundary Work as Career Navigation in Design and Media," looks at how building a creative career applies a form of boundary work, as workers use rhetorics of creativity to justify a wide range of job roles and employment arrangements. The chapter's findings show that commercial artists use a complex vocabulary to evaluate creative work, based on a feeling of engagement and the resulting quality of products. Yet while they share these standards, interviewees adopt distinct approaches to work: many resist the constraints that managers and clients impose on their work; some embrace these limitations as enabling; while others seek to balance tasks that are more imaginative and demanding with those that are more routine. I then show how these meanings are applied to the practice of careers, in two distinct forms of boundary work: segmentation and integration. Segmentation involves reproducing the institutionalized opposition between artistry and commerce in the temporal and spatial arrangements of working lives. Integration breaks down the boundary, as interviewees find artistry and commerce to be compatible motivations. Both correspond to a range of career-building strategies that put boundary work into practice. In closing, the chapter questions the centrality of occupations as a place of sensemaking and belonging, at least in the formative phase of creative careers.

Chapter 3, "Self-Assessment and Self-Presentation in Disorderly Careers," looks at a different set of career navigation strategies based on self-accounting and self-improvement. The organization of American work has shifted fundamentally in the last few decades, making it more difficult for workers to foresee and implement career plans. Work in many skilled occupations and professions now resembles structures long found in creative fields: project-based work and "portfolio careers" that are highly mobile, routinely crossing labor market boundaries in search of stable and rewarding work. This chapter looks at the early careers of

creative professionals, whose work experience offers models of career navigation that are useful for skilled and professional work more broadly. The chapter demonstrates that workers adapt to the varied institutional contexts of work using strategies of self-assessment and self-presentation. Young creatives continually look within—evaluating their own qualities in market terms—as they experience jobs in various contexts. They learn to understand their own capacities as labor market potentialities and then reevaluate these as contexts shift. The primary criteria on which these assessments are based are skills and personal style, which encompasses personality, preferences, and affective qualities. Instrumental responses to self-assessments include investment in human capital—both emotional and technical capacities—and self-selection based on a sense of fit with a job or project. More commonly, though, the process involves opportunistic growth and adaptation to working environments, as workers learn to match their embodied, identity-based preferences with job roles, firms, and industries. The chapter illuminates the experience of boundary-spanning careers while also reviving a micro-sociological stream of career theory.

Chapter 4, “Crafting Identity: Two Approaches to Professionalization in Art School,” turns to college education as a training ground in occupational identification and career preparation. Professional training is the dominant contemporary form of higher education in the United States, having surpassed the arts and sciences in the number of undergraduate enrollees and college graduates. Yet, sociologists know little about how students experience the professionalization process at the college level. This chapter shows how professional training varies across academic departments in one institution and the important effects this has on students’ modes of career preparation. The two departments use similar training methods but their approaches are infused with different meanings; that is, they practice distinct pedagogic cultures. One prepares students for industry-specific work roles to which students peg their future trajectories; the other cultivates general competencies that are applicable across industries, leaving students to identify work roles and career pathways. The analysis provides a conceptually nuanced model drawn from cultural and organizational sociology that is applicable across settings of higher education.

CHAPTER 2

“Boundary Work as Career Navigation in Design and Media”

This chapter explores the meaning of work, drawing upon sociological research into cultural production to illustrate the distinctive characteristics of creative work as a meaningful pursuit, and how these meanings are enacted in careers. Most of the art school graduates interviewed for this chapter express frustration with the constraints imposed on their work by clients and managers. This finding is consistent with sociological research asserting that the tensions found throughout creative industries and occupations—between artistic expression and routinized production models—define the experience of creative work. In addition, however, to wishing to avoid such constraints, some interviewees either embrace the limitations on their work as helpful guidelines, or prefer a balance between highly engaging and more routine tasks. In enacting the tensions of their work, this variety in responses shows that many creative workers take a pragmatic stance toward creativity, accepting managerial control and unimaginative tasks as necessary and even desirable. The chapter then shows how these evaluations of work extend beyond projects into the broader temporal horizons of career navigation. Interviewees use two forms of boundary work—integration and segmentation—to enact work preferences, using the art-versus-market opposition to justify a range of practices. Segmentation includes several strategies that reproduce the symbolic boundary between artistry and commerce. These include taking on creative side projects, holding on to creative tasks within firms, and evaluating the respective merits of consecutive periods of freelance work. Integration strategies, in contrast, break down the opposition, blending artistic and commercial motivations in work roles as corporate manager or entrepreneur. Integration also applies to job seekers—who keep preferences open by necessity—and those who leave creative work but find analogous forms of engagement in non-creative occupations. As a whole, interviewees’ accounts in this chapter demonstrate how workers in various roles in the creative economy apply a shared definition of creativity to justify a wide range of practices and arrangements. The chapter’s findings show that the rhetoric of creativity is a malleable cultural resource. Today’s practical creative professionals find a number of ways to enact creative identities and work styles as they navigate across job roles and industries.

1. Introduction

In sociology as in the popular imagination, creative work represents a site of frustration and compromise. Artists require autonomy to express their unique vision and execute projects skillfully, while the economic structures that support their work impose constraints on creative processes and outcomes. Workers are motivated by aesthetic standards of craftsmanship, while managers and clients impose restrictions on materials, cost, and timelines. In addition, sociological research on creative careers tends to highlight the experience of high-profile industries and occupations, or the struggles of creative workers to remain motivated in precarious conditions. Less well understood are the mundane efforts of career entrants in commercial fields to adjudicate among a diverse range of work roles and environments as they build rewarding and stable careers. The experiential tension between artistry and commerce is particularly pronounced in commercial art fields such as media and design. But how does the tension between artistry and commerce shape the experience of career navigation in creative fields? Sociologists have studied the ways in which workers and managers assert their priorities, but less frequently examine how such negotiations shape careers.

This chapter examines how young artists entering commercial production roles experience the well-documented tensions between artistry and commerce in these fields. Specifically, I show how novice graphic designers and digital media artists perform boundary work, putting the symbolic boundaries between personal expression and market demands into practice by either integrating or segmenting their working lives into distinct temporal zones (Nippert-Eng 1996a, 1996b). In doing so, they make choices and form aspirations that play a part in shaping career trajectories. Drawing on work history interviews with 55 commercial artists in two occupational groups, the analysis applies insights from the classic work of Robert Faulkner (1973, 1983) to the contemporary creative economy. Whereas Faulkner and most researchers of cultural production look at a single institutional field in each study, I provide a broader look at work across creative occupations and industries, in careers that involve frequent transitions. I find that highly mobile creative professionals evaluate jobs and projects using vocabularies of creativity that are highly flexible and often contradictory. They assess work in particular roles and settings according to the feeling of engagement and quality of work they experience, balancing these against inevitable workplace routines and constraints. They put symbolic boundaries into practice in personalized career-building strategies, either resolving the tension by finding ways to integrate conflicting motivations, or actively segmenting tasks and jobs based on these opposing valuations.

2. Literature review: The meaning and practice of creative careers

The tension in creative industries between routinized production and the unpredictable nature of artistic inspiration is well documented. Artistry is defined by its charismatic aura; artistic fields consist of conflicting hierarchies based on the opposition of artistic prestige and economic prominence (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). In commercial fields, this opposition informs practices and planning. Innovation must be balanced with genre-based expectations to achieve success with an audience; left unrestricted, artistic production may result in undisciplined and unsuccessful organizations (Hirsch 1972; Jeffcutt and Pratt 2009; Lampel et al. 2000). Yet the risk for producers is also the source of the creative sector's powerful draw for workers seeking some measure of personal autonomy and expression in their work (Menger 1999, 2006).

Conventional wisdom in economics dictates that creative workers suffer poorer than average outcomes, paying a price for seeking desirable work in competitive markets (Alper and Wassall 2006; Stern 2005). But artists are resilient; they routinely combine jobs in different roles and move across economic sectors in the search of stable and engaging work (Throsby and Zednik 2011; Lindemann 2013; Lingo and Tepper 2013). Creative work may be risky, but it is also a powerful source of meaning and self-direction.

Faulkner's research (1973, 1983) remains instructive in its sophisticated analysis of workers' motivations and practices in highly competitive creative fields. In his research on symphony musicians, Faulkner identifies "career concerns," a collectively shared "common sense point of view" (Faulkner 1973: 334-5). Faulkner builds on this insight in his study of composers in Hollywood, who develop "shared understandings" and an occupational ethos. The ethos is reinforced in standardized stories composers tell of proper and improper practice, from which "premises for practical action are developed" (1983: 165-6). Such stories "direct newcomers and central figures alike to an occupational script in which they can articulate and reconcile conflicting interests or opposing tendencies" (*ibid.*: 165). Moreover, these shared sensibilities are formed through practice, in the early stage of trial and error in a career: "The new composer gathers disconnected bits of information as he moves from one assignment to the next, and he gradually pieces together an image of his profession" (*ibid.*: 90).

Just as they guide the composers through the everyday tensions in creative autonomy versus workplace constraint, occupational scripts provide navigational guidance by helping the composers to locate themselves amid the role conflicts and shifting circumstances of media production. Yet their tendency to share occupational scripts does not extend to the career trajectories of these artists, which diverge based on talent, connections, ambition, and luck. Faulkner traces the movement of Hollywood composers from the periphery to the center of the industry, where film work is analogous to the major leagues, television work to the minors. Faulkner's book does not examine in detail the routes that lead artists into the occupation, or their forms of mobility within it—other than the transition from periphery to core projects for a lucky few. Thus, readers are left without a sense of how young workers entering this field use the new knowledge they have of occupational scripts and shared identities to respond to unpredictable circumstances. Moreover, Faulkner's attention to the internal workings of a single industry excludes those who may move into and out of this competitive field.

Subsequent research on the conflicting meanings found in a wide range of creative occupations has flourished, especially in ethnographic studies of specific occupational roles. Fine (1992, 1996) writes that on-site negotiations over aesthetic standards and constraints on work—such as limited resources like time and ingredients, as well as customer complaints—define the work experience of restaurant cooks. Recent studies emphasize creative workers' struggle for self-determination and jurisdiction on projects (Wei 2012; Elsbach and Flynn 2013; Koppman 2014) or examine how web-based media production offers attractive features to young professionals while also presenting a site of compromised agency (Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Damarin 2006; Isler 2007; Stark 2009; Neff 2012). Gerber (2017) takes research on the symbolic boundaries in creative work toward further complexity, drawing on the concepts of valuation and commensuration to show how artists combine multiple vocabularies of worth in their accounts of working life. Evaluations that seem logically incompatible on their face—such as pragmatic benefit to one's career and dedication to art as a calling—are alternated in painstaking "push and pull" narratives that draw on multiple valuations to justify variations in artistic practice (2017: 89).

This rich literature on the meaning of creative work has remained relatively separate from an equally distinguished stream of work on creative careers. These studies tend to focus on advancement dynamics within a single field, lending important insight into, for example, opportunity structures in the Hollywood film and television industry (Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Jones 1996; Bielby and Bielby 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Rossman et al. 2010) and social networks in local music scenes (Grazian 2004; Pinheiro and Dowd 2009; Dowd and Pinheiro 2013). An important exception to this trend is Leschziner's (2015) work on the careers of elite chefs. Leschziner maps the rhetorical strategies that chefs use to evaluate their work against their status positions, a major development in Bourdieusian analysis of belief and identity vis-à-vis social location. But, like many studies of cultural production, Leschziner's analysis is bounded within two distinctive geographically-defined fields. In addition, her study examines routes to the top of an occupational field, rather than the struggle for access. Each of these studies provides insights into the dynamics of uncertain advancement in competitive fields of cultural production, but offers less guidance for studies of highly mobile careers in which changes in work role and employment arrangement are routine.

This chapter advances the latter agenda, applying the concept of boundary work to a study of career formation. Boundary work provides a useful way to understand how people understand and respond to competing motivations. Studies of work show how people use symbolic boundaries interactively to demarcate occupational roles in disputes over jurisdiction and to construct moral hierarchies among colleagues (Gieryn 1983; Lamont 1992; Vallas 2001a). Creative workers engage in interactive boundary work to adjudicate between worthy and unworthy products as a way to bolster their authority in interdisciplinary workplaces (Koppman 2014). Whereas these studies show the application of symbolic boundaries in the formation and reinforcement of group identities, boundary work can also apply to sets of practices that people undertake to organize their lives into distinct experiential zones. For example, boundary work applies to the effort of contractors to construct and maintain temporal boundaries, distinguishing billable hours from personal time (Evans, Kunda, and Barley 2004; Osnowitz and Henson 2016). Nippert-Eng (1996a, 1996b) shows how people approach the spatial and temporal divide between home and work to manage the conduct of relationships in each domain. She distinguishes between integration, in which aspects of home and working life merge, and segmentation, in which they are actively separated. These forms of boundary work are not mutually exclusive; rather, integration and segmentation represent extremes on either end of a continuum. Nippert-Eng explains:

As we negotiate our own home and work realms, the vast majority of us... do not approach "home" and "work" as a single, all-encompassing and amorphous category of experience... Rather, along numerous dimensions, we combine segmenting and integrating visions and practices to create personal realm configurations. (1996a: 6)

Those whose work is structured differently face distinct "realm constraints" that shape how they perform boundary work. Nippert-Eng draws examples from interviews with employees of a single scientific facility; while machinists mark "break time" with a "segmentist" approach based on years of hard-fought union struggles, scientists' professional status affords them the flexibility to move more fluidly between home and office (1996a: 40-42).

While sociological studies continually advance knowledge of creative work, they tend to address the tensions between artistry and commerce, on the one hand, and career trajectories, on the other, as separate concerns. In an effort to build on Faulkner's example, this chapter applies

the concept of boundary work, as articulated by Nippert-Eng, to a study of highly mobile creative careers in two occupational groups. When it refers to the active navigation of social spaces and relationships, boundary work provides a novel analytic way to link conflicted meanings with enacted social experience. In addition, the rich sociological tradition of research on cultural production leaves important gaps that are relevant to the contemporary creative economy. This study addresses one of those gaps, adding a comparative look at commercial art worlds—digital media and graphic design—that have not been adequately addressed given their importance to the contemporary creative economy.

3. Research methods

This chapter documents boundary work and career-building practices of creative professionals in two occupational clusters, drawing on 55 in-depth interviews. All interviewees are alumni of one private, four-year art school, Adams College of Art (a pseudonym) and graduates of either the Visual Design (n=30; 55%) or Media Arts (n=25; 45%) departments. These interviews are part of a larger study of career preparation in creative fields, for which I conducted a total of 106 interviews with current Adams College students and faculty, in addition to the alumni described in this article. Alumni interviewees are in the early and middle stages of their careers, having graduated from college three to fourteen years prior to the time of interview; the average time since graduation is eight years. I recruited interviewees through emails sent to alumni in targeted graduation years through the college's alumni office; potential interviewees then contacted me by email. Subsequent peer referrals led to some interviewees being recruited through snowball sampling.

The alumni interview sample studied in this chapter has a distinctive demographic profile, in that it consists of graduates of an unusually diverse, urban art school. Asian Americans (n=15; 27%) are overrepresented in relation to the U.S. as a whole, while African Americans are underrepresented (n=1; 2%). The remainder of the interviewees are white (n=27; 49%), Latino (n=6; 11%), Native American (n=1; 2%), or identify with mixed racial-ethnic ancestry (n=5; 9%). In terms of gender, 53% of interviewees are men (n=29), 47% women (n=26). Most interviewees are in the late twenties to mid-thirties, a typical range for alumni who have been out of school for this amount of time. A minority of interviewees (n=8; 13%) are older, having worked or undergone another form of training before enrolling at Adams.

All interviews were conducted in 2012 and 2013, in cafes, interviewees' homes or workplaces, or via Skype. They ranged from one to two hours in duration. Interviews included a detailed work history, structured questions about education and other forms of training, and personal background. Discussion of these topics led to more open-ended exchanges related to personal experience with the shifting meanings of work. I join Lamont and Swidler (2014: 157) in carrying out an "open-ended and pragmatic approach to interviewing, one where we aim to collect data not only, or primarily, about behavior, but also about representations, classification systems, boundary work, identity, imagined realities and cultural ideals, as well as emotional states." The study was designed to document the subjective process of professionalization in shifting and uncertain circumstances. Rather than focusing on one occupation or work roles in a particular industry, detailed work histories "follow" interviewees across labor market boundaries. In this regard my approach is novel. Other studies use work histories to study career trajectories in the aggregate, or track workers' movements within a particular firm, occupation, or field (Burchell 1993; Stovel, Savage, and Bearman 1996; Paterson 2001; Damarin 2006). This method

allows me to study the dynamics of identification, commitment, and mobility in several distinct, but related, fields of creative practice.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, with all identifying information removed and pseudonyms assigned. I conducted two waves of coding and analysis of interview transcripts using Atlas.ti. The first wave organized sections of text into themes (e.g., creativity-present level, creativity-limitations); the second consisted of recoding certain targeted theme sections using substantive codes that emerged inductively from the data (e.g., affective engagement, genre conventions). Finally, analysis continued in the preparation of a series of memos that synthesized these codes into the specific topics presented in this paper. This process enabled me to synthesize a large amount of work history and other interview data in a primarily inductive fashion. I adopted terms from Nippert-Eng's (1996a) study of boundary work in a later stage of analysis, finding in it a useful model of classification in work experience.

The interviewees fall into two occupational groups. *Graphic designers* (29 of 55 interviewees; 56%) specialize in print and/or web applications, including logos, signage, and promotional materials for small business and corporations. Many also specialize in designing mobile applications or web-based user interface platforms. These are creative-services professionals who work across industries and economic sectors; for example, interviewees have worked in toy manufacturing, beauty products marketing, online auto parts retailing, and a public-sector transportation agency. The more than 200,000 graphic designers in the United States earn an average income of around \$50,000, although those living in coastal and metropolitan areas tend to earn higher wages (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015a). *Digital media artists* (20 of 55 interviewees; 36%) include 2D and 3D animators, broadcast graphic artists, video game designers, and visual effects artists. These are primarily technical craftspeople concentrated in media fields, especially the advertising and entertainment industries. This is a smaller and more lucrative occupation, with more than 30,000 "multimedia artists and animators" in the U.S. making around \$70,000 on average (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015b). I also include the six interviewees (11%) who had left creative work by the time of the interview. Their early experience within—and transitions away from—these occupations provides complementary data on career flexibility and uncertainty.

As a group, these creative professionals' early careers contain a paradoxical feature: growing commitment to occupational roles, but also high levels of mobility across jobs and industries. Their job mobility is notable for its qualitative range, that is, variation in the *kinds* of changes they experience. Forty (73%) of the 55 interviewees changed employment arrangements in their first five years of work, such as moving from freelance to full-time employment. Twenty-four (44%) changed the primary skillset that they use in their work—such as a graphic designer becoming specialized in packaging design—and twelve of these changed occupations altogether. Another nineteen (35%) moved from one industry or economic sector to another, such as from a local transit agency to an apparel manufacturer. Clearly, many young graphic designers and digital media artists change jobs as a way to explore their options, seeking a secure foothold in occupations where these can be elusive.

At the same time, most interviewees were on their way to stable and rewarding careers, despite the unsettled nature of their early job histories. After five years of work, only two of the 55 (4%) had left creative work altogether. There is also evidence of growing commitment to occupational roles and identities in these early work histories: 29 of those who remained in creative work after five years (55%) had worked in at least one full-time job or long-term contract for a period of two years or more. The contradiction between these patterns of

movement and commitment suggest that when they find a stable and rewarding job, young creatives are eager to stay put. Overall, most interviewees navigated the early, turbulent period of their careers successfully, experiencing periods of uncertainty rather than prolonged financial insecurity. Five years after graduating from art school, the majority of interviewees were already successful, either stably employed in a creative occupation (n=17; 31%), advancing steadily in their fields (n=18; 33%), or having already reached highly coveted roles directing creative projects (n=5; 9%). Only a minority of interviewees (n=13; 24%) still struggled to find a secure footing five years into their new careers. Interestingly, I found no relationship between the number and variety of work changes and interviewees' and the level of advancement that interviewees had accomplished in the early years of their careers. This suggests that their ability to navigate uncertain conditions allows most of these young creatives to cross labor market boundaries without becoming insecure in the ways commonly associated with precarious work (Kalleberg 2009).

I describe these patterns to demonstrate the complex paths that young creative professionals follow as they construct career trajectories. The qualitative analysis of interview data—the focus of the chapter—shows how the meanings of creative work justify various career-building practices. The first section of findings, below, traces the conflicted meanings of creativity as they are used to evaluate work along the lines of engagement and quality. The second section shows how this rhetoric of creativity is applied in boundary work. Young creative professionals practice either integration or segmentation in the spatial arrangement of their working lives. Segmentation represents the reconstruction of the art-commerce divide in the separation of tasks, jobs, or periods of a working life according to the features of the work as more or less creatively engaging. Integration, in contrast, represents a breaking down of the art-commerce boundary, as workers combine artistic and commercial motivations in a range of career-building practices. Both are ways that interviewees apply the shared rhetoric of creativity that gives meaning to their work, and each, in turn, justifies a range of practices. The conclusion explores some of the implications of this fluidity for sociological studies of creative work and cultural production.

4. A passion for quality: The meaning of creative work

Creative professionals associate the meaning of work with two kinds of quality: the quality of the work experience—how it feels to do the work—and the quality of the products that result from the work; both are subject to aesthetic evaluations (Fine 1992: 1292). One of the predominant themes in interviewees' accounts of their work is their association of creativity with the positive, energized feeling of engagement with a project. Stella (graphic designer) explains:

I don't know what other creative people think of their job... but I want to have fun. A lot of times, all these places I've ever [worked], I stayed there until eleven, twelve, one o'clock, early in the morning. It's not because—yeah, sure, the project is due. But you start creating something and your creative juices keep flowing... And you really get into it. And I'm actually having fun, rather than [saying], "Oh my God, it's five-thirty, I've got to get going." You know? I really do what I love.

Work that is creative simply feels good. It calls upon one's skills, which are intensively applied. It no longer feels like work. Stella's account recalls the concept of "flow": a mental state of high

engagement with a task that is equivalent to “optimal experience” among both exceptional and ordinary people (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 2008).

At the same time, interviewees use the term creative when referring to high-quality work that takes place while one is highly engaged. Rather than doing things freely, creativity in this sense refers to the conditions necessary to produce good products. For example, Julie (graphic designer) notes that she gets a feeling of satisfaction from following the guidelines of typography that she learned in art school. To illustrate, Julie mentions her previous work with an advertising agency that used low-contrast and closely spaced type in presentations. “It really rubbed me the wrong way, as a designer,” she recalls. Similarly, Sandra (digital media artist) complains that her current contract as an animator for mobile game apps requires working with a lower standard of quality than she has found on other projects, such as feature films. “There’s all these subtleties of animation that just make it like really meaty and delicious,” she says. Working on mobile apps, she adds, “You don’t really have the time to do that.”

Julie and Sandra’s comments indicate that creating low-quality products leads to a feeling of frustration for creative professionals, who use occupational standards learned through intensive training in order to assess their work. Many interviewees join them in finding the constraints that managers and clients impose on their work as a source of interference and frustration. Denise (graphic designer) illustrates the increasing constraints over the life of a project, in this case a packaging design for a new product in her job at a toy manufacturing firm. “You start off with, like, endless possibilities,” she says, describing the ideal package with a “clear window box” and a “fancy fold” in the cardboard. “And then it goes to marketing and they’re like, ‘No, you can’t do this. The package is more expensive than the product.’ So then you have to cost-reduce.” Denise ties her frustration to the hierarchy of a bureaucratic organization: “You have art directors over you, project managers over them, marketing over them, sales over them.” Denise is a full-time employee—adding to the sense of being at the bottom of a professional hierarchy—but freelancers can be similarly blocked from doing good work, a subject of ongoing negotiation with clients. Cathy (graphic designer) remembers saying to a client, “You hired me because I know what I’m doing. Let me do this for you.” Signaling competence to clients who may not understand design is an ongoing process for freelancers (Osnowitz 2010). Although they face different kinds of constraints, many interviewees working as both full-time employees and freelancers share frustration with work processes that make their work less engaging and result in lower quality goods.

In contrast, some creative professionals find that imposed constraints foster a good working experience and lead to better quality products. For example, Mike (graphic designer) says the specifications that clients provide actually engage his level of focus and energy in a positive way, such that better work results from within set guidelines. He explains:

When you’re given the blank page, everything just sort of—your mind sort of wanders to your conventional, safe designs. And you sort of crank out stuff that is never really outstanding. But when there’s limitations, you’ll always surprise yourself with what you can do with those limitations. And you create stuff you might not have normally thought of.

Thus for Mike, working under specifications has a justification according to an artistic logic, cultivating imagination and facilitating high quality. Paradoxically, the lack of creative autonomy allows him to do better work because it forces him out of his comfort zone, overcoming the force of habit. Others insist that work can feel creative despite having already-set

guidelines. Robin (digital media artist) illustrates this point using the example of a freelance advertising project. She was hired to create a short segment of animation depicting the folding of an origami box. She explains:

There is definitely a lot of creativity even though you're working within this framework. So, say, on the last project that I worked on, well, they needed a piece of paper to fold up into a box. So that's really specific. But then within that, like, I can have it folded however I want to. And that's my creative, you know, contribution, to figure out how it's going to fold up and how it's going to spin exactly, and land, if it bounces... [The creative director] didn't really care, so, it was like, "Okay, have the artist figure it out."

Robin plays a limited role in the production process of this advertisement, yet she feels that she has sufficient freedom within that role for her work to be satisfying. Though she does not come up with the concept for the ad, she executes her part of it using her own imagination and to her own standards.

While some creative professionals state preferences for working outside of constraints, and others within them, members of a third group prefer variation in their level of autonomy and engagement over time. The work that many creative professionals find to be the most rewarding involves creating new concepts and executing the related products, from start to finish. Work in the initial phase, coming up with innovative-yet-workable ideas, is also the most demanding. For example, Annie (graphic designer) prizes the freedom she has to develop initial concepts for projects at the small architecture and branding firm where she works. "It is always really fun when you're starting something new," she says, "because it's really open and there's no barriers yet." But she adds that being highly engaged in the short term also means having responsibility over the life span of a project over several many months or more. "It's also kind of nerve wracking," Annie adds, "because you know you're going to be doing it for so long. You're like, 'Oh, what if this doesn't go right? I don't want to be stuck with this project I don't want to keep doing.'" Along with being wary of the additional responsibility of creating something new, others note that the energy it takes to be highly engaged ebbs and flows. Philip (digital media artist) prefers to move between projects that are more imaginative and those that are less demanding. He says, "I like to mix it up. I get burnt out always trying to think of something creative, because you're always thinking and you're just tired." The "flow" of attention and engagement moves not just within the course of a day, but from period to period over the course of a job, or from job to job. Thus some creative professionals prefer variation between their projects in the level of creative freedom, rather than a unitary preference for more or less constraint on their work.

Creativity is a polysemic construct, referring to engaging, high quality, and personally meaningful work. These accounts show that creative professionals have different ways of approaching the tensions between the engaging and free aspects of their work on the one hand, with its constrained and routine aspects, on the other. These accounts are resonant of Fine's (1992, 1996) work showing that managerial constraints impinge upon both aspects of quality and define the work process. Many complain about these constraints, like the restaurant cooks Fine studies, but others embrace the limitations on their creative work, claiming that they allow for or even encourage innovative and engaging work. It is notable that this variation occurs within both occupational groups I interviewed, as similarly situated workers express contrary ideas and preferences. While Fine shows that those in different occupational roles and settings use different rhetorical strategies to deal with constraint, none of the cooks openly embraces constraint or

indicates a preference for variation in the level of constraint over time. The next section of findings shows that, among highly mobile workers, evaluations of creativity in different settings help workers make sense of work transitions and understand what it means to move forward in their careers.

5. Boundary work in creative careers

Emerging creative professionals navigate through different work roles and environments by evaluating the possibilities and limitations of work, and using this information to understand forms of mobility that do not always feel like advancement. To study this complex process, I use a conceptualization of boundary work borrowed from Nippert-Eng (1996a, 1996b): the practical effort to order life's spatial and temporal zones. Through this process, workers draw upon shared definitions of the value of work to bring order and a sense of progress to disparate work experiences. The polysemic nature of creativity allows this core concept to provide rhetorical justification for a diverse range of attitudes and choices. Interviewees who follow an *integrated* approach seek to break down the symbolic boundaries between artistry and commerce. They find both sets of motivations to be meaningful and, in fact, complementary. An integrated approach to creativity justifies their positions as corporate managers or self-employed business owners. Second, those who follow a *segmented* approach actively reconstitute the boundaries between artistry and commerce by separating work practices that are routine from those that are creatively engaging. These interviewees augment routinized full-time jobs with more imaginative side projects, or pragmatically pursue less engaging work to make ends meet. Each approach—integrated or segmented—is expressed in a range of work-related practices. Neither prescribes a certain course of action; instead, just as these creative professionals take different attitudes toward the constraints on their work, they use boundary work to justify different career-building strategies (see Table 2.1, below, for a summary).

Segmentation: Rearticulating the boundary between art and commerce

Creative professionals learn early on that creatively engaging work is divided among the tasks that make up complex projects. Establishing the look and feel of a project is usually done by those in leadership roles; technical and artistic staff are left to implement marching orders quickly, using their skills and a trained eye. As shown above, most interviewees express frustration with constraints imposed by clients and managers that decrease the quality of their work experience. The first approach to boundary work, segmentation, puts this awareness into practice by justifying a range of career-building practices as ways to separate the artistic from the commercial. Some even frame their work using a classic sociological trope of the sacred and profane. Sam (digital media artist) offers an example: “People say, ‘Do what you love,’ but it kills it a little bit. It takes the fun out of it... My side passion is photography. And I’m very strict with myself, with that. I will always, only do photography for a hobby. I will never accept money for it. I want to keep that pure.” Putting up a wall between personal and professional time is a way for Sam to remain fully engaged in a quasi-sacred artistic practice, while spending his workdays in somewhat less rewarding commercial practice. Sam works as a model builder and CGI artist on feature films—an occupation that offers a high level of creative engagement—but even he finds it necessary to construct a boundary to legitimate his artwork and de-legitimate his paid work.

Table 2.1: Forms of boundary work and associated career-building practices among early-career design and media professionals (n=55)

Form of boundary work	Career-building practices	Examples
Segmentation	Side projects	Video game designer posting online tutorials
	Ambivalent advancement	Senior designer, wary of promotion
	Freelance exploration	Graphic designer alternating between freelance projects and long-term contracts
	Strategic freelance	Graphic designer seeking easy projects
Integration	Entrepreneurship	Founder, video game studio
	Corporate management	Creative director, beauty products company
	Job seekers	Unemployed web video producer
	Dropping out	Aspiring graphic designer turned HR coordinator

Sam’s account represents a larger pattern of enacting boundaries between art and commerce. But Sam is unusual in creating such a stark divide between personal and professional practices. Most interviewees who endorse segmentation are creating distance between more and less engaging forms of what is still essentially work. For example, many creative professionals who become disillusioned with full-time work on commercial projects seek to find creative engagement elsewhere. Tim (digital media artist) expresses frustration with working under a supervisor whose aesthetic judgment differs from his. “But I guess that’s what personal projects are for,” Tim reasons, “so you can do everything start to finish the way that you want.” To this end, Tim develops free, online curriculum for beginning artists in his field of video game design, a task that allows him to flex his creativity by creating entire game worlds from scratch. While he is not paid for this activity, creating these tutorials is a career-building activity for Tim, in that it keeps him interested in his work while finding an alternative venue for expressing a personal vision. Others pursue paid side projects that are more creatively fulfilling. Since freelance work often provides greater autonomy amid less bureaucratic interference, it provides a welcome contrast for some full-time workers whose day jobs have become routine. Denise (graphic designer) works full time at a toy company, but takes on freelance projects in her own time, such as designing wedding invitations and event materials for non-profit organizations. Both of these provide her with a feeling of connection and fulfillment that is missing from her day job. Denise explains by first describing her day job:

You’re kind of always under someone’s thumb. After a few years, you feel like you have zero creativity. You just come in every day and you just do what you know how

to do. And nothing changes. So then you try and find other things. Like, everybody does freelancing. Because you get a little bit more creativity. I have to do freelance or else I'll lose my mind.

“Creativity” in this sense refers to the freedom to call the shots, to not only carry out orders but to first plan and then implement projects according to one’s own aesthetic standards. Not only are wedding invitations and non-profit events meaningful for Denise (and her clients), directing her own work process provides a more fulfilling experience. While this level of control is not a priority for all creative professionals, Tim and Denise seek out additional work to recharge their creative batteries, allowing them to remain fully engaged in a less rewarding day job. In practice, they create quasi-professional spaces outside of commercial workplaces where routine reigns and work can feel unimaginative.

A segmented approach to the tensions of creative work is expressed not only through the creation of additional work, but in the evaluations of full-time workers who anticipate their future progress according to conventional career ladders within firms. Advancement tends to be more routine within bureaucratic organizations, as job hierarches are clearly marked. Yet this clarity does not necessarily resolve the boundaries around creative work; many in-house creatives remain ambivalent about creativity as they advance (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010). Some interviewees express this ambivalence in wary recognition that their assigned tasks will change as they move up the career ladder. For example, Christine (graphic designer) values the hands-on nature of her work at a paper products company and fears that the next stage of her career could involve less creative engagement. Acknowledging that her boss is grooming her for a leadership role in the company, Christine reflects on the position she would occupy if promoted:

[My boss] started as a designer. And now she’s making spreadsheets and calling the clients and... like, she doesn’t really get to touch the art any more. But I would say I still touch the art on a daily basis... I don’t ever want to stop that. Sometimes she talks about becoming the creative director and me becoming the art director, but honestly I really don’t think I want to do it, because I don’t want to stop designing.

Being able to “touch the art” is important to Christine, who foresees her artistic functions limited further by the dominance of client service and administrative tasks if she were to be promoted again. While Christine does not separate her working life according to the boundary between creative and non-creative tasks, her recognition of those tasks and their changing role in her career reflect a segmented approach to creativity—if a less committed one than that of Tim and Denise, above.

Just as freelance work provides Denise with a creative outlet of her skills as a designer, those who work primarily as freelancers appreciate the flexible and autonomous nature of their work. Freelancers have the option to work with clients they like and trust, and to do projects that they find interesting as they build skills and a reputation. Freelance graphic designers negotiate aesthetic control on a project-by-project basis (Osnowitz 2010), which means that the symbolic boundaries between engaging and routine work can be negotiated situationally. For example, Julie (graphic designer) says that early in her career, she recognized the opportunity for exploration in doing a series of short-term freelance projects, recalling:

I was kind of lucky that my first freelance project was with a real estate developer who was about affordable housing... So it was really nice working with them and

after that I kind of felt like, if I pick and choose my clients then I'm doing projects that I like and also I can pick and choose something that gives me a greater sense of creativity, and also greater sense of control.

Julie quickly learned that freelancing could be personally meaningful and that some projects promise “a greater sense of control” than others. However, the freedom to choose meaningful, engaging work often does not translate into security. After several years of freelance work, Julie was having trouble making ends meet and took a one-year contract with an advertising firm. Although it was more lucrative, she faced a new tension in this job: compromised quality. “I was doing really crappy work,” Julie says, adding, “but the money was really nice.” At the contract’s end, Julie returned to freelancing, reasoning: “I, A, am willing to make a little bit less money and, B, be a little bit more satisfied creatively.” She indicates that this strategy has already paid off in terms of doing more engaging work: “This past year I really tried to take on things where, you know, they’re creative and not—not just for the paycheck.” In this account, Julie describes two transitions: she took the advertising contract by necessity, and went back into freelance work by choice. She retains a segmented approach to creativity, in that she recognizes one work role as more rewarding but uncertain (self-guided freelance projects), another as more stable but less fulfilling (long-term contract).

Freelancers who experience frequent transitions between projects face heightened uncertainty, but also have the freedom to seek out projects with desired qualities. Thus, another way to express a segmented approach to creativity is to strategically alternate between projects with different features. Diana (graphic designer) uses the variability in her work to her advantage by crafting a project-specific approach to segmentation, distinguishing more creatively engaging—and more demanding—projects from those that are simpler and more lucrative in the short term. She explains:

It all comes down to the client. Because sometimes they’re very close-minded, even if I tell them, “Look, I can do something that makes you stand apart or makes it better,” they’re like, “No, no, no.” They’re in a safe zone. And they want something a little standard and cliché... When my bank account’s not as like healthy as it should be, I will really go after those clients and just be like, “I can do this for you quick. Do you need a new postcard this month? Do you need a new piece?” And I know what they want, so it’s easy to execute.

Whereas many creative freelancers are wary of clients who are “in a safe zone” and whose projects do not require imaginative labor, Diana sees this as an opportunity to support her business by turning around a low-stakes project quickly. Diana exerts a measure of control over the work process, thus extending her career by making it more sustainable. She is unusual among the interviewees in treating freelance projects in this business-savvy manner.

This section of findings provides several examples of boundary work as a set of conceptual distinctions put into practice. Many creative professionals reinforce the symbolic boundary between art and commerce by separating distinct temporal zones of their working lives. The need of some interviewees to pursue additional projects to gain creative fulfillment contradicts the well-documented appeal of creative workplaces (Florida 2004; Ross 2004; Neff et al. 2005). Yet Denise (toy company) and Tim (video game studio) find that working as full-time employees in commercial settings has its limitations. They both express their frustration by doing semi-professional work in their personal time, in effect buttressing and expanding their core skillsets while they remain committed to less creatively engaging jobs. Freelancers like Julie

alternate between more and less engaging periods of their careers, and these experiences in turn inform future decisions. Business-savvy Diana also places potential projects into separate categories: more imaginative and resource intensive, versus more constrained but easier to implement. Her segmentation is not driven by a concern for purity but a pragmatic distribution of time and other resources. All of these practices represent strategic adaptations to the constraints of creative work, in which rhetorics of creativity justify a range of experiences. The changeable nature of early careers provides diverse job opportunities and different forms of economic engagement. The logic of segmentation allows these to be brought into a semblance of order, as shared occupational scripts legitimize several different kinds of career-building practices. A segmented approach to creative work involves continually reconstructing the institutionalized boundary between tasks that have artistic merit and those that maximize profit.

Integration: Embracing constraint

Integration as an orientation to creative work represents the collapsing of symbolic boundaries between aesthetic quality and routinized production. It is the result of effort, as work experience in a particular institutional setting leads to a new awareness of one's priorities and capabilities. For a few of the professionals interviewed for this study (four of 55; 7%) a career within corporations represents a strategic resolution of the difficult balance between quality and constraint that is a dominant theme in narratives of creative work. For example, Stella (graphic designer) has been a project manager and creative director for beauty products and toy companies. Here, Stella describes a transitional moment early in her career that set her on this unlikely trajectory:

At some point in my career, I really wanted to quit this whole thing. I could not deal with people looking at my labor of love, basically... Cutting it, dissecting it, invalidating... But then something told me, I am not a fine artist. This is communication art, this is graphic design. And I realized that this line of business solely exists because there is a client telling you what the hell they don't like... So I start embracing the invalidation and I really start actually loving what [the] business requirements are. Knowing the business, what's the reasoning behind [it], who are the customers... Those things actually [make] you a [more] efficient and smarter creative person.

Stella initially found the constraints put on her work by supervisors to be emotionally challenging. They made her work less engaging and decreased her satisfaction with the resulting products. Yet over time, Stella says that she learned to embrace the constraints that are ubiquitous in corporate workplaces. Not only is "the business side... making [her] job exist," but working under constraints makes her "a smarter creative person." Seeing this, Stella is willing to integrate her goals and standards as a creative professional with those of her employer. This strategy has served her well as her career advanced toward positions of greater responsibility.

Several other interviewees (five of 55; 9%) demonstrate a different approach to creative integration, becoming entrepreneurs. These include owners of small consulting firms or other creative businesses, such as retail shops or galleries. Like corporate managers, entrepreneurs collapse the boundary between art and commerce, drawing meaning and self-direction from both. For example, Andrew (digital media artist) is in the process of establishing an independent video game studio where he will act as co-owner and creative director. He contrasts the innovative projects he wants to create with those of mass-market game developers. "It's not really doing,

you know, first person shooter games where you shoot aliens. Stuff you've seen a million times," he says; rather, his firm is "trying to take games someplace new." Andrew explains that starting his own company was more attractive than becoming a creative supervisor in a larger firm because in the latter situation, "You're a little bit more limited in your creative capabilities. Working with more people, there's kind of more cooks in the kitchen... I want to have more creative control than that." Yet Andrew does not seek unlimited creative autonomy; he still works within genre conventions, technological constraints, and industry standards. As a business owner, though, Andrew seeks to set the parameters that will constrain his own work and the products his firm creates. His account resonates with Stark's (2009) interpretation of new media work: "Entrepreneurship is not brokering difference between otherwise disconnected identities but instead occurs at sites where identities and their competing orders of worth are densely interacting" (2009: 110). On the job site, media entrepreneurs' multiple motivations interact densely; in the practice of a career, they integrate in a combined role of creative visionary and business owner.

Even full-time jobs cannot protect workers from the uncertainties of turbulent markets. Many creative workers participate in unsettled fields and occupy job roles that are not fully institutionalized, such as those working on new or currently evolving media platforms. For those facing economic insecurity, accepting creative constraints represents a practical approach to employability (Menger 2006; Smith 2010). For example, Jacob (digital media artist) was recently laid off from his dream job as video producer for an online media channel marketed to video game fans. Since then, he has been looking for something similar and trying to imagine alternatives. Here Jacob explains the predicament of a skilled specialist in new and shifting terrain: "My realm of experience has gone to web video, YouTube, search—I'm just of that culture now. It's a new sort of production space [and] it's rare to have as much experience as I do... Right now in games media there's been sort of a culling of some stuff and it's been a little rough." No purist, Jacob's talk of work has a producer's attention to audience metrics, such as when he refers to the website's young male target audience as "the magic demographic." But he also describes his work and its environment in the glowing terms of maximum creative engagement: the firm that laid him off was "awesome," a "super-creative, fun environment." As a job seeker, Jacob seeks to balance a fully engaging work experience with the commercial logic of production. His acceptance of constraints on his creative production allows him to remain flexible, open to whatever work comes his way, in ways that are informed by his prior experiences.

Finally, a group of interviewees (six of the 55, 11%) practices boundary integration in a surprising way: leaving creative work altogether. Creative work is demanding, uncertain, and can be extremely competitive; thus, some who aspire to become creative professionals end up pursuing other paths. But these former creatives build links to their current work, legitimating it as also being creative and, therefore, a worthy source of personal fulfillment. For example, Laura started her career as a freelance graphic designer, but soon shifted into administrative work. Now a human resources coordinator, Laura recalls being frustrated by early freelance projects—both the work itself and the difficulty of finding it. She uses an expanded definition of creativity as problem solving. "I like coming up with solutions," Laura explains, "and I guess that's where I kind of apply it in my work now, is just coming up with creative solutions for projects... I love coordinating and planning." Laura's approach is one of integration in that she interprets management activities as creative activities. With this finding, the chapter joins other recent

studies that show how creatively-identified workers enact and protect creative identities even as they engage in non-creative work (Lindemann, Tepper, and Talley 2017).

These accounts show several ways in which creative professionals apply an integrated approach to the symbolic boundary between art and the market, using rhetorics of creativity to justify merging the creative and routine aspects of work. Interestingly, the interviewees featured here are among the most *and* least successful I spoke to, according to a metric of occupational advancement. Managers and entrepreneurs are among the most successful in this way, many having attained creative director status. These career strategies require high resource investment; climbing the corporate ladder takes intense devotion, and small businesses often fail. Yet for those who are willing and able to do so, merging artistry with commerce opens doors to leadership roles in the creative economy. Yet those who are struggling to find a foothold in the creative economy may also endorse integration, whether out of preference or a belief that doing so maximizes their employability. That those who have quit creative occupations also find ways to integrate engaging work with routine, managerial tasks demonstrates the adaptability of creativity as a guiding concept for these workers. Just as it does for those who practice segmentation, above, a shared vocabulary of justification applies to a range of integrated career-building practices. This diversity reinforces the notion that many avenues are open to creative professionals. Constraints imposed by managers and clients may restrict how they experience work on a particular job, but do not limit them from crafting rewarding careers.

6. Conclusion

This chapter features a micro-level cultural approach to labor market participation, showing how symbolic boundaries that are institutionalized within creative fields are interpreted by actors responding to pressures to become, and remain, economically independent. By looking broadly across work roles and industries—as creative professionals do in their early careers—this study examines how people progress in uncertain and often unstable circumstances. In addition, I examine two occupational fields that sociologists have rarely considered before: graphic design, a well-established service profession found throughout the economy, and digital media, a set of technical crafts concentrated in the entertainment and advertising industries.

In the first section of findings, I present evidence of commercial art as a field of cultural production whose participants share more practical than idealistic motivations. In contrast to the popular image of the artist as an independent, rebellious economic actor, these creative professionals pursue strategies in which artistic considerations are loosely coupled with instrumental goals, rather than opposed to them. The extent of this looseness varies; diverse responses can all be justified using a flexible, multifaceted definition of creativity. Creative work is valued according to a feeling of intense engagement and results in high-quality products. While some interviewees use the language of sacred and profane to distinguish between artistic effort and paid work, most are more than willing to incorporate the value of creativity into their assessments of commercial projects. If all design and media workers make sense of their work using the ubiquitous tension between artistry and commerce, they take different stances regarding this tension. Most express frustration with constraints imposed by managers and clients—in keeping with a dominant theme in the sociological literature on cultural production—while others embrace such constraints as creatively liberating. Others seek to balance creatively engaging tasks with those that are less demanding, alternating such tasks or projects over the longer term.

Armed with these shared definitions of creativity as a cultural resource, creative workers progress through their early careers by combining jobs in different roles and industries. The second section of findings shows that the two primary approaches to the boundaries between artistry and commerce—segmentation and integration, terms borrowed from Nippert-Eng (1996a)—are both associated with a range of career-building practices. Interviewees enact segmentation through several career-building practices that all reconstruct the opposition of art and commerce in the temporal zones of working life. Jobs, tasks, or periods of freelance work are labeled as allowing more meaningful, engaging work, or—on the contrary—as featuring excessive constraint that results in poor quality products. In these accounts, the rhetoric of creativity justifies keeping creative and non-creative functions separate. Examples include adding freelance projects to a full-time work schedule, rising in a corporate hierarchy without losing creative fulfillment, alternating between freelance and longer-term contracts that provide different rewards, and making strategic use of this alternation by seeking simple freelance jobs to make ends meet. Each of these practices represents a way of reconfiguring and reconstituting the boundaries between art and the market.

The findings also demonstrate several ways in which creative professionals enact an integrated approach to the art-commerce divide. Those who are willing and able to become corporate managers or entrepreneurs can merge the competing motivations of creative work, in effect breaking down the symbolic boundary. Artistic and market-based valuations blend in leadership roles on projects that are both commercially viable and creatively fulfilling. Yet such integration is out of reach for most, who may seek to become leaders but face difficulties finding stable work that is also rewarding. Job seekers may adopt a position of integration by necessity, as they believe such a stance lends itself to employability in competitive markets. In addition, some interviewees paradoxically find ways to integrate the conflicting demands of creative work by leaving such work behind. Instead, they retain a form of creative identity by defining routine, non-artistic tasks as creatively fulfilling and, therefore, worthy of a (former) artist's attention.

Each of the strategies depicted in this chapter represents an effort to navigate uncertain careers guided by the meanings of creativity that these art school graduates share. Certainly, the interviewees experience periods of economic insecurity, as well as instances of the unpaid or exploitative labor that are common in creative work (Frenette 2013). Yet, for the most part, these creative professionals are stably employed in their respective fields and are rising within occupational hierarchies. Some are very successful, having already reached a pinnacle of their field—creative director status—in the first five years of work. Their success stands in contrast to the focus of much research on creative work that is, understandably, preoccupied by artists' experience as precarious workers. My interviewees are exceptionally well-located, receiving training in a coastal metropolitan area that is home to many of the industries they seek to join, and where creative workers' salaries are relatively high. There is a contradiction in the early outcomes of these creative workers, who weather dramatic shifts in work roles fairly well. Their relative stability and success leads me to conclude, along with Kalleberg (2009) that the skills, training, connections, and status of professionals shields them from the most harmful effects of even very high levels of economic uncertainty.

This chapter's findings complement existing frameworks in the sociological literature on cultural production and work in creative industries while also suggesting new paths for research and theory-building. Like Faulkner's classic studies of orchestra musicians and Hollywood composers, the findings of this study show a clear link between creative workers' evaluations of work and the ways in which sequences of jobs form careers. While other recent studies have

documented on-site negotiations of creative expression and managerial constraint, none has linked these to the wide array of possibilities that young creative professionals enact as they pursue stable and rewarding careers. Instead, most research on cultural production studies the dynamics within fields, rarely examining the movement of creative workers across work roles and industries. This is a major oversight, given the tendency of creative workers to combine a seemingly disorderly sequence of jobs, and especially so given the rising prominence of the creative sector in the post-industrial knowledge-based economy.

The lack of sustained attention to careers extends beyond research in culture, to sociology broadly. Years ago, DiMaggio (1994: 33) made a comment that highlights the ongoing disconnect between research on opportunity structures and the experience of work: “Because empirically observed job sequences, even among professionals, are far less orderly than the notion of ‘career’ implies, it is likely that the career concept structures persons’ economic behavior to some extent independently of underlying labor-market patterns.” This article revisits the “career concept” by recruiting the concept of boundary work to frame a conceptualization of career trajectories from the worker’s perspective. I follow earlier sociological theorists (e.g., Becker and Carper 1956; Hughes 1958; Strauss 1959) in understanding careers as a form of social experience that extends evaluations of specific work experiences over broader time and space horizons. But I adapt this conceptualization to the situation of creative workers, who—like a growing proportion of the American workforce—routinely change jobs and employment arrangements in the course of a career. As workers experience jobs and projects in different environments, they assess not only particular firms, jobs, and clients but institutional ways of working, including occupations, industries, and employment arrangements. In the process, they form broad sets of preferences, calling upon rhetorics of creativity to bring disparate experiences into an ordered framework.

All economic participation is informed by orders of worth that are mutually understood by participants in a given context (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). Creative fields are marked by the symbolic opposition of artistic and commercial modes of valuation. The opposition is institutionalized in the workings of creative industry firms, in which artistic functions are spatially segregated from others, as well as the hierarchical structure of fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). This chapter shows how the same opposition is institutionalized in the personal experience of career navigation. I find that graphic designers and digital media artists practice two forms of boundary work—integration and segmentation—that, in turn, justify a range of career-building practices. This finding contributes to the rich sociological literature on the meaning conflicts in creative work. Fine (1996) argues that cooks use occupational rhetoric selectively to bolster identity claims in specific circumstances. Gerber (2017) argues that artists—a relatively disaggregated occupational group—alternate between contradictory valuations to justify their circumstances, preferences, and outlook. This chapter complements both previous studies and adds a novel perspective. Rather than connecting the meanings of creative work to one’s position in an occupational field, like Fine, I connect them to career-building practices endorsed by members of both of the occupational groups I study. I join Gerber in examining how the complex valuations of creative work justify different forms of economic engagement.

This chapter’s findings question the primary role that many cultural production scholars assign to occupations in shaping work experience. The study’s design was intended to compare the experiences of workers in two differently structured occupational worlds, yet the interviewees’ tendency to move across occupational boundaries renders occupational identity a

problematic construct, at least in early careers. Members of both groups included in this study—graphic designers and digital media artists—practice a similar range of career-building practices and use of both forms of boundary work. This finding stands in contrast to Faulkner’s (1983) identification of occupational scripts as a core meaning-making tool, but acknowledges Fine (1996) and Nippert-Eng’s (1996a, 1996b) observation that occupants of different work roles articulate and enact the tensions of their work differently. There is an ongoing debate in the sociology of work on the implications of more flexible work structures, which are commonly found in cultural production. As Damarin (2006: 434) notes: “The growth of flexible work organizations appears to have contradictory implications for the future of the occupational form”; she suggests the term “modular occupations” for workers’ loose attachments amid “functionally flexible” work structures (2006: 451-2). Damarin’s findings are especially germane to this chapter, given that her case—website production—includes some of the same creative professionals featured here. As creative industries and cultural production models have long had “post-bureaucratic” features that are now spreading to other industries, this line of questioning suggests the utility of continued dialog among scholars of cultural production and work and occupations. This chapter’s findings support the conclusion that occupations represent a tenuous place of belonging in early creative careers. They inform standards and expectations of quality that enable young, mobile professionals to sense opportunities and form aspirations that may extend beyond the boundaries of a conventional occupation. I assert that the meanings bestowed upon work within occupational communities take on different meanings as workers enter new work arrangements, combining roles in a fluid, personalized manner. Just as modular occupations play a key role in contemporary production processes, adaptable occupational identities appear to play a formative role in the formation of career trajectories.

This chapter ends with two disclaimers. The first has to do with a common slippage found in the presentation of qualitative data, between using personal accounts of social experience as justification for action, and the implication that such rhetorics motivate or enable action. I do not claim to have identified a causal process in this chapter, such that a particular form of boundary work leads to or paves the way toward a particular set of career-building practices. Instead, I interpret accounts of turning points and past realizations as part of the narrative structure of identity formation, as past events are brought in line with current understandings of self and social context. At the same time, I would argue that personal accounts do play a part in paving the way for the future by informing goals and plans. I join Frye (2012) in defining aspiration as an assertion of identity that draws on shared meanings to legitimate one’s present status. Career progression is subject to opportunity structures and resource flows that are beyond individuals’ control. In staking claims and asserting priorities, creative workers apply conventional rhetorical positions to make sense of unpredictable circumstances.

Second, I do not interpret this chapter’s findings as a thorough account of the motivations for engaging in creative work. Some of the most consequential reasons for pursuing a job or career change are instrumental, idiosyncratic, and may have little to do with creative engagement or quality. For example, interviewees mention long commutes, demanding schedules, and growing families as reasons for a job change. It is nonetheless interesting to observe the many ways that creative workers use rhetorics of creativity to understand and explain career progression amid uncertain circumstances. All workers are subject to a broad range of motivations and constraints, but cultural production is distinctive in that workers’ rhetorical strategies are well documented by sociologists. This sophistication provides an opportunity for

studies of creative work that may apply to other occupations and industries in which conflicts of meaning are both thoroughly institutionalized and highly adaptable.

CHAPTER 3

“Self-Assessment and Self-Presentation in Disorderly Careers”

Whereas the previous chapter focused on the meaning of work as it informs career processes, this one examines the meaning of the self as an economic agent. It responds to the sociological research literatures on work and careers, using the case of creative workers to speak to working arrangements and career trajectories that are increasingly found among “knowledge economy” professionals and skilled workers. Rather than symbolic boundaries between artistry and commerce, this chapter references the boundaries demarking zones of labor market participation: work roles, occupations, industries, sectors, and employment arrangements. Building and maintaining a sense of one’s capacities in market terms helps creative workers navigate disorienting changes in roles and status, as they cross multiple labor market boundaries in their early careers. Skills and personal style are the two primary ways in which these workers measure and invest in their own capacities, as they learn what employers expect and how much agency they can exert in a given context. They present themselves strategically based on these criteria, too, acting on the perceived fit of their skills or style with a current project or potential opportunity. The chapter’s findings suggest that self-assessment joins self-presentation as a “soft skill” that shapes career success and may be developed in trainees and novices.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, sociologists have documented fundamental shifts in the structure of American work. Contingent or “nonstandard” work, such as contracting and freelance, is expanding as more corporate functions are being outsourced (Cappelli 1999; Kalleberg 2000, 2009; Davis-Blake and Broschak 2009). The duration of jobs has declined significantly, along with career stability (Farber 2010; Hollister 2011). The early stages of careers are useful for exposing the techniques workers use to adapt to labor market conditions, yet remain understudied. While sociologists have looked at the experiences of established workers who are “downsized” and become contractors (e.g., Barley and Kunda 2004), they have not shown how young workers entering skilled occupations establish career trajectories under these conditions. Gaps in the data prevent sociologists from fully grasping how workers cope with frequent change and how many build stable and prosperous careers despite great uncertainty. How do young, skilled workers establish careers in fields where contingent work is the norm?

Creative fields provide insight into this broader socioeconomic process. Artistic labor is characterized by flexible engagement with a number of different economic arrangements—not only firms in different sectors, but different ways of working—in industries where project-based work has long been the norm (Menger 1999). Yet here, too, sociologists who study these trends have done a better job of tracking artists’ labor market experience than in explaining how they learn and adapt to these conditions. As a result, Lingo and Tepper (2013: 352) call for “a robust theory of artistic identity that takes into account how artists become *professionally socialized* in a world where the definition of professional artist is murky and the locations of socialization are varied and diverse” (emphasis in original). Given the shift toward boundary-spanning career paths in many fields today, I argue that such a theory should be more ambitious, capturing identification practices in which all skilled workers and professionals engage.

This article seeks to address the gap in sociological understanding of career uncertainty in general—and in creative fields in particular—by revisiting an old sociological premise: the career as an analytic bridge linking personal experience to the social structures of the economy. Whereas earlier sociologists saw the career as a “negotiation” or “moving perspective” between self and structure through time (Hughes 1958; Strauss 1959), more recent work neglects this conceptualization, leaving it underdeveloped. In this chapter, I develop and illustrate a conceptual framework in which identity functions as a core resource in career navigation. Interviews with early- and mid-career creative professionals—graphic designers, animators, and other digital media artists—demonstrate how these workers evaluate and respond to changing environments by learning from and adapting to situational cues. If entering a labor market means conceiving of oneself as a market entity, subsequent changes in work role and employment status require a redefinition of the self. Personal qualities and activities take on new meanings, in relation to what young workers learn about work roles, production processes, and hiring systems. Skilled workers in boundary-spanning careers engage in a continual process of self-assessment and self-presentation based on skill and personal style as the two primary criteria.

The following sections of this chapter review relevant sociological research on career uncertainty before introducing the conceptual model. Then I introduce the research setting and provide an empirical look at how career entrants experience creative fields, highlighting observed patterns of labor market boundary crossing. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to qualitative findings, showing how interviewees use skillsets and personal style in a process of identity-based navigation of uncertain economic terrain. In the conclusion, I expand upon these

findings, using them to highlight features of a new sociological model of identity-based career development. Finally, I provide suggestions about the implications of this research for sociologists.

2. Uncertainty in creative careers

Sociologists document a dramatic shift in the structure of employment in the last 50 years. The increasing prevalence of nonstandard work—part time, freelance, and temporary—is widespread but appears to have disparate effects by skill level and economic sector (Smith 1997, 2001; Newman 2008; Kalleberg 2009, 2011; Pugh 2015). Sociologists highlight the most harmful outcomes of income loss, job insecurity, and poor working conditions among those in unskilled supporting roles and in the service industry. Middle-class and skilled workers—including professionals—appear more likely to experience greater *uncertainty* rather than *insecurity* as a result of these historic changes. Technical, creative, and managerial workers encounter confusion as to how to move forward in careers that seem to have lost their shape or purpose (Newman 1993; Kunda and Van Maanen 1999; Barley and Kunda 2004). Many professionals who once may have conducted careers within organizations, climbing the hierarchy, now find themselves untethered from organizational structures (Tilly and Tilly 1994; Cappelli 1999). As a result of the “postbureaucratic” turn in the structure of work, more workers pursue their careers in an “entrepreneurial” or self-driven manner—free to pursue their options, but also more vulnerable to market dynamics, lacking the protection of both state agencies and labor unions (Smith 2010; Neff 2012). This leads to “boundaryless” or “protean” career forms that are both more independent and less secure (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Hall 2002).

On the experiential level, career uncertainty involves assessing work opportunities on an ongoing basis, without a clear sense of the best procedure or likely outcomes. Work that crosses institutional boundaries—causing workers to move not only firm to firm, but across economic sectors and into new working arrangements—is challenging because it introduces uncertainty into working relationships and careers. Long ago, Strauss (1958: 108) made an observation that remains very relevant:

Insofar as careers can be visualized and implemented because of the relative stabilities of those social structures within which one has membership, the continuity and maintenance of identity is safe guarded and maximized, and methods of maintenance and restoration are more readily utilized and evolved.

If careers are more tenuous, then they are also more uncertain in a cultural sense, as work loses its ability to serve as a consistent source of personal meaning. A shared premise of organizational and economic sociology is that understandings, conventions, and standards of evaluation are institutionalized at the field level and become taken for granted (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Scott 2008; Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Thornton et al. 2012). A set of these contextually grounded expectations concerns job standards, hiring procedures, and career trajectory (e.g., Peterson and Anand 2004; Hermanowicz 2009). Crossing labor market boundaries means encountering unfamiliar expectations and routines. In the contemporary environment, the meaning of work itself—what one’s goals can or should be, how to conceive of one’s value in a labor market, and how to find jobs—becomes unmoored from workplace structures when workers are more free to create careers for themselves.

This uncertainty is compounded for young workers who often enter the labor market with little sense of how to proceed. Research has found that labor market entry is a crucial factor in shaping later outcomes (Coleman 1984; Krahn et al. 2012). Even college graduates are largely unprepared to adopt the responsibilities expected of them as working adults (Arum and Roksa 2014). Young workers in general suffer from a lack of information and other resources they would need to move strategically in labor markets (Rosenbaum et al. 1990). While this body of research gives a sense of the daunting challenges young workers face, it does not provide a conceptual framework for understanding how they learn from and adapt to early experiences with work. How do young, skilled workers manage job change and career progression in fields where contingent work is the norm?

The creative economy is a useful case for the study of career navigation in uncertain conditions, given the growing importance of this sector and the nature of work structures in these fields. Creative industries are characterized by the historic use of contingent and project-based work arrangements of the kind now becoming more common throughout the economy (Menger 2006). Creative workers routinely cross labor market boundaries, combining jobs and projects in different roles and economic sectors in search of stable and creatively engaging work (Markusen et al. 2006; Throsby and Zednik 2011; Lingo and Tepper 2013; Lena 2014). Yet the processes they use to manage such transitions remain unclear. While sociologists have conducted many studies of work in creative industries, these have tended to consist of case studies of specific industries, or broad depictions of artistic labor in general. For example, researchers pay particular attention to the structure of labor markets in the film business (e.g., Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Bielby and Bielby 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Rossman et al. 2010). Yet the field of cultural production hosts a range of structural arrangements, and each subfield has its own institutionalized career process (DiMaggio 1977; Peterson and Anand 2004). In addition, sociologists have often overlooked creative occupations that cross industry boundaries, involving creative workers in a variety of settings, including non-creative industries. Unlike actors or lighting technicians, for example, graphic designers are employed throughout the economy, and are likely to move across industries and occupational niches as they pursue opportunities. Despite large bodies of research on cultural production and contemporary work, the unanswered question remains: How do young, skilled workers manage job change and career progression in fields where contingent work is the norm?

3. Conceptualizing self-assessment in early careers

Given the current conditions facing skilled workers, managing one's self-identification may be more important than ever—especially in the formative, early years of a career in flexible, contingent work. Yet sociologists have not devoted significant attention to developing these ideas. Again, studies of creative workers lend insight into the problem of self-guided career progression. As Lingo and Tepper (2013: 350) put it:

Dealing with uncertainty, setbacks, and constantly shifting opportunities requires artists to have a strong personal compass—a sense of what makes them tick, what they are good at, and what network of enterprises or projects will best sustain their career. The elements of this identity include answers to such questions as “Who am I?” “Who do I want to be?” “What is important to me?” and “How can my work advance these values?”

This line of questioning picks up insights from earlier conceptualizations that have not been fully developed in sociology. For example, DiMaggio writes: “Because empirically observed job sequences, even among professionals, are far less orderly than the notion of ‘career’ implies, it is likely that the *career concept* structures persons’ economic behavior to some extent independently of underlying labor-market patterns” (1994: 33, emphasis added). But subsequent studies have not done much to develop the “career concept,” a task taken up by vocational psychologists and self-help business writers rather than sociologists. Although sociologists have identified the configurations of person-job mismatch and the hazards associated with it (Kalleberg 2007), they have not devoted significant attention to the subjective process of matching one’s skills and preferences to market structures. Specific studies do, however, document the ways in which some skilled workers seek to maximize their own employability, such as by investing in human and social capital (Barley and Kunda 2004; Osnowitz 2010). More often, sociologists warn of the demands put on workers in general to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to work, assuming the risks formerly shared by employees (Smith 2001; Vallas 2001b).

If work in new, disaggregated contexts poses significant challenges to worker identity, identity also continues to function as a primary resource workers on which rely to navigate work experience (Leidner 2006). This chapter documents strategies of self-assessment as career navigation in uncertain conditions. Understanding self-managed career progression relies on a process-based notion of identity, in which personal experience is crafted through identification practices. In a pragmatic model, identity is an unfolding process of becoming rather than a constituent feature of personhood (Joas 1993, 2000). It is relational and contextual, continuous in personal experience yet also subject to continuous appraisal and affirmation. The process consists of drawing inferences from environmental cues—especially interpersonal communication—to maintain a sense of the self that is inherently social (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Glaeser 2000). Social institutions play a key role in this process, providing the cues and cultural resources that people rely upon to interpret the self and implement courses of action (Swidler 2001a). This understanding of identity is also rooted to social contexts; the need for self-improvement and investment in oneself is typical of modernity, and is particularly salient in the United States, where a thoroughly institutionalized discourse of self-help puts pressure on people to develop and display personal growth and emotional intelligence (Giddens 1991; Illouz 2008; Sharone 2013).

In this perspective, the career is a process of working on the self, an ongoing practice of response to working environments, with an eye on progress, growth, and better outcomes. In job training and early careers, people learn to interpret their capabilities and personal qualities in market terms. In this paper, I explore two broad criteria or modes through which this self-accounting occurs: skill and personal style. These are the primary means by which workers assess their capabilities in relation to what they are learning about work in different configurations.

Skills are institutionalized markers of employability in labor markets denoted by training, tasks, and job titles (Vallas 1990). For individual workers, skillsets are ways of understandings how one fits into a project or organization and the kind of contribution one is expected to make. Skillsets give shape to the meaning of a job well done while also allowing workers to imagine occupational futures in particular fields. Since hiring is a transaction between parties, some of the ways that workers’ skillsets function as resources are beyond their control. Yet workers may be able to manage skillsets by intentionally seeking out opportunities to grow (O’Mahony and Bechky 2006). There is some evidence that workers use occupations as an organizing device in

project-based work that also provide a source of social bonds (Damarin 2006; Bechky 2011; Weststar 2015). Technical and creative contractors invest in their skills on an ongoing basis to remain employable (Barley and Kunda 2004; Feldman and Ng 2007; Adams and Demaiter 2008; Bidwell and Briscoe 2010). While workers do not control the institutionalized meaning of their skills, they can act according to this self-knowledge by weighing options, leveraging resources, and recognizing opportunities.

Styles comprise a range of dispositions, structured at the individual level, based on understandings of one's personal qualities and affective comfort zone. While self-conceptions are resources that figure into any form of economic action, they are particularly salient to job seeking, hiring, and workplace advancement (Ibarra and Barbulescu 2010). Within firms, designated gatekeepers seek workers who provide a perceived cultural fit with the firm, based on one's interests and personality (Rivera 2012). In some occupations, affective codes or "feeling rules" are explicitly taught, while in others they remain a tacit feature of the work environment (Hochschild 1983). Professionals, as opposed to service workers, tend to be protected from explicit affective mandates at work, yet affective resonance remains a key criterion of hiring and job performance in white collar work (Wharton 2009; Rivera 2015). Moreover, American white collar workers understand the strong role affect plays in hiring decisions and shape their job seeking practices accordingly (Sharone 2013). As workers monitor their feelings and personal preferences, they build a sense of person-job fit that is adaptable across situations.

Self-presentation. Workers do more than perceive and evaluate opportunities and preferences, however; they also take instrumental action. Thus, this chapter also documents the self-presentation and job-seeking strategies that people use to act upon self-assessments in early careers. Contractors engage in an ongoing process of hustling up new work, either reaching out to potential clients directly, or using the services of a staffing agency. They interactively "perform expertise" to current and potential clients, and may demonstrate their commitment by working longer hours than employees (Padavic 2005; Osnowitz 2010). In addition, those who are seeking work may shape their presentation of self by taking lessons from job trainers in order to appeal to potential employers (Sharone 2007). Studies of personal branding illustrate a number of techniques workers use to represent themselves as marketable workers; this form of self-promotion is itself an important, and unpaid, form of labor (Vallas and Cummins 2015; Pagis and Ailon 2017). The findings that follow document and analyze personal identification strategies based on skillset and personal style. Self-presentation strategies based on both of these criteria are also presented in each section respectively.

4. Research methods

This study addresses the micro-level experience of work as it relates to meso-level institutional structures, and it documents fields and occupations that are not well known to sociologists. The study's data come from in-depth interviews with 55 creative professionals, trained as graphic designers and digital media artists. All are alumni of one private, four-year art school, Adams College of Art, and graduates of either the Visual Design (n=30; 55%) or Media Arts (n=25; 45%) departments. The cross-discipline plan is motivated by comparison of occupational fields with distinct profiles. Visual Design encompasses several majors centered on the core skillset of graphic design, an established and professionalized field with applications across economic sectors. Graduates become service professionals in print, web, and user experience/interactive design. Media Arts is a new and less developed field encompassing

diverse skill sets—such as 3D animation, video game development, and motion graphics¹—that are applied in specific industries, especially advertising and entertainment media. Both sets of occupations provide opportunity for entrants to reach middle class status, although animators and related occupations are better paid than graphic designers, on average.²

I recruited interviewees through emails sent to alumni in targeted graduation years through the college’s alumni office, as well as subsequent peer-to-peer referrals. Through these methods, I made direct contact with 94 potential interviewees; of these, I was able to interview 55 (58%). Thirty interviewees (55%) initially responded to Adams College alumni emails, the remaining 25 (45%) to peer referrals. While most of these had presumably also received the alumni recruitment email, they reported having heard about the project through a friend or colleague. While the sample was not limited to those remaining in creative professions, most interviewees did so—only two of the 55 (4%) had dropped out of creative work altogether after the first five years of post-college work. The sample is demographically similar to the profile of college graduates in the metropolitan area where Adams College of Art is located. Asian Americans (n=15; 27%) are over-represented in relation to the U.S. as a whole, while African Americans (n=1; 2%) are under-represented. The remainder of the interviewees are white (n=27; 49%), Latino (n=6; 11%), Native American (n=1; 2%), or identify with mixed racial-ethnic ancestry (n=5; 9%). In terms of gender, 29 (53%) of interviewees are men while 26 (47%) are women.

All interviews were conducted by the author in 2012 and 2013, in cafes, interviewees’ homes or workplaces, or online via Skype. They ranged from one to two hours in duration. Interviews included detailed work histories, with particular focus on the first five years of work history after college graduation. I probed systematically to uncover the key transitions and “a-ha” moments of self-awareness that interviewees draw from life events (Lamont and Swidler 2014). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author, with all identifying information removed and pseudonyms assigned. I conducted two waves of coding and analysis of interview transcripts using Atlas.ti. The first wave organized sections of text into themes (e.g., job finding, creative autonomy); the second consisted of recoding targeted theme sections using substantive

¹ Motion graphics uses 2D and 3D technology to create animated graphic elements for use in broadcast and online media. Typical applications include film title sequences, website banners, and the on-screen graphics used by television networks and in advertisements.

² The nation’s 30,000 “multimedia artists and animators” make an average annual wage of more than \$70,000; the average in the state and region where Adams College is located are among the highest in the nation: \$82,000 and \$86,000, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015b). Graphic designers are more numerous but less remunerated, with more than 200,000 making on average just over \$50,000 annually—although here, too, the state and regional averages are higher: \$59,000 and \$58,000, respectively (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015a). While the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not provide specific information about the incomes of those working as contractors versus full-time employees, other data suggest a fairly rosy picture. White collar contractors tend to make higher hourly wages than their counterparts who work full-time, although they often lack key benefits such as employer-provided health insurance and retirement plans (Barley and Kunda 2004; Osnowitz 2010). Despite the risks, very few of those the BLS considers “independent contractors”—as opposed to on-call and temporary workers—say they would prefer to work full time (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005).

codes that emerged inductively from the data (e.g., job fit-skills, job fit-affect). Finally, analysis continued in the preparation of a series of memos that synthesized these codes into the specific topics presented in this chapter.

While the recruitment procedure resulted in a high level of participant self-selection, the empirical benefits of this novel sample outweigh its limitations. Studies of work that proceed from the worker's point of view are usually located within a single firm or field, as in organizational studies and workplace ethnography. In light of the shift toward boundary-crossing, entrepreneurial work, it is important to observe how workers understand career advancement across labor market boundaries. Among studies that use work history as a research method (Burchell 1993; Stovel et al. 1996; Paterson 2001; Damarin 2006), none "follows" a group of similarly trained workers into disparate fields and career trajectories. These interviews give a sense of how occupational socialization proceeds over time while allowing for variation in outcomes. In addition, the study satisfies calls for research into the "motives and attitudes" of creative workers, key players in the post-industrial, knowledge-based economy (Healy 2002: 99).

5. Techniques of self-assessment and self-presentation

This chapter documents some of the ways in which young workers flexibly yet strategically transform themselves into market entities. Each kind of positioning represents a mode of self-accounting, in which people assess and manage their technical and aesthetic competencies in relation to firms' and clients' expectations. The findings are organized into two substantive areas: skill and personal style. Techniques of self-presentation are built into each section.

Skill

Self-assessment based on skill is an ongoing process of knowing one's value as a contributor to specific production processes. In the case of creative work, skillsets include the technical know-how and aesthetic judgment needed to contribute professionally to commercial art projects. Skills are institutionalized in the criteria for hiring and advancement, as well as the division of labor into competencies at the department and project levels. For workers, skills provide a means to organize expectations, assess progress, and plan for the future.

As a worker takes on a new job or project, her self-definition as a worker often shifts as a result of the specific combination of skills required in the setting. Among the 55 interviewees, 24 (44%) reported a change in their primary skillset used at work during the first five years post-graduation, including twelve (22%) who changed occupations altogether. Anxious to find work, they take jobs that may not match perfectly with their prior training; many interviewees also report learning new skills on the job. For example, Susan describes her experiences with a small marketing firm that cultivated her skills, providing hands-on experience with design tasks after originally hiring her for another purpose. She explains: "I was hired by them as a freelancer for illustration... And then they just said, 'Why don't you try some logos?' So I said, 'Okay.' And I did that, and they thought, 'Oh, we can actually use these.' So they began to give me more design things." The unexpected chance to try new skills led to a shift in Susan's occupational identity. Here, she describes the transition:

When I was in school, I thought I wanted to be a storyboard artist. And then I got some [freelance] storyboarding jobs right out of school and it wasn't as fun and awesome as I thought it would be... And then I became a graphic designer and I fell

in love with that. And then I became a packaging designer, and I fell in love with that. And I thought, “This is something I really love to do.”

Susan first shifted to a new occupation, graphic design, and then became focused on a more specialized subfield, packaging design. The way that this change came about shows that many firms make room for young professionals to grow and develop in an ad hoc manner. Susan adds:

For me, [it was] because I was just given the opportunity. And I thought, “I can sink or swim. And I can try this,” and I did it, and I liked it. And I got [a] positive response. And then I began to seek out packaging design elsewhere. And look at the history of it. And look at every package that I saw in stores... I don’t know, I guess the opportunity opened up the possibility that I could do it and love it.

Susan’s evolution from storyboard artist to packaging designer represents an assessment of her professional growth based on technical capacities. She did not actively seek to expand her skillset, but rather remained open to change and embraced an opportunity.

Susan’s account mirrors what O’Mahony and Bechky (2006) call “stretchwork”: the expansion of skillsets that occurs on the job. As one of their interviewees in software programming puts it, “You get contracts that keep stretching you” (2006: 924). But there is an important difference between this construct and Susan’s account. She uses stretchwork not in the intentional, self-reflexive manner that O’Mahony and Bechky describe, but opportunistically. Rather than actively seeking out a particular skill—or even growth in general—my interviewees’ primary strategy in the early phase of their careers is to say yes when opportunities present themselves: to try things out. For the novice, this approach is necessary because work roles and criteria of advancement are not immediately apparent. Looking back, Susan can see that a consequential expansion of her skills has taken place, and along with it, her embodied sense of her capabilities has shifted. This in turn guides her next steps, in that she can consider herself to have joined a new labor market niche, packaging designer, and interpret opportunities accordingly. Susan’s self-definition as a worker has shifted, and with that, expectations and plans for future work.

Other interviewees do invest in their skills more instrumentally, as a means of reaching a goal. Here, too, skill represents a growth metric that corresponds to labor market value. Like many animators, Sandra dreams of working at a major studio like Disney or Pixar, creating new characters or recreating classics like Cinderella. This drive led her to enroll in an expensive and time-consuming training program for character animators immediately upon graduating with a B.F.A. She explains:

Sandra: When I got done with Adams, I knew that I wasn’t anywhere fit to be doing full-time animation. It was still very new to me.

Interviewer: *How did you know?*

Sandra: Oh, you just know... I wasn’t good. (laughs) I mean, I had only taken like three [character animation] classes... You know that, like, your stuff isn’t up to par.

Sandra’s awareness of her skill level in relation to a particularly competitive labor market led her to make a significant financial investment in training while also working at her first job in a new field. Fortunately, Sandra had accepted a job that featured sporadic periods of unpaid “down

time.” While not ideal as a source of secure income, this compromise allowed her to expand her technical skills while investing in a longer-term goal.

Others position themselves for work in multiple job markets by creating portfolios that highlight distinct skill sets. For example, Robin, an animator who identifies herself as a “3D generalist,” says, “I have a couple different reels³... I have a pre-vis⁴ reel, I have an animation reel, and I have a compositor reel.” Each of these refers to distinct roles on the projects for which creative agencies and advertising firms hire her. As her skillset has grown to include the new production role of “pre-vis,” Robin seized the opportunity by making sure potential hirers knew she had those skills. Having a ready-made set of reels provides evidence of expertise that self-promotion can only suggest. As her career progressed, Robin—now a veteran freelance commercial animator—learned to codify her talents according to production roles for which she was well suited and that were relatively in demand. She now presents herself as an artist with a range of skills, but selectively, hoping that each potential client will be well matched with her potential contribution.

While clients respond favorably to seeing similar products represented in an artist’s portfolio, they do not reward undisciplined growth or excessive breadth of skills (Leung 2014). Thus, entering a new market requires careful self-presentation. This is another situation in which taking stock of one’s capacities applies a sense of fit with the market. Miguel (3D animator) provides a good example of using self-promotion to transition from one freelance market to another. He is currently “building up [his] reel” to move his career as an animator away from advertising, toward the aerospace and high-tech industries. To do so, he needs to limit potential clients’ exposure to his previous work, since, as Miguel puts it, “People get confused if they see too much.” Building up his reel in this case means developing speculative aerospace-themed projects in his own time to appeal to such clients in the future. As Miguel implies, *not* advertising one’s work in a certain area can also be part of a selective self-presentation strategy. Diana provides a similar example. In addition to her freelance graphic design career, Diana seeks to establish herself as the creator and producer of an animated web series. Because this entrepreneurial venture is her top priority, she does not maintain a strong web presence as a graphic designer. She explains, “That’s where I want my name out there, as a creator, an entrepreneur, a developer, that sort of thing... Because if I put my name out there as a graphic designer, then I’m creating that path for myself.” Each of these strategies represents a growing awareness of the artist’s capacities in relation to the market for their services. The form of matching seen here stands in stark contrast to studies that find professionals use web-based self-promotion to *distance* themselves from the market, suggesting personal uniqueness rather than

³ A reel is a compiled animation sequence that contains high-quality work samples that potential clients can view online.

⁴ Previsualization or “pre-vis” is a preliminary step in the production of digital animation, in which rough, unfinished animation models suggest the look of a finished piece. Compositing refers to the combination of visual elements in a later stage of production. Compositing refines the appearance of the finished product (a composite of various assets produced on different platforms) into a smooth, seamless whole.

skill-based fit (e.g., Pagis and Ailon 2017). My interviewees seek a place to belong in markets using self-accounting to become employable and establish a reputation with a target audience.

Adaptive skill transitions are clearly consequential for career trajectories, but these consequences are often not apparent to job seekers and may lead to future dilemmas. Taking a passive approach can lead to mismatch and, ultimately, insecurity. For example, Marisela allowed her skillset to drift from away from graphic design, her chosen field, and arrived at a dead end when work in the apparel industry led her to less skilled work. Here, she recalls her first job in the new field:

I'm coming in [to the job] thinking, "Wow, I get to do all the stuff that I went to school for." But in reality, I realized they needed... stuff for fashion [such as] helping the designers with their sketches, putting it into the computer... So like, I can see my career was slowly shifting. (laughs) Because then I was doing even, like, embroidery stitches for the back pockets, [on] denim.

Not only was Marisela doing more simple work that she would have liked—reproducing sketches using computer software such as Adobe Illustrator—but she also found herself taking on non-creative tasks in which she had no training, such as embroidery. Looking back, Marisela sees the institutional factors that can lead to this kind of unintentional career shift.

I ended up kind of working in this field, in this industry, where they need a graphic [design] person, but I think the terminology is different for them. Because in my head, [when] I think "graphics," I think like, you know, making annual reports, or logos, or stuff like that. But they mean "graphic" meaning [a] computer person that can do sketching or just type things for them. Hang tag labels, things like that.

In retrospect, Marisela came to realize that her understanding of her skills no longer matched that of the field in which she was working. Her training and early work experience in graphic design centered on print design, while in the apparel industry, the tasks were more varied and less creative. She did not keep up the self-accounting needed to remain poised for employability in her market, leaving Marisela vulnerable to market shifts. Marisela was laid off from the firm after several years, leaving her with little relevant work experience to reset her career as a graphic designer.

Skillsets correspond to occupational roles in production processes that job seekers learn to identify as labor market niches. In this way, skills are aspirational within institutionalized contexts. They provide a marker of progress and a set of self-identification resources to draw upon when navigating job change. Susan came to love her work when she discovered a talent for designing logos and packaging. Marisela learned that being a graphic designer has specific connotations in the apparel industry. Those who are more savvy, like Sandra, can proactively plan and implement job changes based on a developing sense of skillset-field fit. In this way, being aware of and managing one's own skills is itself a skillset that is likely to be highly valuable in the most uncertain labor markets, where career trajectories are difficult to foresee. In early careers, characterized by frequent and diverse forms of change, workers use skillsets as a navigational tool.

Personal Style

Navigation through early work experience presents emotional as well as practical challenges. For young creative professionals, finding the right job is just as much about finding a

match for one's developing preferences and emotional style as it is about making ends meet. Skillsets provide one set of institutionalized markers workers can use to understand their place in fields and labor markets, to measure growth and plan for change. A second set of capacities that workers use in these ways are affective: emotional resonance and even personality form the basis of preferences and a sense of fit with firms, projects, market niches, and entire industries. Along with skill, personal style emerges in these interviews as a commonly cited criterion for evaluating and responding to changing circumstances.

Young creative professionals find that they must engage in a difficult, ongoing process of work on the self in order to become and remain employable in commercial markets. This affective labor involves learning to achieve emotional distance from the work process and its products. Only three years after graduating with a B.F.A., Nina (digital media artist) is already eyeing a promotion to associate producer, a junior management role at the large advertising agency where she works. Here, she talks about how transitioning from a primarily artistic identity to a professional one took effortful self-control:

In the beginning, it was definitely very challenging. Because I do, of course, consider myself a creative. So you pour your heart and your soul into something and it gets shot down. It's just like, *Arrrgh*, you want to cry. But you need to understand that, you know, there's a hierarchy there for a reason. And you have to play ball, play nice.

Dave (digital media artist) agrees, saying, "You get used to seeing a lot of the stuff you love get shot down. That's just the nature of commercial art." He continues by linking this cultivation of affective distance to employability:

A big part, I think, of surviving in this career is... being able to take that kind of criticism... Your opinion, even as a creator, is the most important, [but] it's not the opinion that's paying for it... I've known some absolutely amazing designers... who are creatively doing stuff I could never even hope or dream to do. But because they can't absorb feedback and they can't switch their own gears to some extent, they're just, they're not as hireable. And that's really sad. Well, maybe it's not sad. I mean, maybe it's really cool that they're artists with integrity that don't compromise. But it's sad that they... maybe are struggling to sell their work.

Dave has adapted to the demands of his workplace, drawing satisfaction from a working life that no longer feels like a compromise. He identifies being able to "switch one's own gears" as an effective way to leverage employability. The emotional training that Nina and Dave impose on themselves resembles the sociological concept of emotional labor, but there is one key difference: their social status. Sociologists like Hochschild document workers taking up inauthentic emotional styles that are dictated by management, typically in gendered service roles (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993). As emerging professionals, however, Nina and Dave are engaged in a self-guided process of emotional training. They commit to this affective labor because they see it as essential to their occupational identities, not because a manager is directing them to do so.

Unlike service workers, who adopt false smiles and bury their true feelings toward customers, young creative professionals exert some agency in deciding how emotional self-assessment can lead them to better jobs. In external labor markets, particularly in creative fields, a worker's reputation is paramount (Menger 1999; Zuckerman et al. 2003; Barley and Kunda 2004). Yet when asked to assess their own reputations, many of my interviewees seem unsure.

For example, when asked what she thinks sets her apart from other professionals in her field, Robin (digital media artist) answers:

Hmm, I don't know. I know people say they do like to work with me because I'm really easygoing... There can be a lot of ego in this work. You do have your creative input [but] I usually just kind of do what I'm told and I don't fight back a lot with any of that kind of stuff. So I think I'm pretty easy to get along with, and then I do the work. So that's why people bring me back and why I've been able to establish relationships and keep going from studio to studio with them.

Robin is successful in a labor market characterized by a “chemistry game” (Sharone 2013) in hiring, in which being “easy to get along with” is a core criterion of employability. Being aware of what employers look for means constantly monitoring one's affective state, to remain “easygoing” and not “fight back.”

While the examples of Nina, Dave, and Robin show how emotional self-monitoring is a form of adopting professional standards, some interviewees also use emotion as a factor in *their* selection process in working with firms or clients. For example, Kate (graphic designer) describes what she looks for in a working relationship with a client:

I kind of just prefer working with certain types of people... I'm very straightforward, so I have a very hard time just being overly, you know, like, accommodating. Or not just speaking my mind about something... If people are rude or if they're being annoying, I would just rather not work with them. And I feel like that's, at least that's kind of a luxury I can have at this point.

Kate has learned that forming and maintaining relationships with clients requires her to be self-aware and communicative. She and other freelancers use affective criteria to judge clients and to guide the selections they make among potential jobs when they have the flexibility to do so. For a freelancer working on a number of small projects, this personality-based job sorting is a constant process. These examples of affective job matching provide an interesting counterpoint to recent studies of personality-based hiring (e.g., Rivera 2012), suggesting that it is not only large firms but employees, too, that use feelings as a orienting tool in sensing and acting upon opportunities.

The cultivation of self-awareness applies not only to working relationships, but one's sense of belonging within an entire industry. Nineteen (35%) of the 55 interviewees changed economic sector or industry at least once during their first five years of work after college graduation. Several account for these transitions through a realization that a particular field is not a good fit for their affective style or ethos. For example, both Andrew (digital media artist) and Mike (graphic designer) made early moves out of advertising. Andrew's first job after graduation was a freelance gig working on television commercials for a small creative studio run by some of his friends from school. “I did that because I was working with cool people I knew and I needed experience,” he explains, adding, “[I] never wanted to do advertising.” This early work experience built on Andrew's growing awareness that the video games industry represented a better fit with his priorities. He explains:

I realized that the game thing was so much more fulfilling, just because you're making something that's new, creative. You're not selling bubble gum. I mean, it just felt way more real... in that you're making something meaningful that people care about. Instead of an advertisement that people want to change the channel [away

from] because they're looking at your work... That's what I want to work on, something people care about.

Several other interviewees echoed Andrew's evaluation of advertisement as a creative product with questionable ethical value. For some others, though, it was the working environment, rather than the nature of the product itself, that made advertising unsuitable. Here, Mike recalls an early work experience:

My first job out of college was at an ad agency in [another city] and I got the full brunt of it. And I really realized then and there (laughs) there were certain things that were appealing about it—but as a designer, there were a lot of things that were not appealing about it... And it's amazing how an industry can color personalities so much... So, advertising wasn't for me.

Although Mike tries to avoid direct critique of the firm, this sense of mismatch led him to not only quit this job but to avoid working with advertising firms in the future. Critique of the advertising industry was common among these creative professionals, but not universal. Some find working in ad agencies to be a perfect fit with their personalities and report fighting to attain positions in the competitive field. For example, Nina (digital media artist) emailed the creative director of the agency where she now works for months before eventually securing a freelance job there. Bart (graphic designer) reports being strongly drawn to “work hard, play hard” culture of ad agencies despite having been laid off from one recently. Personality-based matching is a powerful force of attraction, as well as aversion.

In addition to industries, employment arrangements are also subject to evaluation based on their fit with a worker's personal qualities. The most commonly cited justification for freelance work is that it allows the worker to select enjoyable, engaging projects. But moving away from freelance work is also a common occurrence among these early-career creative professionals. While 44 of the 55 interviewees (80%) had some freelance experience in their early careers, only thirteen (24%) worked primarily as freelancers after working for five years. Part of what makes freelance a viable option is whether the worker can manage its emotional ups and downs. Renee (graphic designer) recently became a freelancer after being laid off from a full-time job; here, she cites the insecurity and negative affect of freelance work as its main challenges:

Sometimes there's nothing and sometimes there's a lot of stuff and it's very exciting... When something gets done successfully and it's not a tragic story of somebody who didn't pay me, or somebody who didn't recognize me for my abilities, it's such a wonderful thing. But it doesn't always go that way. And you have to have the confidence and the strength to say, “I'm still worth staying in this career. I'm still good at this. I'm still worth paying to do this.” So that's pretty much where I'm at now.

Renee uses an affective vocabulary to evaluate her current working situation, noting that she finds the challenges of freelance work draining and would like to return to full-time work again soon. Like Sharone's (2013) interviewees, who blame themselves for remaining unemployed, Renee does not find fault with a lack of worker protections for freelancers like her, who may occasionally simply not be reimbursed by predatory clients. Instead, she looks within herself to identify the qualities that she believes a freelancer should have—and remains unsure as to whether she has them.

This section of findings demonstrates several ways in which creative workers orient themselves to work through understandings of the self. Young professionals work to change their emotional responses, learning how to accomplish, and maintain, distance from the work process. They soon realize that affective cues are important to supervisors and clients—that is, they learn to monitor their emotional performance at work. Creatives also learn to use affective and personality-based criteria as job sorting mechanisms, evaluating employment arrangements and industries work takes them across labor market boundaries. Looking within and learning to monitor one’s feelings at work provides a means to evaluate current and former circumstances and explain change. Unlike service workers, these young professionals are not given specific guidelines to follow in shaping their affective responses. Instead, they adopt general standards in order to maximize opportunity in competitive markets. As professionals, these creatives can rely on their occupational status and relative autonomy in production to protect them from overt labor controls typical of service work. This explanatory framework also guides workers in their decision making. To the extent that they are able to exert agency as they move between and within labor markets, personal style provides an important element of job fit in creative careers. Interviewees take it for granted that a worker’s identity and preferences can and should align with the characteristics of a working environment. These assessments are similar to the cultural matching that take place in hiring procedures (Rivera 2012)—but in this case, it is the employees who are using style as the basis for decision-making, rather than employers. This supply-side cultural matching is an important element of labor market navigation for creative professionals, requiring that they reflect on their own habits and personality traits as they evaluate their options and pursue opportunities.

6. Conclusion

This chapter provides a new look at the challenges facing skilled career entrants, with evidence from the creative economy. College graduates with training in graphic design, animation, and other digital media platforms experience rapid shifts in the first five years of their careers, not only changing jobs, but shifting skillsets, employment arrangements, and jumping from one industry to another. Each of these kinds of changes represents crossing an institutional boundary, as each work situation has characteristic conventions, routines, and modes of evaluation to which new workers must adapt quickly. The fast pace of change—along with its boundary-crossing nature—is disorienting and requires workers to look within in order to respond strategically. Yet the stability and success that most of my interviewees find during these periods suggest that they have found ways to navigate disorderly trajectories successfully, crafting careers out of disparate experiences.

Skillsets constitute a primary way of assessing one’s fit with a given field or opportunity structure. Some changes in work role are instrumental, as workers seek to expand their range by building a new set of skills, or invest in training to bolster their standing in a new field. But skills more often develop opportunistically, as young workers accept roles that are handed to them and adopt new occupational identities. Saying yes to opportunities can lead to a lack of skillset-based fit, however, as some workers look back to see how their occupational role has shifted in undesirable ways. The most savvy workers are able to see these differences clearly, cultivating a more self-conscious fit between their skillset and a desired field as they tailor their self-image carefully in order to navigate early creative careers.

A second set of identity-based navigation strategies concerns personal style, structured understandings of the self that also help young workers understand their labor market participation. For many creatives, developing a professional identity means learning which working environments are for them, or not. They self-select into and out of firms, fields, and employment arrangements using affective criteria; cultivate personality characteristics that they believe are rewarded in creative labor markets, such as becoming emotionally distant while also having a reputation as flexible, friendly, and upbeat; and seek work environments that promote a feeling of shared styles. In all of these ways, young creatives frame personal style as a metric of self-assessment and market-based fit.

These findings provide strong evidence of a form of career navigation that has not been previously brought to light: work on the self as a market entity, consisting of continual assessment of one's capacities in relation to shifting labor market positions. The analysis builds on research on employability and self-branding that shows how workers attempt to position themselves favorably in nonstandard labor markets. Despite early attention to the career as a negotiation or moving perspective between the self and social structures, sociology lacks a clear, updated theory of how workers navigate disparate work experiences. The contemporary economic context calls for new conceptualizations of the experience of boundary-spanning careers. There is a growing consensus in sociology and organizational studies that (1) workers are becoming more responsible for their own fates, and (2) white collar workers such as college graduates are more likely to have options to choose from. One important implication of this is the idea that workers resemble micro-organizations in their self-driven, entrepreneurial movement from job to job (Smith 2010; Lane 2011). But previous work has not explained the dynamics of this process in a satisfying way.

I unite existing concepts in a framework based on identification, showing how people use identity-based assessments to respond to labor market conditions. In line with cultural sociology's model of action as improvisational yet informed by institutionalized expectations, the creative workers in this study respond to dilemmas they face at work using the tools they have at their disposal. The facets of workplace identity—including skills and preferences—are “cultured capacities” that are called upon to respond to life's mundane problems (Swidler 2001a). This study finds that workers' identities are themselves a cultural resource informing action. In addition, it shows that new work experiences produce these identities in an iterative process of institutional self-formation. These contributions are notable, given sociology's lack of attention to the acquisition of cultural resources (Garrett 2016).

This chapter adds to the sociological literature on work in the contemporary economy by extending existing concepts of employability and worker-job mismatch (Kalleberg 2007; Smith 2010). It confirms previous studies that suggest workers are taking on the responsibility for maintaining and investing in their own human capital, including skills and emotional styles. It extends the idea, though, by showing how employability is actively pursued in a constant process of self-evaluation and actively applied in self-presentation strategies. The findings also shed light on the concept of worker-job mismatch. Studies of mismatch tend to look at broad patterns rather than micro-level worker experience, or they study the demand side of the hiring transaction, as in job interviews. This study shows that workers understand what is expected of them, if not perfectly, based on institutionalized signals they pick up during work and training experiences. At times they seek to maximize their desirability to a particular employer, but most of the time, the version of supply-side cultural matching seen here is a routine response to common work changes. While it is widely assumed that young workers change jobs in the spirit of seeking a

better fit, this study articulates a mechanism of how they accomplish ongoing self-orientation. In short, young creatives manage their careers by finding a place to fit, which they do by figuring out what it means to fit, which they do by changing jobs.

One of the implications of this study is the question of how, and when, uncertainty leads to insecurity for young, college educated workers. This article's findings provide a sense of what a "strong personal compass" may look like in the case of creative labor (Lingo and Tepper 2013: 350). These findings suggest, more broadly, that job-based identification may itself be a skill that distinguishes successful from unsuccessful workers in boundary-spanning careers. The fleeting nature of institutional attachments make quick assessments in real time essential to successful navigation. Although they are white collar workers, young creatives do not benefit from the prestige or institutional guidance found in the established professions. The occupations studied here sit an uneasy position with the sociological definition of professions (Larson 1979; Abbott 1988; Freidson 2001). They are relatively disorganized and lower in status than medicine, law, or architecture. Most interviewees do not belong to professional organizations, nor do they attend conventions or conferences. Thus, their willingness to self-monitor and adapt while forming and staying true to their priorities are essential for these college graduates to thrive.

A related question is whether the skills of developing and applying self-assessments can be cultivated. This extension of the chapter's findings has implications for studies of stratification and inequality. If college education and skilled jobs can serve as engines of upward mobility, then these findings suggest that those who occupy them are likely to succeed when they also have the ability to sense the personal significance of labor market changes. I argue that exploring this issue further requires further study of the institutions to which the identity-based meanings of work are "anchored" (Swidler 2001b). For example, Sharone's (2013) research on the long-term unemployed demonstrates how hiring operates amid culture- and class-specific understandings of labor markets that are reinforced institutionally through training. Just as Sharone identifies training services for the unemployed as important institutional reinforcements of self-help constructs found throughout American culture, further research may identify which aspects of college training or early work experience prepare young workers most effectively for careers in highly uncertain, boundary-spanning careers. For example, comparative research may investigate the curricula of occupationally specific college majors—as well as extracurricular counseling, internships, and other preparations—to see whether, and how, these programs cultivate flexible, practical forms of occupational identification in their students, and whether these efforts pay off in the long run.

CHAPTER 4

“Crafting Identity: Two Approaches to Professionalization in Art School”

This chapter examines an earlier phase in the development of creative professionals, showing how the meanings associated with work form during college. By the time they reach their senior year in college, students in occupationally-oriented majors are learning not only the skills of a trade, but also the tacit conventions of professional roles and expectations placed upon the workers they hope to become. But are the training methods adopted by different departments consequential in crafting different outcomes among students? Do those in different majors leave school with different occupational identities and dispositions towards career-building? This chapter’s findings show how art students in one college are becoming familiar with two different modes of professional identity and practice. Those in Visual Design—centered on the discipline of graphic design—undergo training in a disciplinary model, and emerge with high standards but relatively unformed knowledge of work roles and expectations. Those in Media Arts, in contrast, are trained in a market-based model that prepares them for specific industry-defined work roles, leading to more developed goals and familiarity with expectations. There are multiple ways to be an “itinerant professional,” as Barley and Kunda (2004) demonstrate. This chapter traces two models to the pedagogic cultures found in art school departments, which, in turn, reflect institutional characteristics of two occupational fields. It also addresses a broader question for sociologists of higher education: how different approaches to training in the “practical arts” (Brint et al. 2005) prepare students for future careers.

1. Introduction

What happens during college? The answer is as complex as the experience of a college education itself, given the vast diversity of colleges in the highly stratified field of higher education. Framed broadly, college provides young people with a transitional process in which they prepare for adult lives and responsibilities. Students and their families invest in college with the expectation that it serves as a gateway to white collar careers. Despite a large literature tracking the relationship between higher education and graduates' economic indicators, sociologists have not paid serious attention to the *experience* of higher education as a transition to economic agency. Given the significant investment that college represents—and the risks associated with a heavy debt burden—understanding how different kinds of college training prepare students for occupations is both timely and broadly relevant.

This paper examines how college education functions as a site of meaning-making and identity-building related to future careers. The unlikely case of this study of labor market preparation is art school. Although popularly perceived as perhaps the least economically engaged form of higher education, art schools provide a range of majors, many of which provide hands-on professional training for students with specific occupational goals. This paper reports on two such departments at one four-year art school that carry out contrasting forms of vocational preparation. The two departments both offer occupational training in commercial art, but they do so using different approaches; the outcome is two groups of graduates with different sets of expectations and aspirations.

This paper makes two main contributions. First, I document two approaches to vocational training, adding fine-grained detail to the sociological study of the “practical arts” (Brint et al. 2005). I draw on more than 50 interviews with students and faculty—as well as analysis of the college's marketing materials—to show that the two departments' training methods vary systematically in content despite sharing similar structures. One department's curriculum and instruction practices are more clearly linked to specific labor market outcomes, while the other cultivates in students the tools they will need to reach a broader range of possibilities, through a more student-guided process. Second, I show how students experience this training, using interviews with current college seniors to understand how students' interests and abilities become channeled into occupational identities. Students reconfigure symbolic boundaries of work, self-select into and out of majors based on an evolving sense of occupational style, and develop career aspirations that vary by department. Throughout these examples, I show that the structurally similar processes that the two groups of students undergo result in different approaches to their labor market potentialities.

2. Professionalization in higher education

Historically, sociologists of higher education have concentrated on understanding how college functions as a means of social stratification, using large data sets to determine the economic effects of schooling. In the process, they tend to neglect the micro-level and institutional processes that occur during college, resulting in a conceptual “black box” of college experience (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008). Recently, sociologists have started to turn their attention to this gap by examining how students' identities are produced in on-campus social processes. College experience has the power to constitute students' identities along several dimensions (Kaufman and Feldman 2004). Studies show how class stratification is reproduced

during college, as well as the on-campus production of political, racial, and gender identities (Willie 2003; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009; Mullen 2010; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Binder and Wood 2013; Binder, Davis, and Bloom 2016).

One important area of personal development that takes place during college but remains understudied in this literature is professional development: how undergraduates are being prepared—and prepare themselves—for future careers. This is an important topic given the broad shift in American higher education toward professional training (Brint et al. 2005; Grubb and Lazerson 2005). While the field of postsecondary education has been divided historically between its vocational and academic missions (Sewell 1971; Mullen 2010), there are clear signs that professional training is now the dominant paradigm. The majority of U.S. college degrees are now in applied programs or “practical arts,” such as business, education, and health (Brint et al. 2005; National Center for Education Statistics 2016). Brint et al. (2005: 174) summarize the trend: “[C]olleges and universities became definitively oriented to occupational-professional education at the end of the twentieth century, at a time when they were becoming mass terminal institutions in the same sense.” For their part, incoming students view college pragmatically: a majority of college freshmen say they evaluate potential colleges based on their graduates’ economic outcomes (Eagan et al. 2015). The enormous rise in student loan debt both constricts students’ options and makes them acutely aware of the need to start working right away after college (Rothstein and Rouse 2011).

A better understanding of students’ experience with on-campus career preparation is especially timely, then, given the shifting terrain of American higher education. Students and their families expect a four-year education to pave the way for white collar careers—but can institutions deliver on that promise? Sociological research on professional training at the post-graduate level offers useful guidance on how trainees become channeled into occupations. Studies of medical school, especially, demonstrate how these programs function as explicit occupational socialization by familiarizing students with the roles and responsibilities of the profession (Becker et al. 1976; Bosk 1979; Granfield 1992). In addition, medical residents’ specializations produce different institutional attachments in an “identity customization” process (Pratt et al. 2006). Less specialized forms of advanced training also cultivate new forms of occupational attachment among students. For example, a study of business and law schools finds that the “skills and thinking styles learned in school channel students into particular jobs by giving students the right cultural-cognitive tools to choose appropriate jobs” (Schleef 2006: 201). Over time, these students learn to identify and pursue “jobs of least resistance”—not necessarily those that are easiest to attain but that match students’ self-identities and serve as the foundation of high status careers (ibid.: 150).

Sociologists have begun to address the occupational tracking that takes place at the undergraduate level. Universities construct institutional pathways, or tracks combining academic and social functions, on which students proceed; those who thrive find a fit between their social trajectory or “class pathway” and an institution-specific “college pathway” (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Colleges increasingly rely on private sector partners to manage the school-to-work transition, leading students into particular kinds of jobs (Davis and Binder 2016). For example, on-campus recruitment activities at elite universities give certain firms immediate access to top students, whose status anxiety and competitiveness are triggered by the need to find a fast-track career in a prestigious field (Binder et al. 2016). As one student interviewee sums up this “career funneling” process: “You come in wanting to change the world and then you leave wanting to work at McKinsey,” the prominent financial consulting firm (2016: 32).

While corporate recruitment represents a highly structured form of institutional tracking of students to particular jobs, most of the occupational preparation that takes place during college is likely to be less structured and more customizable. In this chapter, I focus on the routine work that academic departments in applied fields do to prepare undergraduates along vocational lines. I develop a cultural model of personal meaning-making as it interacts with training practices on campus. The pedagogic cultures of academic departments cultivate in students understandings and identifications that are conventional within the broader professional fields in which departments are nested. In turn, students select schools and majors based on their evolving awareness of their own skills, preferences, and aspirations. As they advance, students learn to understand their skills and preferences as they are conventionally applied to disciplines and labor markets—and refine their goals accordingly. My analysis draws on two sets of literature: one linking higher education to the institutional fields in which academic disciplines are nested; the second looking at personalized evaluation and identification processes.

First, colleges and their departments infuse curricula with different messages, depending on the discipline in which a department is situated. This observation relies on one of economic and organizational sociology's core premises: understandings, conventions, and standards of evaluation are institutionalized within economic fields and become taken for granted (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Yet while an institutional perspective has often been applied to studies of higher education, the relationship between academic departments and their external constituencies remains underdeveloped (Hearn 2008; Meyer et al. 2008). Since colleges and universities are “loosely coupled” assemblages of functional units (Weick 1976), academic departments are likely to reproduce the distinctive motivations and evaluations of the professional communities in which faculty are engaged. The structure of majors and standards guiding curricula and planning are informed by the “institutional logics” (Thornton et al. 2012) that are conventional within professions—and with which administrators and faculty are familiar, given their own training and backgrounds.

I argue that institutions of higher education develop *pedagogic cultures* at the department level that translate the meanings familiar to working professionals into curricula and classroom practices. Just as the training of doctors cultivates different standards and identities from that of lawyers, both academic and vocational undergraduate programs carry out their missions in ways that are informed by institutional memberships that extend beyond the academy. This insight builds on the few studies of departmental culture in undergraduate education, which in turn draw on a steady stream of research on organizational culture (Ouchi and Wilkins 1985; Hallett 2003; Lee 2007). As applied here, this framing merges two of the core functions of higher education as observed by sociologists: an “incubator” developing students' identities and social relationships and a “hub” linking institutional domains (Stevens et al. 2008). I argue that one of the distinguishing features of postsecondary departments in applied fields is their cultivation of occupational identities among students, which in turn serves to reproduce the department's connection to external professional communities.

Second, concepts from cultural sociology contribute to an updated model of personal change through institutional participation. Building on earlier sociological models of adult socialization as “the internalization of institutional or institution-based ‘subworlds’” (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 138), cultural sociology provides several mechanisms through which understandings of the self are informed by institutional environments and change over time. Here I highlight the concepts of symbolic boundaries, personal style, and aspiration. All are forms of identification, building on theory that calls for breaking down social identity into its specific and

observable functions (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Young adulthood, consecrated as a time of freedom and exploration but burdened with the need to craft an adult persona, is an example of an unsettled phase in the life course, when individuals actively seek sources of identification and are more open to new cultural resources (Swidler 2001a; Arnett 2014). I argue that students' evolving identities serve both as a resource for and an outcome of higher education (Schleef 2006; Chambliss and Takacs 2014). To show how each of these concepts applies to occupational identity development, I cite examples of their previous use in studies of work and occupations.

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions, taken for granted in practice, that are commonly used to distinguish social groups and to stake claims of membership within them (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007; Small, Harding, and Lamont 2010). Learning conventional boundaries is an interactive social process that is intimately involved with belonging in any social group (Lamont and Fournier 1992). In work settings, people use symbolic boundaries to make status claims, construct moral hierarchies among colleagues, and respond to structural constraints on the work process (Lamont 1992; Fine 1995; Vallas 2001a). An analogous process takes place among college students, as they work with symbolic boundaries to understand their potential as future workers.

Styles comprise a range of structured preferences, based on more or less self-reflexive understandings of one's personal qualities and affective comfort zone. Work is an important source of self-meaning and self-direction (Hughes 1958; Lamont 1992; Glaeser 2000). Studies of interactive social processes at work, including role modeling, job seeking, and hiring show that one's presentation of self plays a key role in labor market participation (Ibarra 1999; Ho 2009; Rivera 2012; Sharone 2013). Here, I extend these insights to the study of occupational identification during college, where many students learn to match their skills and preferences to occupations and work roles. College students engage in a process of trying on and rehearsing occupational styles based on cues they receive from faculty, other role models, and each other. They choose colleges and majors in part based on these evolving self-perceptions, and use them to justify a change of course.

Aspirations. Students rely on their social relationships—with instructors as well as peers—to form new understandings of their potentialities (Chambliss and Takacs 2014). Cultural sociologists highlight the importance of present social context in determining the ways that people understand and frame future action (Frye 2012; Mische 2012). In turn, students' evolving identities serve as a cultural resource that informs action (Swidler 2001a). I highlight professional networking as one competency that students enact strategically to resolve the daunting uncertainty of launching a career. Networking is especially important in creative careers, which often involve irregular sequences of project-based work, secured by reputation and personal connections (Faulkner 1983; Baker and Faulkner 1991; Menger 1999; Lingo and Tepper 2013).

In the findings, below, I show that each of these cultural concepts—symbolic boundaries, personal styles, and aspirations—helps to isolate the identification processes that college students undergo in applied majors. During college, students respond to institutionalized expectations using an evolving sense of style and goals, choosing courses and majors that feel like a fit with their talents and interests. In doing coursework and participating in campus life, they prepare for working lives by negotiating with the understandings of the work they obtain directly and indirectly from courses, internships, and personal relationships. By the end of college, students in applied fields form incipient occupational identities that project this stock of working knowledge into the future, their skills and judgments ready to be tested.

3. Learning from art school

Arts degrees have more than kept pace with the growth of higher education during the last 50 years, yet they remain a small fraction of the total bachelor's degrees, around five percent (National Center for Education Statistics 2016). How, then, can this niche provide a useful example of a much broader social process? Despite the stereotypes of artists as poor labor market performers, surveys of art school graduates show that their subjective and objective outcomes are generally positive, comparable to those of college graduates in general (Lena 2014). In addition, the institutional composition of art schools is similar to that of small colleges: departments are divided by discipline, and among the departments and majors there is a range from least to most direct in terms of labor market application. That is, some fields of study—such as sculpture—are intended to cultivate one's abilities but not to provide the majority of graduates with directly applicable career training, while in others, such as graphic design, the intention is to meet both of these goals. The mystique surrounding art—the “charismatic ideology of ‘creation’” (Bourdieu 1996: 167)—dictates that true art cannot be taught, a popular belief that continues today in art education (Elkins 2001; Adler 2003; Addison and Burgess 2012). Likewise, the field of arts education has been divided historically between the goals of cultivating fledgling artists and the more practical need to train art teachers (Singerman 1999). The opposition of artistic and economic logics (Bourdieu 1993) is institutionalized in the composition of arts education as a field, and reproduced in the curricula of specific art schools. In this way, art schools' programs are analogous to the majors found in all undergraduate institutions: liberal arts train students for democratic participation and personal exploration; applied fields train them for more-or-less specific work roles.

Despite the growing importance of the creative sector of the global economy, sociologists know little about the “motives and attitudes” of creative workers and “how artists become professionally socialized” (Healy 2002: 99; Lingo and Tepper 2013: 352). This study's data come from 51 in-depth interviews with students (43) and faculty (8) of one private, four-year art school, Adams College of Art. The school offers a range of art and design majors; here, I concentrate on two departments that provide professional training in the applied arts: Media Arts and Visual Design. The cross-discipline comparison is motivated by institutional differences between these creative fields. Visual Design encompasses several majors centered on the core skillset of graphic design, a well-established and professionalized field with applications across economic sectors. Every organization with a public face, large or small, relies on the services of graphic designers to establish a visual identity that can be expressed in print and online. Media Arts is a new and less developed field encompassing diverse skill sets—such as animation, video game development, and “motion graphics” used in broadcast media and online—that are applied mainly in media industries like advertising and entertainment.

I recruited interviewees through in-person appeals to students—arranged with the cooperation of the departments' respective administrators and delivered during classes and events—and in emails to faculty. The resulting sample reflects the demographic make-up of Adams College's undergraduate population. Nearly one-third of interviewees are Asian American, more than one-quarter are white, one-fifth Latino, and the rest African American or identify with more than one racial-ethnic category. While not typical of the population of U.S. college students as a whole, the interviewee demographics are in keeping with comparable higher education institutions in the diverse metropolitan region where Adams College is located. The gender distribution—nearly two-thirds of student interviewees are women, more than one-

third men—is typical of Adams College’s undergraduate student body; women are overrepresented at Adams, in relation to other private four-year colleges and other art schools in the region. (Detailed demographics can be found in the methodological appendix.)

All interviews were conducted by the author in 2012 and 2013. Student interviews took place in the college library, its cafeteria, or a café adjacent to campus. Faculty interviews took place on campus, in interviewees’ homes, or via Skype. Interviews ranged from one to two hours in duration. I join Lamont and Swidler (2014: 157) in carrying out an “open-ended and pragmatic approach to interviewing, one where we aim to collect data not only, or primarily, about behavior, but also about representations, classification systems, boundary work, identity, imagined realities and cultural ideals, as well as emotional states,” with the understanding that rhetorical strategies do not determine action, but that action is “empowered” by cultural resources that are accessible through talk. Student interviews covered training experiences, personal background, and plans for the future. Faculty interviews explored personal experience with the Adams College curriculum and other professional experiences. Students received a small incentive to encourage participation. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the author; all identifying information was removed at the time of transcription.

I conducted two waves of coding and analysis of interview transcripts using Atlas.ti. The first wave organized sections of text into themes (e.g., choice of major, internship); the second consisted of recoding targeted theme sections using substantive codes that emerged inductively from the data (e.g., technical training, networking). Finally, analysis continued in the preparation of a series of memos that synthesized these codes into the specific topics presented in this paper. Using a similar procedure, I also analyzed Adams’ marketing materials, including its website and publications describing the two departments. The resulting analyses provide insight into the systematic variation in two departments’ methods and the kinds of artists they train: one group prepared for work roles in specific industries, the other trained in general competencies applicable to diverse economic settings.

4. Pedagogic cultures of professionalization

This first section of findings describes the two departments’ respective approaches to training. Both use a similarly structured model, guiding students into majors and concentrations as they advance. Most of the skillset-based courses are taught by working professionals, so students in both departments experience career role modeling as they learn. Yet despite these similar procedures, the departments infuse their training with different messages. The Media Arts department embraces a *market orientation* to training, preparing students for specific work roles in certain industries. The Visual Design department, on the other hand, has an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the market, using instead a *disciplinary orientation* to training, drawing on the long history of teaching and practice in graphic design. (Table 4.1, below, contains a summary of these approaches.)

Similar benchmarks and practices

The two art school departments I studied follow many of the same formal and informal practices in their undergraduate training. For example, the departments use a similarly paced specialization process, in which students first declare majors as sophomores and specialize further as juniors and seniors. Both departments require students to take at least one course on career preparation;

Table 4.1: Summary of observed differences in professionalization strategies by department, Adams College of Art

	Media Arts	Visual Design
General orientation	Market	Discipline
Marketing message	Learn applied skills	Learn general competencies
Approach to technical training	Integrated	Segregated
Teachers strive to develop students' occupational identities	Yes	Mixed

these include site visits to typical workplaces and guidance on resumes and job interviewing. Both assist advanced students in finding summer *internships*, and nearly all of the student interviewees have done at least one. Both departments also host *visits* from working professionals in their respective fields; visitors give talks and visit classrooms to critique students' work. And both require seniors to prepare projects that will be displayed during a public show at the time of graduation. The *senior show* functions as a transitional event, both the culmination of the student's undergraduate work and an opportunity for visiting professionals to identify and recruit prospective employees. In all of these ways, the Media Arts and Visual Design departments share a mission to providing students with hands-on cultivation of their skills and sensibilities as working artists. Both take professionalization seriously, in contrast to the stereotype of arts education.

Two pedagogic cultures

Despite the many structural similarities in their respective training processes, the two departments follow a different agenda as they implement these practices. First, the stated goal of Media Arts is to prepare students for specific work roles in media industries, primarily entertainment (film, television, and video games) and advertising. These industries are concentrated in the region where Adams College is located and the department is active in cultivating a network of industry contacts through its alumni and part-time faculty. Ellen, a Media Arts administrator and instructor, explains the strategy clearly: "Because we are a professional school... At least in our department, they're coming here to learn how to be working artists in a set of industries. And we need to keep up on what those industries are. And what they need." The department sees itself as a liaison, providing practical training and job placement assistance for students while also functioning as a source of well-trained workers for these industries. The department's website supports Ellen's comments, efficiently exposing readers to the skills taught and their commercial application. "With a fundamental understanding of digital tools and their creative applications," the website informs viewers, "graduates meet the demands of a diverse and expanding job market in visual storytelling for film, television, video games, apps, and the Web."

The Visual Design department implements a more ambivalent stance toward career preparation, focusing training on skills that have broad commercial application, rather than specific work roles tailored to a set of industries. This approach to training is in keeping with the historic application of graphic design as a creative service occupation, something that all firms

need and that they often contract out. The department's descriptions of itself reflect this breadth. For example, when describing the graphic design major, the department's website reads: "Typical formats include branding and logo development, posters, books, package design, apps, websites, and interactive design... Strong craft and presentation skills are emphasized throughout." The website follows with an impressive list of graduates' "recent clients" that includes a leading tech firm, apparel companies, a local art museum, and a record company. In contrast to the Media Arts approach, however, this list does not create links between these practices and local industries or firms. Instead, the mention of "formats" and "craft" are nods to the department's emphasis on training in a disciplinary tradition—one that acknowledges graphic design's commercial application but downplays careerism for the fundamentals of good practice.

Looking at the field of graphic design more broadly shows that this approach is an institutional feature of the field, not just Adams College or the Visual Design department. For example, the website of AIGA⁵, the largest organization representing graphic designers, uses similar language to that of the Adams College website and faculty interviewees. For example, the web page entitled, "What goes on in design school"? reads, in part, "The purpose of design education is to develop and practice habits of learning that a designer will use and hone for the next forty or fifty years" (AIGA 2015). A page devoted to guidelines for undergraduate educators lists a number of suggestions for best practices: (1) "basic communication principles and processes"; (2) "understanding of people and setting"; (3) "effective use of technology"; and (4) "research predispositions and skills" (AIGA 2012). Here, as in the Adams College curriculum, the pairing of skills with commercial applications, such as work roles, is de-emphasized.

A review of sociological research on higher education argues that contemporary colleges and universities act as a "hub connecting multiple institutional domains," seeking to add this metaphor to the sociological research agenda (Stevens et al. 2008: 134). I see the practical approach to training at Adams College as just that—in different ways, each department connects students to the creative occupations and economic fields they seek to join. The Media Arts department sees its constituencies in market terms, preparing students for work roles in specific industries and assessing their competence using standards familiar to those working in these industries. Visual Design sees itself as a labor market hub, as well, but the more diffuse nature of its professional communities—encompassing design disciplines across many industries— informs a more flexible approach to training.

Technical training versus design ideology

This section looks more closely at the curriculum practiced in the two departments, using insights from interviews with Adams College students and faculty. Media Arts emphasizes technical skills in its curriculum, integrating the technical and artistic dimensions of training to serve the assignment. Core courses in Media Arts focus on technical training, bringing students up to speed on creative software as they execute projects. As Cami, a Media Arts major, puts it, "In my sophomore year... we were required to take beginning classes on different programs." This initial exposure begins the process of developing students' occupational preferences, as they learn to associate software applications with specific work roles in media production. The applied nature of the training results in greater confidence in their technical skills and readiness for the job market, in contrast to their peers in Visual Design. Media Arts major Felicia refers to

⁵ This is not an acronym; the organization's formal name is "AIGA, the professional association for design" (<http://www.aiga.org/about/>).

motion graphics, one of the concentrations within the major, to say, “What I’ve noticed is that motion graphics people, when they present their work, it looks *good*,” she says. “In the Media Arts major, we feel confident because our skills have been honed.”

Core courses in Visual Design, however, do not necessarily require students to use the primary software tools of the field—primarily Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign—and as a result, their confidence wavers. The use of these programs is contingent on the nature of the course and particular assignments; proficiency with software tools is not necessarily considered a central function of the training. For example, core faculty member Simon says, “I don’t teach any of that stuff... I’m very much more on the idea and design stuff. That’s what they deal with in my course. And if they need technical support or they need someone to help them with the technical aspects, we have some great people to help them with that.” Similarly, faculty member Paola describes the trajectory of the graphic design curriculum: early courses teach students how to create “navigable hierarchies”; they work at “developing iterations”; more advanced courses focus on students “creating their own voice.” The students in Visual Design are fully aware of this approach and many are critical of it. Kristy, a graphic design major, says, “A lot of people think graphic design is, like, Photoshop and all that. But they don’t teach that at all in many of the courses. I mean, that’s outside knowledge.” As a result, she feels that her portfolio is less polished than it should be for the job market. Nick, another graphic design major, says that teachers reinforce the notion that the design process is primary, technical skills secondary: “They say they could train a parrot...how to operate a program... But they can’t train [it to] think on its own.” Nick sees a direct effect that this attitude has on working life. He and others who are already finding freelance projects complain that the department does not have a well-developed sequence of web design courses, leaving them unprepared in a key application of their skills.

The approach embodied by the Visual Design program is in keeping with the academic tradition of graphic design in which administrators and faculty have been trained. Like all design disciplines, graphic design sits on the cusp of art and commerce. As participants in a field of cultural production, designers balance the opposing standards of artistry or commercial success, a process described in Chapter 2. The same is true of architects, filmmakers, and chefs (Blau 1987; Fine 1996; Baumann 2007; Leschziner 2015). The academic context of art school faces educators in applied arts fields with a dilemma—one that the two departments in this study seek to resolve in different ways. In prioritizing concepts and process over technique, Visual Design endorses a historically enshrined, art-centered model of design education. However, many of the department’s more career-minded students are critical of the less applied nature of the training.

Career preparation strategies

The two departments’ pedagogic cultures incorporate distinct approaches to professionalization. Media Arts provides several concentrations within one eponymous major, each of which maps onto a specific work role that can be customized by industry. Visual Design offers students a more diffuse pathway, offering three majors: graphic design, illustration, and advertising art. The first two—in which the large majority of Visual Design students major—are commercial art disciplines that can lead to work in any industry, while the third is tailored to a specific industry. In this section of findings, I document the forms of career preparation that take place within the classroom, finding these to be an indication of the two departments’ respective pedagogic cultures. Students have access to other professionalization resources, including an on-campus career center, as well as internships and networking opportunities with professionals. Yet in interviews with students, the structure of course assignments and the feedback they get from instructors emerge as the most salient forms of career guidance. While some students do use the

career center and other on-campus resources, these form an addition to the core of their knowledge, which is gained through courses and reinforced in their social relations with each other and research that they conduct online.

Students in both departments have immediate access to working professionals who serve as professional role models.⁶ Students' accounts indicate that faculty role modeling is incorporated informally into classroom activities, but the effect that this has on students' imagined trajectories varies. For example, Marco shows how teachers model professionalism in Media Arts: "They're all... in the industry, so they all know what it takes to be out there... A few of our professors have even given us tips on pricing our work when we go freelance. Giving us tips on how we should present ourselves... In a sense, it's like a crash course in marketing yourself." In Visual Design, on the other hand, the situation is more mixed: some students do report getting the kind of specific guidance that Marco talks about, while others do not. Graphic design major Tommy says of this teachers: "I don't really have a clear vision of what they do exactly. It seems like they're involved in the graphic design community. But I'm not really sure what it is." Lynne, an illustration major, indicates that career mentoring is a student-driven process. "I think that Adams kind of opens up things and if you have question... you tell a teacher, 'Oh, this is what I want to do.' It's like, 'What would I do to get there...?' But if you don't know what you're doing, it's like Adams can't really do anything for you either." For these students, professionalization is routinized in Media Arts training, while in Visual Design it is available but its use depends on students' initiative.

The departments' respective approaches carry over into curriculum and course assignments, as well. Teachers in Media Arts are more clearly focused on developing students' professional identities, whereas in Visual Design the picture is mixed. Gilbert, a Media Arts faculty member, says, "What I'm focusing on... [is to] make sure that they have a skillset and also a correct understanding towards the profession they wanted to get into." He goes on to give an example: Gilbert teaches courses in concept art and visual development, both of which involve using illustration to develop characters and environments for animation and video games. This skillset is already quite specific, but Gilbert explains how he uses a different focus when teaching one application versus the other.

[They are] kind of similar but [with a] different focus... Visual development for animation... has to work with the story more. Not necessarily with game mechanics. They have to understand the story and then storyboard and [use] color keys... More of [the] emotional side... [Concept art for video games] is, you know, you have to illustrate the correct information so that that can be generated in [a] model, [a] 3D model.

While cultivating students' illustration skills, Gilbert is orienting them to work in different fields by emphasizing distinct aspects in his lessons and critiques. Visual development projects involve "story," "color," and the "emotional side" of the project. Concept art for video games involves a

⁶ More than 80% of faculty in both departments teach part-time, usually one class per semester, while working full-time as creative professionals. While the school boasts a 7-to-1 faculty-to-student ratio, only 54 of the 407 faculty are dedicated to teaching full-time. There does not seem to be a source for comprehensive data on faculty composition of art schools, but a cursory review of top-ranked institutions shows wide variation. Adams College's 83% part-time rate is high, but not extraordinarily so. Most art schools, including Adams, do not have a tenure system.

technical match with the later stages of the production pipeline. Gilbert's approach—to vary the training by specific commercial application of the skillset—is typical within Media Arts.

In contrast to Gilbert's highly occupationally-specific approach, Paola in Visual Design has a different approach to the preparation of students for likely career paths. She says:

I don't really think about that. I don't try to tailor it to anything specific. I think for the most part I try to, I try to guide the students into having an opinion of their own, creating their own voice. And just being culturally adept, and—so they can create meaningful work. I don't really think about, “Oh, you're gonna go and do branding, and you're gonna go and do motion graphics.” I don't really think in that way, I guess.

Paola teaches core courses in graphic design, clearly indicating that this curriculum does not include specific adaptations to students' potential work roles and occupational goals. The Visual Design departments also offers what students call “business classes” that provide practical approaches to professionalization. Edward teaches a course called “Business for Designers,” in which seniors who are about to graduate identify career goals and take steps toward advancing them. He explains, “They're going to get, you know, drop-kicked to the curb in May... They learn how to do freelance, market themselves... It's a survival class.” The class is optional for students in Visual Design's three majors, and while those who take it find it valuable to imagining their options and pursuing goals, it is notable that in contrast to the Media Arts approach, these goals are student-defined within a broader set of possibilities.

The first set of findings demonstrates that within one college, two departments train students for future careers using different understandings of the department as a hub connecting the school and its students with occupations and industries. Media Arts sees itself as a direct pipeline, integrating hands-on technical training into coursework and adapting courses and assignments to the work roles and expectations of specific media industries. Courses in Visual Design prepare students as entrants to the disciplines of graphic design and illustration—rather than specific industries—and segregate technical training and professionalization into separate classes that students seek out as needed. Both departments hire working professionals to teach most classes, and all faculty are immersed in professional networks in their fields of expertise. If the faculty vary in their proclivity to connect students for work roles and facilitate actual connections, this difference in “linking activity” (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, and Person 2006) suggests another aspect of pedagogic culture, rather than differential access to social capital. The next section will show the effects that these differences in approach have for students, who approach labor market entry with distinct occupational styles and competencies.

5. Student experience and occupational identification

The next section of findings uses students' accounts of their experiences in the two departments to show the effects of these two forms of professional training. As they advance through their respective majors, students engage in a set of cultural processes that enable them to build occupational identities in relation to institutional expectations. Students reconfigure the symbolic boundaries separating work from personal pursuits, and they learn to translate their interests and goals in occupational terms. While these processes are shared among students in both departments, there are also disparate outcomes that reflect the differences in pedagogic cultures described above: seniors in Media Arts, on the verge of labor market entry, articulate more focused goals, whereas those in Visual Design develop broader sets of preferences. (Table

4.2, below, provides a preview of these findings.) While the contrast is a more nuanced than stark opposition of strategies and perspectives between the two departments, it demonstrates how a similarly structured professionalization process results in two distinct orientations to future work.

Discovering careers, reconfiguring symbolic boundaries

The first thing that Adams College students learn, when it comes to career preparation, is that creative careers exist and are attainable. Most enroll at Adams with little sense of where their creative interests will lead them. A large majority of student interviewees report having known no professional artists or designers before college, other than a high school art teacher. They understand art as a personal interest and a school subject that they enjoy, rather than a self-sustaining career. Once they are exposed to the courses and majors at Adams College, students in these two departments break down the symbolic boundary separating art from work—then reconfigure it by distinguishing their professional and personal interests. For example, Media Arts major Marco depicts his transition into Adams, and subsequent transition across majors, as a kind of boundary work (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Growing up, Marco's strongest creative interest was in graffiti writing. He initially pursued an illustration major but quickly became concerned about his career possibilities. "I was a little lost when I came here," Marco says. "I so badly wanted to do graffiti. But then I just [realized], I'm just gonna separate what I love and my career. And somehow it ended up just merging. Because I still do graffiti, and I ended up loving what I'm doing now, so. It worked out really well... Because I'm doing what I love." Learning that creative occupations exist enabled Marco to break down the art-work divide. He then constructed a new boundary, distinguishing occupational skills like 3D animation—now marked as creative work he could "love"—from graffiti, a personal passion. Similarly, Felicia specializes in motion graphics and storyboard art as her career-focused concentrations within the Media Arts major, but she pursues music in her own time. She says, "I would never want music to be my job... I don't want any restrictions on it." These young artists learn that creative endeavors are valued according to the oppositional principles of aesthetic freedom and commercial appeal. Just as fields of cultural production—and college departments—are divided institutionally between pure and applied disciplines, students apply analogous categories to their own practices in their search for a meaningful, yet sustaining, creative career.

Crafting occupational styles

Joining a department and declaring a major are important in shaping the student's sense of present belonging and future direction (Katchadourian and Boli 1985: 58). Students self-select into courses and departments according to their evolving sense of their skills, preferences, and future goals, a process that becomes apparent in students' accounts of changing majors. Graphic design major Josh says that it was a sense of expanding possibilities that led him to choose the more "interdisciplinary" Visual Design department, combining a "fine art perspective" with the "commercial perspective in graphic design" in contrast to what he calls "very limited" fine arts majors. He says, "I've done really well... because it's allowed me to do whatever I want." Josh is also becoming accustomed to the skills and working styles of graphic design as an occupation—his horizons are in fact narrowing, rather than broadening. Yet he perceives the open-ended nature of the projects and curriculum there as a fit with his personality.

Table 4.2: Summary of observed occupational identification processes among students in two departments, Adams College of Art

	Media Arts	Visual Design
Symbolic boundaries around work reconfigured	Yes	Yes
Occupational styles develop in courses, majors	Yes	Yes
Embrace of networking as a job market strategy	Yes, active	Mixed, passive
Career aspirations - Lofty - Realistic - Clueless	Focused - Internship, leading firm - Specific work role - Refuse to choose	Flexible - Entrepreneur - Working environments - Searching for a fit

In applied college majors that are designed to lead to specific occupations, hands-on experiences with courses and projects transforms students’ sense of their abilities and preferences into personalized occupational styles. While Josh uses coursework to assess his own interests with ways of working that are broadly defined, other students are concerned with identifying specific work roles—and find that coursework is an effective sorting mechanism. For example, Media Arts major Vicky learned she loves to do concept art, the use of illustration skills on commercial entertainment projects. But Vicky also learned that her aesthetic style dictates specific genres in which she would like to specialize. Experience with courses turned her off to the style of projects used in most video games—as she describes it, “space armor,” “aliens”; “It just seemed like a guy thing.” Instead, she concentrates on courses that prepare her for work in television or film animation, where she can apply her preference for “fun, cutesy stuff.” Having learned that aesthetic styles map onto production processes in different industries, Vicky tailors her training to fields that seem both appealing and realistic.

If coursework is a productive means by which students learn to hone their sense of a fit with skillsets and ways of working, internships offer even more direct lessons. Nearly all students in both departments complete at least one summer internship, with the departments’ guidance; for many, this leads to ongoing part-time work. The lessons are often a wake-up call, alerting students to the promises and perils of commercial art work. Based on her internship experience, Felicia became concerned that many who work in her chosen field are frustrated by a lack of creative autonomy in their work. “In our industry... [the] idea comes from the advertising agency,” she explains. “So I feel like a lot of industry people, in motion graphics at least, get really burned out and drained out, because they’re not [working with] their own ideas.” This discovery led Felicia to develop another new skillset, storyboard art, during her senior year. Although not resolved, Felicia has learned the pros and cons of specific kinds of creative work—and the evaluative frames needed to assess their merit—through hands-on experience.

The findings shown so far in this section demonstrate that students undergo a similar process of identity formation in the two departments, reconfiguring symbolic boundaries around work and self-selecting into majors and courses based on their evolving sense of who they are as creators. These processes—along with their ongoing reflections on their training, lead to a more refined sense of occupational style. Assessments as different as Josh’s independence, Vicky’s

distaste for “space armor,” and Felicia’s awareness of the creative limitations of commercial motion graphics work all provide evidence of internal states being harnessed to the professionalization process. While these accounts do not map cleanly onto a contrast in occupational identifications by department, the next sections show that students’ career strategies and aspirations diverge by their senior year.

Networking, a career-building strategy

As they become professionalized in courses and internships, students in the two departments begin to adopt conflicting approaches to future work. For example, networking proves a controversial topic among these emerging artists. Media Arts students tend to embrace the practical advantage of forming personal relationships with like-minded peers—and many are already doing so. In contrast, Visual Design students tend to be unaware of the importance to their budding careers of forming professional networks. Those who are aware of it tend to take a passive approach, allowing teachers to play important referral roles rather than actively seeking out these opportunities for themselves.

First, many Media Arts majors openly acknowledge the need to be strategic about network building. For example, Kelly says, “We’re encouraged to go out to networking events... and go talk to people. Networking is really everything. It’s not necessarily how good you are.” While she recognizes that skill is important to opening doors to opportunity, she accepts without judgment the lesson that personal connections create opportunities. Kelly is already practicing what her teachers preach, building the number of contacts she has in her prospective field, video games. She adds, referring to the professionals she has met: “It wouldn’t be too hard to contact them and ask for advice or something. That’s why I’m trying to go to more networking events.” Fellow Media Arts major Danny echoes this, saying, “Our business teacher constantly tells us, ‘Be nice. Be nice to people because they will remember you. And they will not give you a job if they think you’re a jerk.’” Reputation-based hiring is a common practice in creative fields; therefore, networking is a particularly important practice in cultivating employability (Smith 2010). These accounts show that the practice has infiltrated art school pedagogy, as well, becoming part of the professionalization process in some departments and majors.

While Media Arts students frequently invoke networking as an important step toward building a creative career, their colleagues in Visual Design are less likely to do so. Instead, the lessons they are absorbing from their own “business” classes have to do with self-presentation rather than relationship building. In illustration-major Cleo’s words, the key questions are, “How do you market yourself? And how do you talk about your work?” She is not yet focused on building a network, as she is unsure of where this effort should be directed. Other Visual Design students learn the value that network connections can have for their budding careers, but remain ambivalent about it. For example, Josh recognizes the need for networking but seems uneasy with actually practicing it. He explains that while he has met professionals in his field, graphic design, he relies on faculty to develop his sense of potential jobs and work roles. “It’s been all teachers” he says. “They’ve just seen my work and been like, ‘You would be perfect here.’ And they refer me everywhere. So it’s all word of mouth from the teachers.” Josh’s approach to networking suggests that it is important but should also be effortless. While there is some emphasis put on cultivating potential contacts in the Visual Design training, the students take a more tentative approach than their peers in Media Arts, who can identify labor markets and the people within them who may be able to lend a hand.

Aspirations

The final section of findings looks at students' aspirations, cultural models of future pathways that they learn to identify and adopt as they progress in a major. Here the differences across departments are even more apparent, as students' respective occupational styles and strategies lead them to imagine different futures at the cusp of college graduation. While students in both departments express a range of aspirations—from lofty to realistic to clueless—the level of specificity within each category of stated goals varies systematically. A lofty goal, for Media Arts students, is to work for a leading firm in one's target industry. For example, animators like Danny compete for entry-level internships at Disney Studios, a prize toward which he directs all his efforts. Among Visual Design students, the most common lofty goal is to be an independent entrepreneur. For example, Josh intends to pursue a business based on his senior project, a web-based "lifestyle brand for men." He also imagines working at a day job at a design studio to support this project—but he is unclear as to how to pursue either the job or the entrepreneurial venture. Like a job at a top animation studio, success as an independent entrepreneur is something very few early-career designers are likely to accomplish. But unlike those firm-specific options, the entrepreneurial path is more diffuse and self-driven.

More commonly, the goals of both sets of majors represent acceptance of the occupational roles they can identify from their training; but here, too, the nature of these goals varies by department. A realistic goal for Media Arts students is a specific work role, located at the intersection of skillset and industry. For example, Marco, who specializes in animation, intends to do "3D for motion graphics," specifically as a freelancer in the "commercial," or advertising, sector. His peer Kelly wants to do concept art for video games. While she is flexible as to game genre, she prefers to work full-time rather than freelance. These are both competitive fields, but the goals that Marco and Kelly have set reflect realistic and targeted approaches to labor market entry.

On the other hand, even realistic career goal among Visual Design students tend to be less targeted. Few of them can be as specific as Marco or Kelly about their intentions, and their preferences tend to be for *ways* of working rather than a specific work role. For example, graphic design major Ana—who bases her preferences on her current part-time job, which began as an internship—wants to find a small firm that works according to a "set schedule" and takes on projects that are "creative" in style, rather than "corporate." Ana is torn because she realizes that while corporate jobs tend to be more stable and lucrative, the more routine nature of this work leads to fewer pieces that she could add to expand her portfolio—a necessity in an emerging graphic design career. Although she can identify realistic preferences, Ana remains open to various options. Her peer Anthony does identify a target industry, popular music, where he imagines he could do graphic design for a record company. But Anthony is not strongly committed to his goal and he lacks a strategy for attaining it. He has little experience with these kinds of projects, does not know professionals in this field, and after stating his preference, quickly adds, "Anything would be fine." Thus, while Media Arts majors can identify career pathways toward which their effort can be directed, Visual Design majors develop adaptable occupational styles that allow them to assess the relative merits of a broader range of possibilities. While they may be well informed about their options, these college seniors are more likely to remain undecided about which path to pursue after graduation.

The final category of aspiration represents those in both departments who are unable, or unwilling, to set a goal or narrow down preferences. This perspective represents a minority in both departments but is more common among Visual Designers, where it is expressed in

statements that there are too many possible paths to choose from with the information students now possess. For example, Lynne, an illustrator, finds it unlikely that she will be able to follow in the footsteps of her instructors, established artists who sell their work in specialized galleries. Yet Lynne has no other concrete path at her disposal, saying, “I think for me there’s going to be a lot of fumbling around and just trying to see what works for me.” While this seems an eminently realistic assessment—one that could be voiced by any number of liberal arts or social science students—it also seems surprisingly hopeless given the vocational training provided in her department and major. Meanwhile, the Media Arts students who have yet to identify a career goal are those who express a lack of personal fit with the available options within the major. For example, when asked to discuss three vignettes describing early career paths of creative college graduates, Veronica says, “They all suck.” She can weigh the pros and cons of the options before her, but cannot choose a path toward satisfying or self-sustaining creative work. Thus, these students diverge even among those who are clueless about future careers: for Media Art majors, this stance represents a refusal to choose among the clearly marked work roles being suggested by the major; for Visual Design majors, the lack of specificity inhibits the development of clearly defined future projections.

Taken together, the findings presented in this section give a full account of students’ experiences navigating two similarly structured processes of professionalization that have different emphases. Students reconfigure the symbolic boundaries between art and work, adjusting them in light of new awareness of commercial art skillsets and work roles. They continually reevaluate their own abilities and interests, placing these in institutional contexts as they develop an occupational style. They develop diverse attitudes and practices toward career-building strategies, such as networking. And, by senior year, students express a broad range of aspirations that vary at each level of goal-setting—from lofty to clueless—in their level of specificity. Media Arts seniors pursue more goal-driven and practical approaches to their looming labor market entry, while Visual Design seniors express greater variation and greater uncertainty about their occupational futures.

6. Conclusion

This chapter provides evidence of two models of professional training within the same four-year college, expanding sociological knowledge of an understudied arena: the black box of college experience as it applies to career preparation. First, I showed that two art school departments that share many benchmarks and practices infuse their training with different messages. Media Arts uses an approach that is explicitly tailored to local labor market opportunities. Students are familiarized with the roles and expectations found in media industries as they prepare for specific kinds of jobs. The department advertises itself as providing a pipeline to creative careers, incorporating hands-on software training into courses. In Visual Design, there is a less direct focus on projected occupational outcomes but, instead, an approach oriented to the core principles of the discipline of graphic design. Technical aspects of training such as software expertise are left for students to pursue in a self-driven manner. Faculty model diverse approaches to careers, mirroring their own varied experiences—but some students do not receive these messages and feel unprepared for the job markets they are about to enter. Each of these pedagogic cultures represents an ongoing adaptation on the part of administrators and faculty to their external constituencies.

Students in both departments move through a similar process of developing occupational identities, yet students' experiences with the two training models result in different outcomes. Students in both departments reconfigure the symbolic boundaries that traditionally separate art from work, as they learn that careers can be both creative and practical. As they sort through courses, concentrations, and majors, students try on different skillsets and styles that they learn to identify with work roles and career aspirations. That is, they exercise self-selection into (and out of) majors, based on personalized definitions of fit with the expectations and practices of different work environments. Students interactively cultivate occupational styles by learning from teachers about creative work and assessing their own abilities and preferences in light of this information. Once sorted into majors and concentrations, students' aspirations and career-building strategies vary by department. Media Arts students learn to map their skills and abilities to industry-specific work roles, while those in Visual Designers learn to assess their potential fit with current and future work environments in a less specific manner. In addition, students in the two departments tend to have different approaches to networking, a key practice in establishing employability in creative fields.

The analysis builds on concepts from cultural and organizational sociology, showing how students' identities change over time as they negotiate with the institutionalized understandings of work that are presented to them in college training. Rather than treating identity as a unitary entity, I isolate several ways in which occupational identities develop. Students reconfigure the symbolic boundaries separating work from personal life as the pleasure that the experience in creation takes on new meanings: job skill or hobby. This is a necessary first step in their journey toward economic self-sufficiency in an environment in which some activities are more likely to have market value than others. Students' occupational styles are channeled by the pedagogic practices of college departments that, in turn, reflect institutionalized understandings of good practice among broader professional constituencies. Students respond by self-selecting into occupational pathways that feel right. They end college with aspirations to apply their skills in particular ways, identifying specific work roles or preferences for ways of working that they can use to assess future opportunities. These creative yet practical students willingly submit to the process of personal transformation because they seek rewarding and sustaining working lives.

This chapter fills a gap in the sociological literature by developing a model of professionalization applied to higher education. In contrast to an institutionally guided process of "career funneling" (Binder et al. 2016), I find a more flexible process of occupationally-tailored training and self-selection within departments and majors. This is a broader and arguably more important process to understand, given the expansion of professional training at the college level. While the courses of training at Adams College are more occupationally specific than many college majors, the differences between the two departments are analogous to those found in many institutions. Media Arts offers students a choice of concentrations within one major, each of which presents a pathway to work roles in locally concentrated industries. In contrast, Visual Design offers a student-driven approach to professionalization as personal development, cultivating a broader skillset that graduates can use across commercial applications. This is a logical strategy, given the nature of graphic design as a professional service without a home in a particular industry. Yet it also introduces uncertainty that many students have trouble overcoming, and their lack of confidence in future careers is palpable. Rather than providing specific career pathways, Visual Design invests in students' learning process first, occupational outcomes second.

The identification of two distinct forms of professionalization during college builds on the concept of institutional pathways, the structures on which schools track students' academic and social lives (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). My focus on curriculum and classroom communication suggests that schools may be able to intentionally craft these strategies in ways that respond to students' shifting priorities and labor market opportunities. As more students pursue bachelor's degrees as the foundation of a white collar career, they will also demand return on their investment. One implication of this paper for educators is that professional training pathways are constructed and can therefore be altered to reflect changing contexts. Educators who wish to create a direct funnel toward job placement can follow Media Art's lead by training students for clearly marked job roles, integrating technical skills into training, and drawing on already-formed professional networks. Those whose fields more closely resemble the broad occupational reach of graphic design across industries and sectors may benefit from Visual Design's example of a flexible, student-led pathway. More sociological research is needed to show how expectations and identities that are institutionalized within fields come to influence the delivery of undergraduate pedagogy in the practical arts, and whether programmatic innovation can alter this kind of path dependency. In addition, the variation among applied college majors calls for more study to observe the effective training and job placement practices in business, health, and applied technical fields.

Finally, although I have not emphasized it here, this chapter also has implications for the study of class-based stratification in higher education. Students enter college on class-based pathways; it is a match between person and institution that secures the most positive outcomes for students, in work and in life (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013). Further research is needed to verify the approach I use to study socialization among this middle class and middle-class-aspiring sample and extend its lessons to studies of vocational training for students in all social class strata. College-level experience with training draws upon the cultural resources that students have already developed in early life. Academic departments do not craft working identities from scratch, but rather transform existing identifications and abilities into ones with more or less specific labor market potentialities. The cultural resources that I have identified in this paper—symbolic boundaries, personal styles, and aspirations—are important not because they determine career trajectories but because they provide students with the orienting devices they need to make sense of environments, recognize opportunities, and choose from available options. Sociologists have shown recently that there are long-term economic consequences of college and major choice as higher education remains a horizontally stratified system (Roksa 2005; Gerber and Cheung 2008; Hearn 2008; Roksa and Levey 2010). Future research may explore the development of students' cultural competencies that takes place in college to assess what higher education can and cannot do to overcome entrenched economic inequalities.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This dissertation is essentially a study of identity processes in two social domains: higher education and careers. Each chapter presents a distinct form of social identity and shows how it serves as an orienting mechanism—an internal compass that people use to make sense of previous experience, and set expectations for the future. Each chapter illustrates these concepts by applying them to empirical cases that are of interest to sociologists: work in cultural production; boundary-spanning careers; and college-level vocational training. Overall, the study contributes to sociological knowledge of identity as both a resource for and outcome of economic participation.

The need for this research is due to the changing nature of work in the post-industrial, knowledge-based economy, where project-based production models shift the nature of employment relationships. Workers themselves are adjusting to these changes, as are training systems, including higher education. Studying the changing nature of work is an ongoing project within sociology. Most researchers who study this phenomenon document the unsettling changes endured by workers as non-standard work is imposed upon them by restructuring firms who outsource more and more functions. As a result, entry into these conditions is not well understood. I know of no study that examines how novices enter labor markets and careers in which contingent work is the norm. Today's young professionals are being socialized into contracting, part-time, and entrepreneurial careers, and careers that combine many forms of work into a disorderly sequence. This dissertation represents a small step in the process of catching up with the times.

The conceptual frames I use to study the issue of changing work capture personal experience, meaning, and identity amid personal transitions and shifts in social context. My focus is on developing models of identity-building that involve individuals' responses to shifting social contexts. In their article, "Beyond 'Identity,'" Brubaker and Cooper (2000) suggest that the term has taken on excessive meanings and should be substituted with more precise concepts that fit respective investigations. They present three alternatives, breaking down the sociological uses of identity into its constituent parts: identification and categorization; self-understanding and social location; and commonality, connectedness, and groupness. It is the second aspect, self-understanding, that I seek to develop in this dissertation. Brubaker and Cooper explain: "It is a dispositional term that designates what might be called 'situated subjectivity': one's sense of who one is, of one's social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act" (2000: 17). They compare this mode of identification to Bourdieu's *sens pratique*, used by subsequent scholars to explain non-instrumental action.

It is striking that the three studies presented in this dissertation's empirical chapters focus on forms of self-understanding and social location in institutional environments that are relatively structured. Yet these students and creative workers are preparing for, and adapting to, high levels of uncertainty about how to proceed. I hope these chapters demonstrate that the study of identity as an orienting resource deserves a greater role in sociological studies of contemporary work, training, and careers. Micro-sociological analyses of work as experience—particularly during transitions—are an important addition to sociological research in the contemporary economy, where more skilled workers and professionals lead careers that routinely cross traditional labor market categories of firm, industry, and employment arrangement. Careers in creative fields offer useful examples, as fields of cultural production have long been home to non-standard work arrangements and entrepreneurial, boundary-spanning careers.

“Institutional self” is a term that I use to capture the processes by which individuals evaluate and monitor their preferences and capacities in relation to their ongoing social involvements, in this case, with work projects and labor markets. Cases like disorderly, boundary-spanning careers call for a new understanding of social involvement that is self-creating and self-affirming. Workplaces are not only a sites of conflict, but of meaningful engagement and belonging. The same is true for disaggregated production involving contingent workers: projects and careers offer avenues for meaning-making among workers who have the agency to pursue their preferences and advance in their fields. Sociology’s focus on working identities remains centered on firms, which play a diminished role in the lives of many skilled and professional workers today.

The similarity of the approach that I take in Chapter 2 and 3 illustrates the multiplicity of identity models that are co-present in social life. The first of these chapters frames its findings around boundary work, centered on the meanings of creative labor; the second around self-assessment, centered on the evolving sense of a match with projects and environments. Both analyses draw upon the same set of interview data with art school graduates, demonstrating that both models co-exist as shared approaches to career navigation. This provokes the question of whether one form of identification is more salient in certain circumstances than the other. If both are available for use, when will one and not the other be enacted? My expectation is that one of these identification models will be more salient than the other in a given context, such as a period of transition versus stability, or when workers different kinds of dilemmas. I will examine this issue more closely in the future as this project continues to evolve.

A similar question comes about when one considers the findings of Chapter 4 in relation to the previous two: whether, and how, the modes of professionalization inculcated during art school carry over into the early careers of graduates? Looking at the three chapters together, I conclude that the training differences I observed are important factors in shaping college experience and career preparation, but become less salient as workers are introduced to working environments with different characteristic and structural arrangements. That does not mean that disciplinary and market-based models of professionalization have no significant effect on working identities. Instead, I am arguing that the continuing effects of training are not structured as rigidly by occupation as the observed differences by department would imply. I hypothesize that the closer a graduate remains to his or her area of concentration in college, the stronger the relationship of working identity to one of these modes of professionalization.

I would like to emphasize that by focusing on meaning and experience, I do not intend to minimize the role of many other motivations for decision-making about careers. Although I have not emphasized it here, many of my interviewees experience periods of prolonged insecurity, including unemployment, underpaid or unpaid work, periodic overwork, and sudden layoffs. I understand the practical, future-oriented models of identity that I discuss in these chapters as ways of coping with uncertainty, including the likelihood of periodic insecurity among young creative workers. In contrast to Sharone’s (2013) findings on the long-term unemployed, I do not see a consistent pattern of self-blame among creative workers who are struggling to find stable and rewarding work. They do, however, enact a related concept: learning from experience as a form of self-improvement. Self-blame and self-improvement both fall under the broader rubric of therapeutic discourse that is deeply institutionalized in American society (Illouz 2008). My cultural analysis stands in contrast to critical approaches that treat such accounts as evidence of misrecognition or willing adoption of the burden of risk. Because my interviewees’ early career outcomes are relatively good, I do not try to explain, as other studies do, why workers justify the

insecure creative work as rewarding, special, or distinctive. These creative professionals are relatively successful, so I understand their experience as evidence of career uncertainty rather than precariousness or insecurity.

An important research question for future study is, then, *Under what conditions can work be uncertain without becoming precarious?* An ongoing question in sociological research on nonstandard work is what resources—skills, social capital, cultural capital, etc.—protect workers who experience disorderly career progression and heightened conditions of uncertainty without becoming economically insecure in the longer term. The predominant theme of research on “work in the new economy” is the burden of risk as experienced by workers. Yet at the same time, there is an unmarked category of middle-class, white collar, and skilled workers who experience nonstandard work and thrive amid this uncertainty. I believe my findings stand as evidence of this latter phenomenon, but more research along these lines could verify these findings among similarly situated populations of workers.

A related question for future research is, *Can the tools for surviving in uncertain careers be taught?* Building on the previous question, an additional one is whether the identity-based forms of orientation that I discuss here—boundary work and self-assessment—represent “soft skills” that can be developed in training or otherwise taught to contemporary job seekers, or whether they are socially reproduced through class-based stratification and, therefore, difficult to transmit through formal education. My findings suggest that art schools offer guidance on flexible, self-driven career navigation, but this preliminary effort should be complemented by studies of other forms of vocational and occupationally-oriented training.

Related also to the question of training is, *Under what circumstances does vocational higher education facilitate social mobility?* The urban, West Coast-based sample of my study is unusually diverse along the lines of race-ethnicity, social class, and national origin. Among my student interviewees, for example, eight of the 43 (19%) are from working class backgrounds. In addition, 21 of the students (63% of the 38 who are U.S. citizens) have at least one immigrant parent or are immigrants themselves. Thus, the majority of these art students are involved in one or more social mobility processes. If undergraduate education is to fulfill its mission of serving as a pipeline to middle-class careers and lifestyles, it is important to understand how college-level training in occupationally-oriented majors serves this agenda. This study offers a small window through which to view this broader process. In future work, I will develop this theme by analyzing student interview transcripts with the issue of social mobility in mind.

Turning to creative work, sociologists who study cultural production emphasize the tensions that workers experience between aesthetics and the ubiquitous constraints of bureaucratized production. But is creative work less special than sociologists tend to imagine? In other words, *Are the tensions found in creative work typical of skilled work more broadly?* Conflicts over meaning at work are a classic theme in organizational theory and contemporary economic sociology (e.g., Gouldner 1954; Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). The concept of boundary work as applied in Chapter 2 may offer a way to study how skilled workers in general navigate the conflicted meanings of work, by designating experiential zones for distinct purposes (segmentation) or uniting conflicting motivations into their projects (integration).

Finally, I note in the chapters above that sociology’s under-developed research on careers leaves the discipline unprepared for conceptualizing contemporary forms of advancement. Economic sociology offers rich streams of micro-level research on transactions, valuation, and emotional labor. The same attention should extend to job mobility. Often, as in the case of freelance work, short-term or undefined job tenures transform employment itself into a series of

transactions. As nonstandard forms of work proliferate, sociologists should pay greater attention to how workers survive—and even thrive—in unstable circumstances. How well-trained workers stitch together jobs to form careers is a topic of interest not only for scholars of the creative economy, but the post-industrial economy in general.

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METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

A. Interviewee demographics

1. Overview, all interviewees

	<i>Students</i>		<i>Alumni</i>		<i>Faculty</i>	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Race/ethnicity						
White	13*	30	27**	49	6**	75
Asian/Asian American	17*	40	15	27	1	13
Latinx	8	19	6	11	1	13
African American	3	7	1	2	0	0
Other/mixed	2	5	6	11	0	0
Gender						
Women	28*	65	26	47	2	25
Men	15	35	29	53	6	75
Total	43	100	55	100	8	100

* Includes foreign students; one is European, four are East Asian; all five are women.

** Includes one interviewee who was both alumni and faculty and was interviewed as both.

2. Detailed demographics: Alumni

a. *Media Arts graduates (n=25)*

Name	Years since graduation	Age	Race/ethnicity	Current occupation
Nina	3	29	White	3D artist, advertising agency
Jeffrey	5	late 20s	Mixed (Black/Latino)	Unemployed graphic designer/production artist
Andrew	5	late 20s	White	Creative director/business owner, video game studio
Mindy	5	late 20s	Asian American	Unemployed 3D artist/student
Adam	5	late 20s	White	Freelance web/app designer/programmer
Jesus	5	28	Latino	Software developer, tech firm
Jon	6	32	Asian	3D artist, television/ entrepreneur

Name	Years since graduation	Age	Race/ethnicity	Current occupation
Philip	6	late 20s	Asian American	Freelance concept artist
Mai	6	late 20s	Asian American	3D artist, advertising agency
Miguel	6	late 20s	Latino	Freelance 3D artist, entrepreneur
Sam	6	28	Asian American	3D artist/model maker, film studio
Robin	7	late 20s	Mixed (White/Asian)	Freelance 3D artist
Alan	7	late 20s	Asian American	UI/UX designer, electronics retailer
Shawn	7	early 30s	White	Freelance 3D artist, entrepreneur
Alex	7	29	White	Freelance 3D artist
Dave	7	36	White	3D artist, entertainment marketing firm
Sandra	7	35	White	3D artist, multimedia firm
Tim	7	early 30s	White	3D artist, video games studio
Jacob	8	late 20s	White	Unemployed video editor/producer
Van	8	29	Latino	3D artist, television program
Vincent	9	early 30s	White	Freelance photographer
Beth	10	41	White	Manager, pet care facility/alternative healer
Ken	10	33	Mixed (White/Asian)	Freelance 3D artist, gallery owner
Toni	13	67	White	Substitute public school teacher
T.J.	13	43	Native American	Freelance 3D artist, entrepreneur

b. Visual Design graduates (n=30)

Name	Years since graduation	Age	Race/ethnicity	Current occupation
Rob	5	39	White	Web designer/project manager, auto parts retailer

Name	Years since graduation	Age	Race/ethnicity	Current occupation
Melinda	5	26	Asian American	Freelance illustrator/web designer
Laura	6	31	White	HR manager, finance
Bart	6	33	White	Unemployed graphic designer/production artist
Cathy	6	31	White	UI design contractor, auto navigation manufacturer
Roger	6	33	White	Self-employed web design contractor
Renee	6	28	White	Freelance web designer
Luisa	6	29	Latina	Student, gallery assistant
Lily	6	late 20s	Asian American	Freelance graphic designer
Julie	7	late 20s	Asian American	Freelance graphic designer
Annie	7	late 20s	White	Graphic designer, design firm
Diana	7	late 20s	Mixed (White/Latina)	Freelance graphic designer/entrepreneur
Greg	7	31	White	Visual designer, web startup
Denise	8	early 30s	African American	Graphic designer, toy manufacturer
Mike	8	early 30s	White	Graphic/web design contractor
Helen	9	30	Asian American	Visual designer, web startup
Martin	9	33	Asian American	Art director, film marketing firm
Susan	9	early 30s	Asian American	Freelance art director
Bob	9	early 30s	White	Self-employed art director
Jack	9	31	White	3D artist, online education firm
Christine	9	31	White	Graphic designer, paper goods manufacturer
Kate	9	31	Mixed (White/Asian)	Freelance graphic designer
Peter	9	31	White	Art director, design firm
Marisela	10	35	Latina	Unemployed graphic/product designer

Name	Years since graduation	Age	Race/ethnicity	Current occupation
Cindy	10	34	Asian American	Realtor
Soo-jin	11	34	Asian American	Student
Ricky	12	38	White	Laborer/bartender
Gabrielle	14	42	White	Small business owner
Stella	14	44	Asian American	Creative director, beauty products retailer
Pablo	14	39	Latino	UI director, multimedia firm

3. Detailed demographics: Students

a. Media Arts department (n=23)

Name	Age	Race/ethnicity (national origin)	Career aspiration
Vicky	21	Asian American	Visual design for animation
Thomas	21	Asian American	Animation
Kelly	21	White	Concept art for video games
Kay	24	Asian (Singaporean)	Motion graphics
Felicia	22	Asian American	Uncertain
Marco	21	Latino	Motion graphics
Molly	21	White	Visual design for animation
Darren	22	African American	Story development for animation
Danny	23	Asian American	Storyboard artist
Kevin	28	White	Animation for video games
Jason	23	White	Cinematography
Leslie	21	Asian American	Uncertain
Zhang	24	Asian (Chinese)	Animation for video games
Betsy	21	Asian American	Animation
Maggie	23	White	Animation
Andrés	21	Latino	Animation
Veronica	21	White	Uncertain
Emilio	22	Latino	Animation
Madeline	23	Asian (Chinese)	Motion graphics

Name	Age	Race/ethnicity (national origin)	Career aspiration
Holly	21	Latina	Animation
Jennifer	22	Latina	Motion graphics
Cami	21	Asian American	Animation for video games
Chloe	21	Mixed (Asian/White)	Motion graphics

b. Visual Design department (n=20)

Name	Age	Race/ethnicity (national origin)	Career aspiration
Amy	21	Asian American	Graphic design
Michelle	22	Asian American	Marketing
Anthony	22	African American	Uncertain
Lynne	21	Asian American	Illustration
Mica	21	African American	Creative entrepreneur
Carla	22	White (Italian)	Graphic design
Mickie	26	Asian (Korean)	User interface design
Ana	24	Latina	Graphic design
Kristy	21	Asian American	Entertainment marketing
Nick	25	White	Web design
Cleo	22	White	Uncertain
José	27	Latino	Graphic design
Karen	26	White	Graphic design
Josh	22	White	Media entrepreneur
Frank	29	Latino	Graphic design
India	23	Latina	Graphic design
Anne-Marie	39	White	Exhibition design
Ivan	22	White	Graphic design
Tommy	22	Asian American	Creative entrepreneur
Farah	27	Asian American	Entertainment marketing

B. Interview guides

1. Alumni

a. Background

- Major
- Year graduated
- Age
- Current occupation

b. Work timeline

- Detailed list of every position held since college. Note gaps and overlapping part-time jobs.
- Prompts
 - Transitions. How was first job secured? How did you carry out the search process? Any preparations, additional training needed beforehand? Subsequent changes in occupation or position: what motivated the change? Search process? Were you satisfied with the change?
 - Trajectory. Was there a plan? Unexpected changes?

c. Current work

- Full-time job
 - Present (or most recent) title, duties.
 - To what extent is the work creative or technical? Are you satisfied with the balance? If not, in what ways is creativity not encouraged? Are these characteristic of your current workplace, or have you found them elsewhere?
 - Is the work individual or team-based?
 - How is your work evaluated—by what process and what criteria?
 - How is your work credited or recognized? Does your firm facilitate any kinds of external (professional) recognition for its employees?
 - How would you describe the working environment? (Prompt for cooperative, competitive.)
 - Compensation. Is it fair? Has it changed over time? Ever received royalties?
 - What's your reputation at work? Are there any ways that you cultivate a good reputation?
 - Best and worst jobs you've had.
 - Relationships with supervisors.
- Freelance period
 - Current project(s). Are these typical of recent work? Are these the kind of work you would like to be doing?
 - Typical project duration
 - How do you find work, seek out new work? How do you market yourself?
 - Best and worst freelance jobs
 - Relationships with clients
 - Gaps between projects?

- Typical work schedule (daily and weekly). Seasonal or annual fluctuations?
- Contracts. Is there negotiation? Formal or informal? Do you create your own? If relationships with clients are ongoing, are new contracts required for each project?
- How is your work credited or recognized? Do you enter contests?
- Compensation. Does your rate change by type of project? Has it changed over time? Ever received royalties?
- What's your reputation in the freelance market? Are there any ways that you cultivate a good reputation?
- How many hours per week do you spend on the following tasks: paid work; networking or socializing with colleagues; training; building a portfolio; your own creative or artistic projects. How have these commitments changed over time?
- What's the audience(s) for your work projects? What's the value of these projects for the audience(s)?
- What intermediaries (if any) do you rely on to help find jobs or provide other professional support (e.g. agent, staffing agency)?
- Are you involved with any professional associations? Attend conferences? What tools or other support do these provide?
- Do you have work mentors or role models? Supportive peer relationships?
- History of training post-college? Plans to do so? Ever go to grad school?
- Plans for the near future?

d. Current creative projects

- Description
- Inspiration, motivation
- Current or future market potential?

e. Personal background

- Where grew up, went to high school?
- Parents' and siblings' occupations, education level.
- Where are your parents from originally? Is either an immigrant?
- Citizenship status
- Art classes or lessons?
- Know any professional artists or designers growing up? Other influences?
- Do you (or did you ever) identify as an artist?

f. Education

- Major, choice of major.
- Any teachers who were mentors? Describe what made that person approachable or a role model.
- Career training. How was it built into courses, curriculum?
- Did you know what you wanted to do professionally when you got to Adams? When you graduated?

2. Students

a. School

- Major. Why they chose it.
- Do you have a specific career goal?
- What do you like/not like about doing school projects?
- Favorite classes.
- *Strengths and weaknesses as a (graphic designer/ animator).*
- How are projects evaluated? By what criteria? Thoughts on that—is it the right way, best way?
- Any teachers who are mentors? Describe what makes that person approachable or a role model. (Career side and artistic side both.)
- Career training. How is it built into courses, curriculum? Is it accessible, sufficient, provide the right kinds of guidance?
- (Career goal.) Does the school provide training specific (or applicable) to this occupation?
- Are there teachers (or speakers) who are working in that occupation?
- Internship experience.
- Senior project and thesis.

b. Interests

- What do you find interesting about design/animation?
- Who are your favorite designers/artists/animators (ask for names of people or projects, e.g. films)?
- What about their work inspires, excites you?

c. Background

- Where grew up, went to high school?
- Parents' occupations, education level.
- Activities related to major/career choice. Other influences?
- Do you (or did you ever) identify as an artist? (If yes) Do you still pursue artwork in or out of school? (If yes) Do you plan to continue when you are working full-time?

d. Work history (if any)

- Detailed information on work done before or during college coursework, including internships and volunteering.

e. Creative career vignettes

- Read three short vignettes (order randomly selected), ask follow up questions.

Sarah (Media Arts). Sarah always knew she wanted to work in animation. She grew up watching animated movies, fell in love with the characters, and used to draw them in her spare time. She went to a college with a good reputation for placing students in top animation studios and, with her hard work and growing skill, Sarah got a job in a major studio. It was her dream come true, and she loved every minute of it. In both her college courses and her

work, Sarah felt renewed passion for animation from her youth. She excelled at her work and believed strongly in the quality of the studio's films. Working at a large studio, however, Sarah didn't get to express her own creative vision. But as her reputation grew, she felt confident that she would take on more and more creative responsibility. She was making a good salary, was often exhausted by the long work hours, but was constantly re-energized by the creative minds of her co-workers.

Sarah (Visual Design). Sarah always knew she wanted to work in design. She grew up fascinated by art—but also by how everyday objects work, and how they're made. She especially loved looking at magazines and wanted to learn how to make something both beautiful and practical for sharing ideas. She went to a college with a good reputation for placing students in top graphic design studios and, with her hard work and growing skill, Sarah got a job in a major studio. In her work, Sarah felt renewed passion for design from her youth and believed strongly in the quality of the studio's projects. Sarah usually didn't get to express her own creative vision, but she felt confident that, as her reputation grew, she would take on more and more creative responsibility. She was making a good salary, was often exhausted by the long work hours, but was constantly re-energized by the creative minds of her co-workers.

Jasmine (Media Arts). Jasmine always loved art, but didn't know she could make a career out of her passion for painting and photography. During college, she realized that digital animation was a way to turn her interests into marketable job skills. Although she was uncomfortable with it at first, Jasmine grew to enjoy using computer software to create her work. She also continued to pursue her other creative interests, both in classes and on the side. After graduation, Jasmine starting working as a freelance animator, taking on all kinds of short-term jobs. She enjoyed the work and the freedom it provided her, but she felt insecure about the future. But by working as a freelancer, Jasmine learned that she could continue to cultivate her interests in painting and photography. Eventually, she found ways to make money in these fields too—by teaching art classes and selling her own work in galleries. She kept doing freelance animation work when she needed to, but this became a way to pay the bills while she pursued her other interests.

Jasmine (Visual Design). Jasmine always loved art, but didn't know she could make a career out of her passion for painting and photography. During college, she realized that web design was a way to turn her interests into marketable job skills. Although she was uncomfortable with it at first, Jasmine grew to enjoy using computer software to create her work. She also continued to pursue her other creative interests, both in classes and on the side. After graduation, Jasmine starting working as a freelance graphic designer, taking on all kinds of short-term jobs. She enjoyed the work and the freedom it provided her, but she felt insecure about the future. But by working as a freelancer, Jasmine learned that she could continue to cultivate her interests in painting and photography. Eventually, she found ways to make money in these fields too—by teaching art classes and selling her own work in galleries. She kept doing freelance web design work when she needed to, but this became a way to pay the bills while she pursued her other interests.

Josh (Media Arts). Josh had always been an avid fan of video games. He grew up playing every type of game, but never thought of making a living as a game designer until he went to art school. The encouragement of his mentor, a teacher who had worked at major game studios, and his increasing confidence in his own skills, led Josh to dream of a successful career as a game designer. But Josh's imagination was also expanding, along with his vision of what was possible to do with video games. He wanted to find a way to make a living while producing games that he, as a fan, would fully appreciate. Josh spent two years developing his own game, with some support from a company that promised to publish the game—if the finished product met their standards. After two years of work, the publisher went through a contraction due to falling sales, and they had to reject Josh's game. Crushed and broke, Josh decided to keep his work life separate from his creative passions. He took a job at a store that sells games, and decided to transition into high tech journalism. He started taking writing classes and considered going back to school for a second degree.

Josh (Visual Design). Josh's admiration for commercial art—movie posters, logos, product design—led him to art school. The encouragement of his mentor and his increasing confidence in his own skills, led Josh to dream of a successful career as an art director. But Josh's imagination was also expanding, along with his vision of what was possible to do with commercial art. He wanted to find a way to make a living while producing truly innovative, cutting-edge design. Like his mentor, Josh wanted to help bring ideas from Europe and Japan to American design. Josh spent two years developing his own high-end design magazine, and building relationships with funders and potential publishers. After two years of work, the one publisher that most supported Josh's work went through a contraction due to falling sales, and they had to back out on their agreement. Crushed and broke, Josh decided to keep his work life separate from his passion for design. He took a job at an art book store and decided to transition into journalism. He started taking writing classes and considered going back to school for a second degree.

Follow-up questions:

- Which vignette do you identify with most, and why? Most and least appealing features of each.
- Which do you think captures your most likely career path after college?

f. Career plans and prospects

- What's your next step after graduation?
- Do you know people working in the field (besides teachers)? Do you see yourself having the same kind of career?
- What's your ultimate career goal? Any other competing plans in mind?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in your field?
- Do you feel prepared for a career?
- Do you have a Plan B in case you can't work in your field right away?
- Plan to attend graduate school or pursue other training?
- How important is it to combine creative life with working life?

3. Faculty

a. Background and career

- What classes taught
- How long at Adams?
- Personal work history: outline, key transitions
- Why teach?

b. Teaching methods

- Priorities in instruction
 - What informed these?
 - How have they changed?
- To what extent is the teaching tailored to the occupations and industries that students will be working in?
- Is career preparation part of the course(s) you teach?
 - How are they being prepared?
 - What is the best way for young artists to learn about careers?
 - Has this approach changed over time?
 - Does it vary by students' area of concentration/future occupation?

c. Adams College

- How is Adams similar to, different from other art schools?
- How are the students similar to, different from other art students?

C. Recruitment Materials

1. Students

a. Business cards

- My name, title, email, and phone number
- message: I am recruiting participants for a research study on careers in the arts and media. Participation consists of one in-person interview lasting about one hour. Each participant receives \$20. Please call or e-mail me for more information.

b. Email script

Hello,

I'm a grad student from U.C. Berkeley doing research on creative careers. I'm doing a series of interviews at Adams College this semester, and I'd like to invite you to participate. All participants receive \$20 in cash at the time of the interview.

The interview:

- takes 1 hour or less;
- includes questions about your education, career goals, and personal background;
- can be done any time and place that is convenient for you;
- contributes to our understanding of the college experience and careers in creative fields more broadly;
- no one at Adams will know whether or not you participate.

Contact me directly if you're interested or have any questions. Thanks!

3. E-mail recruitment script for alumni

Hello,

I'm a grad student from U.C. Berkeley doing research on education and careers in your field. I'm writing to ask for your help with a series of in-depth interviews.

The interviews:

- are in-person and take 1-2 hours;
- can be set up whenever and wherever is convenient for you—I'm based in [city] but can travel to other cities;
- include questions about your career, training, and personal background.

Sorry, I can't offer any compensation. But your participation can contribute to our understanding of the college experience and careers in creative fields more broadly. My study complements other research on this topic by:

- targeting people in your fields specifically; and
- looking closely at early to mid-stage careers.

Anyone who majored in Visual Design or Media Arts from 1998 to 2008 can participate—even if you're no longer working in these fields. No one at Adams will know whether or not you participate.

The project will be going on for several months. If you're swamped now, please contact me and I will arrange a time to meet with you later.

Please reply to me directly with questions or to set up an interview. Thanks!