ABSTRACT

BUCK, ALISON ROSE. Gendered Negotiations of Consent, Labor Process and Exit among Digital Game Developers. (Under the direction of Michael Schwalbe).

Sociologists have long known that wages are not all that attract workers, particularly highly-skilled ones, to different jobs. Identity rewards in organizations of work are opportunities for workers to affirm valued identities. Past research has found that workers value these rewards will protect them when they are threatened. Other scholars have shown that managers can use identity rewards to control and elicit cooperation from workers. Another body of scholarship has explored how gendered assumptions and expectations are built into organizations of work.

Based on two years of field research and seventeen interviews with games industry professionals, my research unites these lines of inquiry, by examining how gendered identity rewards mediate the negotiation of entry, exit, and control of the labor process for game developers. I find that opportunities to enact gendered identity wages are an implicit part of game developers' compensation package, enticing them to forgo higher wages in other areas of software development. The environment of masculine camaraderie that allows developers to collect these identity wages bars women from full participation and acceptance in workplace culture. Even when game developers leave their jobs, the men give accounts that seek to preserve their identity, despite their departure. Women, already less able to claim these identities, relinquish them more easily. A gendered image of a 'good developer" is reproduced through collective identity work and, this image becomes a resource used by developers to negotiate with game publishers over control of the labor process. My work contributes to sociological knowledge about how collective identity work and identity rewards shape and reproduce inequality within negotiated orders.

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Gendered Negotiations of Consent, Labor Process and Exit among Digital Game Developers

by
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DEDICATION

For my brother, Richard, my parents, Kathy and Jerry, and my partner, Will, for their unwavering support while I battled the snake.

BIOGRAPHY

Alison Buck was raised by two librarians in Yellow Springs, Ohio. After exhausting the fairy tale and mythology sections at the public library, she began reading science fiction around age eleven. She was hooked on the genre — and later on the subculture surrounding it. She attended Catholic middle and high school where she enjoyed arguing with students and faculty about human nature and social behavior. During her undergraduate work at Guilford College, she discovered an entire discipline devoted to these arguments called "sociology." She was hooked again. During her doctoral work at NC State, she saw a way to combine these passions. The result is this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

GENDER, IDENTITY, AND NEGOTIATIONS IN GAME DEVELOPMENT

This project began because I started playing Magic the Gathering in high school. More specifically, it began with my observation of compensatory manhood acts within "geeky" subcultural groups. In high school and then in college, I participated in groups centered on various forms of gaming (board gaming, digital gaming, and tabletop role-playing). While some women participated in these groups, they were generally male-dominated. Consequently, I spent a large amount of time with men who were privileged but received a smaller share of the patriarchal dividend (Connell 2002) because they were generally not athletic or interested in sports, hunting, cars, or other conventionally masculine past-times.

When I began befriending and dating young men who were interested in science-fiction and fantasy-based games and novels and who shared my distaste for sports, I felt initially at home. This feeling was short-lived as I quickly met other men in their social circles who reacted to my interest in playing Goldeneye 007 on the Nintendo 64 with them or in their Dungeons and Dragons games with suspicion and even hostility. Further, they often used sexist stereotypes of women as "bad at math" or "overly emotional" to justify their resistance to female gamers. This surprised and confused me because I saw them as allies, united by membership in a stigmatized "geek" subculture. Why were these men directing anger toward me, rather than those who most benefitted from the enshrining of athletic prowess and interest in mainstream, masculine past-times?

In college, and then graduate school, I learned to quickly identify and largely avoid these kinds of men – and those who tolerated their sexist behavior – while still participating in geek subculture. Despite this screening, I still encountered hostile men in geeky spaces on occasion – such as the young male sales clerk at a video game store who, without prompting, asked me why Helen Keller could not drive, and without waiting for me to respond, told me it was because she was a woman. I had come in to purchase an Xbox game about intentionally crashing cars. On another occasion, the male workers in the tabletop gaming and comic book store across from my graduate school office ignored me until I demanded they look to see if they had a particular title in stock. They looked, reluctantly, but said they had never heard of the book (Persepolis – an award-winning comic by a woman that was later made into an Academy Award nominated animated film). I was particularly struck by these experiences not because I had not experienced misogyny and sexism in geeky spaces before, but because I was a customer trying to purchase goods from these men in their places of work. Despite this, they seemed to feel free to treat me with contempt and even outright hostility. Other, negative, sexist experiences as a customer at video game stores, comic booksellers, and comic convention booths made me wonder what aspects of these workplaces made these men feel free to ignore or alienate women who tried to buy their goods.

Meanwhile, in my social circle, I had begun to meet people (mostly men) who played Triple A console games like Halo and Call of Duty and a few who worked at video game companies. After playing a few of these games and experiencing what seemed to me like shockingly violent and sometimes racist and misogynistic content, I was reminded of my experiences in my teens and my interactions in comics and gaming stores. Unlike my

experiences as a teenager, I had at this point begun to develop a critical, sociological analysis of gender, work, and social interaction through my undergraduate and graduate studies in sociology.

Armed with an understanding of compensatory masculinity and an interest in the sociology of jobs and work, I began to wonder how video game workers enacted manhood – or womanhood – in the workplace. How did the culture of the workplace and the relations within it shape or constrain these acts? And how did these acts shape developers' views of the people who bought and played the games, as well as the characters in the games? As I considered these questions through the lens of my symbolic interactionist and ethnographic training, I decided to try to undertake a workplace ethnography of a video game design studio.

Initially, I was interested in how video game developers identified with or distanced themselves from violence, racism, and sexism in their products. Unable to gain access to a hardcore games company, I began studying developers who worked in a small, casual games company. Despite different content in these games, I still found that gender and identity processes governed the way managers attracted developers, the accounts developers gave for leaving the work, and the way developers negotiated the scope of their work.

IDENTITY REWARDS, GENDER, AND NEGOTIATIONS AT WORK

Game developers do highly-skilled, creative work. Managers elicit high-quality work from developers, like other knowledge workers, through identity-based management (Alvesson 2001; Alvesson and Wilmot 2002; Mitchell and Meacham 2011). Identity rewards

within organizations consist of opportunities provided by management for workers to validate valued identities (Schwalbe, McTague and Parrotta 2016). Identity rewards are compatible with managerial control when managers can create or limit these opportunities (Anteby 2008).

Identity-based control and the use of identity rewards are prevalent in professional work for two main reasons. First, highly-skilled professional workers tend to identify with their profession, through socialization and because of the status it bestows upon them (Alvesson 2001; Mitchell and Meacham 2011). Second, identity rewards have grown more important with erosion of job security, guaranteed benefits, and other former features of professional jobs that encouraged loyalty and commitment to a firm (Alvesson and Wilmott 2001; Crowley et al. 2010).

Identity-based control is particularly effective within the games industry because workers, at least those I spoke with, typically play digital games and identify with the gamer subculture. Much like the "green identities" of the grocery workers described by Schwalbe and his coauthors (2016), the gamer identities of game developers serve as part of the attraction to and compensation for the job. Consistent with the "Do What You Love" ideology as described by Tokumitsu (2014), workers in the games industry internalized the idea that employment in a field they loved was worth forgoing higher wages, job security, or the expectation of work-family balance and reasonable hours. Almost every developer I spoke with loved playing games and felt lucky for the chance to create games, despite the less stable, more demanding conditions of the work.

Despite these attractions, the volatility of the industry means developers frequently leave one job for another and high rates of burnout often lead developers to leave the industry entirely. When developers leave a job in the industry voluntarily or when they leave the industry altogether, this requires an account. When a member of a subculture leaves that subculture, as in the case of religious conversion (e.g., Davidman and Greil 2007), an exit account is typically required. Voluntarily leaving a job in the games industry violates an identity code – a collectively recognized way of signifying an identity (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996) – and thus requires the exiter to account for the violation. Consequently, developers who leave but who want to maintain their status in the gaming community have to give an account for leaving that excuses or justifies their willing departure from a coveted industry job.

Identity rewards also condition negotiations over the work of making games, including the labor process. Making games involves a great deal of autonomy. Independent developers generate ideas for games, including plot, characters, and game mechanics. Artists make decisions about how characters will look. Programmers write code to enable certain kinds of movement or to allow a weapon to be used in a particular way. Even when independent developers work on games for licensed characters or properties, they make decisions about what should happen when, and what characters will say. Even while developers work under volatile market conditions where risk has been externalized by

publishers and retailers onto workers and the owners of independent studios,[1] they show high commitment to the work, elicited through normative, identity-based control (Crowley et al. 2010; Cooper 2000).

In 1974, Harry Braverman revived discussion of the labor process as an arena for struggle between capital and labor. Braverman highlighted the long history of de-skilling jobs: the process through which capitalists identified the tasks involved in highly skilled craftwork and broke them down into sets of much simpler jobs that could be done by unskilled workers. Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) introduced deskilling as part of a larger set of principles that he called scientific management. Braverman argued that deskilling had moved from skilled blue collar to skilled white-collar jobs and hinted that this trend would continue.

In contrast, more recent examinations of worker control in professional and managerial jobs suggest that deskilling has not occurred (Crowley et al. 2010). Instead, other Taylorist techniques have been adopted: selecting especially productive, competent workers with the "right" attitude; and *capitalizing* on worker creativity and innovation. These strategies are evident within the games industry and constrain negotiations over how game development gets done.

Even developers who have internalized a Do What You Love ideology do not passively acquiesce to these means of control. Instead, game workers seek to shape what

[1] Not unlike a more highly-skilled analogue of the clothing industry, as described by Bonacich and Appelbaum (2000).

having the right attitude means and how much creative control they have in the development process. In doing so, they use strategies that rely on a gendered identity of "game developer." Much like 19th century craft workers who resisted Taylorist encroachments on their expertise and control of the labor process, developers draw on collective manhood acts to resist the attempts of publishers to control the development process. My research examines how gendered identities shape and are shaped by these struggles for control.

Grounded in a symbolic interactionist tradition, negotiated order theory construes organizations as sets of agreements and patterns of behavior negotiated by participants (Strauss et al. 1964; Maines and Charlton 1985; Strauss 1978). While larger contexts and sedimented rules and regulations that arose from past negotiations constrain what can be negotiated, current organization members are constantly creating new agreements as well as re-interpreting and challenging old ones (Busch 1982). Negotiating over large projects tends to focus on who will do what, when, and how. Identity, then, becomes an important resource in the negotiation of the labor process as identities imply rights, characteristics, and skills.

While it is in the interest of game publishers to control much of the development work, they also seek to capitalize on worker creativity and skill, leading to a great deal of negotiation over how games will be made. Game developer identity becomes a key resource in developers' negotiation strategies for gaining greater autonomy and control over the labor process. These contests for control are also identity contests, centering on what kind of person a game developer is and what kind of privileges and expertise being a game developer entails.

METHOD AND SETTING

As with the software industry in general, video game companies consider their product a form of intellectual property. Concerns about protecting this property made gaining entrée to one of these companies arduous. I began seeking access in December of 2008 and finally gained entry to a small, casual video game company in November of 2009. My initial contacts were through friends and acquaintances in the industry. These led to initial informal interviews, but did not translate into access. Eventually, I introduced myself to a member of the university's computer science department. He introduced me to the CEO of a small, casual video game company who was amenable to my desire to observe meetings and talk to employees.

Between November of 2009 and April of 2012, I attended weekly product development meetings and planning meetings, witnessed and performed voice-over work for games, sat in on calls with publishers, and spent time informally in the office. I also twice attended conferences for local game developers. In addition, I conducted in-depth interviews with thirteen Fun Power employees and five other games industry professionals between December of 2011 and January of 2013[2].

Fun Power Games, established in 2008, employed 13 non-contract workers. The employees consisted of one woman, hired two months before my departure from the field, and 12 men between the ages of 25-45. As might be expected with a small company, Fun Power had a compact management structure. Mike, the CEO, was often present at the offices

[2] "Fun Power" and the names of its products and employees are pseudonyms.

and actively involved in projects. Though he was technically responsible for the business development and lead generation side of the business, he began as a software engineer and sometimes took on overload programming work. Max, the art director, worked remotely from his home in New England. He delegated art work to others but also did a lot of work himself. Mark, the head of engineering, did a substantial amount of coding, though he worked primarily on the company's game engine rather than on the games themselves. Darius, the producer, acted largely as a project manager. His tasks were almost exclusively concerned with overseeing the coordination of projects and of communicating with clients.

Fun Power specialized in casual games – games that are easy to master and require less skill or commitment than "hardcore" games played on dedicated gaming consoles. In particular, Fun Power focused on PC games marketed towards a demographic consisting mainly of middle-aged women. These games require smaller budgets and fewer workers to complete, but are also less profitable than highly successful console-based, hardcore games (often known as Triple A games). Like many game companies, Fun Power boasted a casual atmosphere. Most workers wore jeans and sneakers, while others adopted shorts and sandals (even in the winter). Nerf guns and ammunition were scattered around offices and hallways. Most of "the guys" decorated their desks with toys from popular television shows or iconic video games. Luke's desk featured a framed certificate declaring him a minister of the Universal Life Church. Others displayed pictures of wives or children. The CEO often provided pizza lunches or trips to a bowling alley or film to celebrate company triumphs (such as finishing or "shipping" a completed game). A great deal of joking took place in

meetings. Workers generally felt comfortable talking about non-work topics, even when the boss was around.

Of the full-time developers at Fun Power, most were white, male and heterosexual. All three of those in managerial positions at some point during my observations, Mike, the owner, Max, the art director, and Mark, the technical director, were white, heterosexual men. Mike and Max, like slightly over half of their employees, were married (7 of 13 workers). Five of the other workers had fiancées or long-term partners. The only exceptions were Sarah, the one woman who worked at Fun Power during my observations, and Mark, the technical director. All of the workers identified as heterosexual. Two developers were non-white: Darius, the producer, who was Black, and Damon, who was biracial. All of the developers had completed an associate's degree or higher.

I based my methods on grounded theory principles (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006). After each site visit, I wrote up detailed field notes based on my observations. I coded these notes to search for patterns in the data, beginning with open coding and proceeding to focused coding. I transcribed and coded interviews, also using these coding procedures. I then wrote memos to make sense of these codes and the connections among them. These memos were developed into the current chapters.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

In chapter 2, I will explain why game developers accept lower pay and longer hours than they might receive elsewhere in the software industry. As I demonstrate, workers accept an alternate form of compensation in the form of what I call identity wages. Employers in the

digital games industry know that working in the games industry confers status. At Fun Power, the management fostered an atmosphere of masculine camaraderie that emphasized gaming subculture, enabling the developers to collect identity wages both as men and as gamers. Female game developers secured identity wages as gamers and even through enacting manhood, but had fewer opportunities to do so. As I show, gamer identity was highly entwined with manhood, making it more challenging for female developers to claim associated identity rewards. Similarly, female developers can engage in manhood acts, but could not rely on male bodies for self-presentation, so their attempts to claim the identity wages associated with manhood required acting tough, strong, or dominant – and still elicited skepticism. In sum, employers in the games industry used identity wages to attract skilled workers at lower wages, but, in doing so, created obstacles to women being fully accepted and integrated into game development jobs and culture.

In chapter 3, I examine gender differences in exit accounts given by workers leaving the games industry. The industry faces high turnover due to high uncertainty in consumer tastes and, particularly in the wake of the explosion of mobile games, a highly competitive market. Six developers left Fun Power for new jobs because of financial precarity and unpaid or underpaid wages. The accounts they gave for leaving cited a lack of wages as a threat to their own financial independence or to the welfare of those dependent on them. These accounts simultaneously reinforced an ongoing identity investment in games and gamer culture. On the other hand, the female developers I spoke to who left industry jobs cited sexual harassment or primary child care roles as their primary reasons for leaving, while not addressing wages.

In chapter 4, I demonstrate how developers create and deploy a masculine image of an ideal developer as a resource in negotiating with publishers over the labor process. I explore developers' negotiation strategies, including asserting technical expertise, citing prior agreements, protecting autonomy in contracts, and choosing projects carefully. Developers used these strategies to attain and protect discretion over their work and the development process. The Fun Power workers engaged in collective identity-work, such as ridiculing publisher expertise and knowledge and identifying good and bad publishers. This in turn laid the groundwork for negotiations with publishers.

In chapter 5, I assess my findings and discuss how they add to the sociological understandings of gender, identity, and negotiations within the workplace. Specifically, I show how my findings extend our knowledge of identity rewards and their role as compensation in the workplace, our understanding of exit accounts and identity investments, and further integrate gender into negotiated order theory. I also reflect on the limitations of this study. Finally, I discuss possible avenues for future research to expand on these insights.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY COMPENSATION AND MANHOOD WAGES

Making video games is skilled work but occurs under conditions usually associated with low-skilled, contingent, or part-time work. Most software engineers, the programmers who write the code that makes games work, have at least a bachelor's degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017). Even those without college degrees must achieve a high level of competence with various programming languages and tools, as well as keep abreast of the rapid development of new ones. Likewise, digital artists — those who create the visual elements of virtual worlds and settings, such as characters, buildings, weapons, and landscapes — must master and stay current with specialized software packages that allow them to build muscular 3-D heroes or towering edifices.[3]

While many highly skilled professionals work longer hours, the games industry is unusual in its reliance on mandatory but uncompensated overtime during "crunch periods" (Miller and Bulkley 2013; Walker and Williams 2014). Most game developers work more than 50 hours a week, often including these crunch periods. In addition, work in the games industry is highly uncertain, with a layoff rate that is twice the national average (Williams and Walker 2014). Finally, wages tend to be lower in game development jobs than in comparable positions in other technical fields (Williams 2013).

[3] Though several less technical administrative and support jobs exist, almost all of the jobs at development studios are white-collar, professional positions (e.g., Gamasutra Salary Survey 2014).

Some skilled jobs entail less favorable conditions or compensation than we might expect, because the workforce consists of people belonging to oppressed groups generally seen as less competent, valuable, worthy, or hard-working. For instance, the wages associated with a particular job field tend to fall as that area becomes more female-dominated, regardless of how skilled the jobs may be (England 1992; England, Allison and Wu 2007). This is not the case for video game development. Workers who make digital games generally possess a great deal of privilege on the basis of class, race, and gender. Men (mostly white men) make up the vast majority of video game developers[4] (International Game Developers' Association 2005; 2014), particularly in essential technical positions like programmer or digital artist (Gamasutra Salary Survey 2014).

Despite this mismatch between skill level, gender and race privilege, and working conditions, there are far more workers interested in these positions than there are jobs, based on the proliferation of articles and conference panels about "how to break into the industry," and the tone of recruitment campaigns by major game development studios. Understanding

[4] Jobs in the video games industry are not separated from other programmers, digital artists, or other relevant professions by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), making reliable data on the gender composition of the industry difficult to obtain. The International Game Developers' Association (IGDA), a prominent professional association in the industry, conducts a Developers' Satisfaction Survey every five years that is open to all its members. The 2014 results indicated respondents were 76% male and 79% white. No data were released about the gender and racial composition of specific jobs (e.g., programmer), but the Gamasutra 2014 Salary Survey, using the attendees of the 2014 Game Developers Conference as a sampling frame, provides breakdowns of professions by gender.

why skilled workers vie for these jobs despite lower pay and long hours requires examining the negotiations between workers and capitalists, as well as the economic, social, and ideological contexts that shape these negotiations (Maines 1977; Strauss 1978; Burawoy 1979; Staples and Staples 2001). Specifically, these negotiations center on a type of identity-based control (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016) involving what I call "identity wages."

Identity wages constitute non-financial compensation through built-in opportunities to enact a valued identity as a feature of the work or the workplace culture. Identity wages may include opportunities to enact privileged identities, such as "man." Under these circumstances, identity wages are especially useful for reconciling workers from privileged groups to less attractive conventional compensation. Exploring how identity wages are negotiated extends the literature on identity regulation and identity-based control by showing how control-consent bargains between capitalists and workers reinforce a patriarchal gender order (Connell 2002), as well as capitalism, through the negotiation of valued gender identities. More broadly, the negotiation of identity wages by privileged workers demonstrates a one-way process through which different systems of inequality are mutually constituted and reproduced by identity-based control within organizations — even those offering "good" jobs and relatively flat hierarchies.

In this chapter, I examine how game developers and capitalists have struck a bargain such that part of the compensation for game work took the form of identity wages. Specifically, I examine tacit understandings about opportunities for identity rewards related

to the opportunity to enact manhood and the validation of identity stakes in a particular subculture.

Game developers I observed and spoke with found compensation for their work through the validation of a gamer identity primarily from: (1) working on a product central to their subculture; (2) opportunities for symbolic affirmation of this identity in the workplace and industry culture; and (3) the validation of subcultural peers. Most of the workers also obtained identity wages in the form of opportunities for manhood acts in the workplace. The industry and organizational context for these opportunities was a culture of masculine camaraderie — a "boys' club" atmosphere pervasive in both the industry as a whole and at Fun Power, specifically. This atmosphere featured joking and play around masculine and sexualized themes.

I present my analysis by first contextualizing and defining control and consent. I then discuss identity rewards and identity wages and examine how most game workers at Fun Power and elsewhere in the industry were compensated for their work through validation of a gamer identity. Finally, I explore how the culture of Fun Power in particular, and the industry in general, fostered an atmosphere of male camaraderie and paid out manhood wages to developers.

CONTROL, CONSENT, AND REPRESSIVE SATISFACTIONS

To maximize profit, capitalists try to extract as much productivity as possible from workers. Workers have a variety of motives for resisting these efforts, from simple self-interest to the desire to make a product or deliver a service of which they can be proud.

These competing interests have led to a variety of tactics aimed at control, resistance, and negotiation within workplaces.

In his classic work on the topic, Richard Edwards (1979) reviews various control tactics, both historical and modern. In close supervision, capitalists personally and directly supervise workers, ensuring they perform the work according to owner specifications and at an acceptable speed. While widespread in early factories, this strategy is rare today. The development of the assembly-line and other technologies allowed capitalists to control the pace of work, which Edwards refers to as technical control. He also examines the use of comprehensive, bureaucratic rules to govern workers' behavior. Kunda (1992) expands Edwards' scheme by introducing the idea of normative and cultural control. In this form of control, workers are socialized into and constantly bombarded with a carefully constructed culture that encourages them to identify their own goals and needs with those of the company.

Identity-based control involves some of the tactics described by Kunda, but focuses specifically on work done by those in authority on the identities of employees (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002; Alvesson, Ashcroft and Thomas 2008; Anteby 2008; Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016). Identity-based control entails higher-ups' attempts to secure consent and increase productivity by creating or reinforcing particular meanings about certain employees or positions. These may involve identities created by executives and linked to the organization, as in Kunda's (1992) exploration of "Tech's" carefully created and distributed corporate culture, or they may involve identities already possessed by workers and separable from the organization, as in the of green rhetoric used by an organic grocery store to secure

cooperation from environmentally-conscious employees (Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016).

While these control tactics originate with capitalists and are in their interest, workers are not passive objects of this control. While workers may resist exploitation, either collectively or individually, workers and capitalists often enter into an implicit bargain wherein workers consent to their exploitation (Burawoy 1979). The vast majority of workers participate in capitalist enterprise by necessity, but by making choices (however constrained) about when and how to cooperate, they tacitly consent to the rules established by capitalists. Capitalists maintain their legitimacy so long as they also abide by these rules.

Repressive satisfactions can be said to arise when workers (or other oppressed groups) consent to the conditions of their exploitation in exchange for compensations or distractions that make their situation more interesting, comfortable or bearable (Burawoy 1979; Bartky 1990; Marcuse 1991). For instance, Burawoy's observations at Allied Corporation showed that workers were relatively content with the conditions of their work so long as they were allowed by foremen to engage in the game of "making out" by making enough bonus output to earn extra income without exceeding levels that might change the piece-rate. Workers began to withhold consent (and effort) not because of the discomfort or unpleasantness of their working conditions, but when the rules and conditions that allowed them to achieve these repressive satisfactions were threatened. Similarly, workers at Green Grocer began to question the company's practices when opportunities to validate a "green" identity — such as purchasing from local buyers, opportunities to buy expired food at discounts, and restrictions on the sartorial self-presentation of alternative identities — were

removed (Schwalbe, McTague and Parrotta 2016). Identity wages are one source of repressive satisfaction that hinge on the provision of opportunities to validate a valued identity.

IDENTITY REWARDS, SUBCULTURE STATUS, AND PRIVILEGE

Members of subcultures do collective identity work to decide who is and is not a member of the group and what ways of signifying membership are appropriate (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). While consumers of video games represent a demographically diverse cross-section of the population (Williams, Yee, and Caplan 2008), those who identify as gamers are less heterogeneous (Shaw 2011). Those who devote a substantial amount of time to playing video games, particularly certain types of console or PC games, belong to a loose but recognizable subculture of "hardcore" or "core" gamers that is far more white, male, and heterosexual than the universe of people who play games (Scimeca 2013). Hardcore gamers were characterized by my participants as skillful, intelligent, determined, dedicated, scornful of coddling, tolerant of violence, focused on plot and game mechanics over appearance, and attracted to difficult games. While not all those who play hardcore games claim the identity of "gamer," many do.

As social actors, we develop identities upon which various benefits, or identity stakes, depend (Schwalbe 2005). For instance, a data analyst's paycheck and job security likely depend on her successfully performing the identity of "competent employee." Not all identity stakes are as concrete as this. Some stakes may take the form of prestige, status, or moral authority. For instance, craft workers at an airplane engine manufacturing plant saw the

opportunities to make unauthorized — or informally authorized — "homer" projects with company materials as an opportunity to enact their professional identities and gain admiration from their peers (Anteby 2008). While software developers who create accounting software or operating systems for businesses might not find that their product helps reinforce valued identities, game developers' work on a product that is the basis for a subculture with which most identify.[5] This allows them to be seen favorably by other members of the subculture (both other developers and consumers of games).

Capitalists and workers negotiate over the identities and identity rewards associated with work (Brower and Abolafia 1997; Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Schwalbe 2005; Satterlund 2012). Identity rewards, "in the context of gender, are those situated signifiers and behaviors that allow males and females to be viewed favorably as 'men' and 'women' in our society" (Satterlund 2012: 531). More generally, identity rewards are opportunities for people to enact salient identities in a socially approved and acceptable way. For instance, a woman who posts many pictures of her immaculately dressed, happy child on social media sites demonstrates to friends and family that she is a "good mother" and provides the opportunity for them to affirm this identity.

[5] While it was rare for my participants to explicitly refer to themselves as gamers, they typically painted hardcore players in positive terms with respect to ability and taste and contrasted them with casual players. They also played games considered to be "core" or "hardcore" and contrasted their own taste and abilities in gaming with those of casual players in ways similar or identical to the contrasts they drew between hardcore and casual gamers.

A special type of identity reward relates to the ability to signify a privileged identity. In U.S. culture, people labeled male at birth because of their external genitalia learn to act like and represent themselves as men (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). Men are the dominant gender group and successfully signifying manhood has many attendant privileges (McIntosh 1989).

Scholars have suggested that control and consent are not gender neutral, but that capitalists draw on gender ideologies to elicit cooperation from workers (Mumby 1998; Schwalbe 2014). When capitalists provide male workers an opportunity to signify manhood in the course of their work, this constitutes a form of repressive satisfaction, in the context of class. Just as poor white workers in the South were compensated for their low wages by what Du Bois described as the psychological wages of whiteness ([1935] 1995), men are compensated by opportunities to secure their claims to gender privilege at the expense of accepting their class exploitation.

Being able to enact a highly valued identity may compensate or distract men from unpleasant conditions of their work, such as extremely long work weeks. For example, not all high-tech companies have carefully constructed cultures, yet software engineers and other workers at tech startups often put in very long hours. Cooper (2000) suggests this is because of a form of normative control that she calls "nerd masculinity." Since these men have little chance to demonstrate physical strength or prowess, they show masculinity through mastery of technology (Cooper 2000; Kendall 2000). Further, they feel as though co-workers and bosses subtly assess them on this basis. This offers repressive satisfactions to male workers, in the form of identity rewards, while ultimately benefiting owners and shareholders. As well

as reproducing capitalist power structures, this bargain also reinforces a patriarchal gender regime within the organization (Acker 2006) and a patriarchal gender order (Connell 2002) more broadly.

EARNING IDENTITY WAGES AT FUN POWER

Game developers Fun Power found two distinct identity wages in game work despite the possibility of more stable, better compensated, or less time-demanding work in other technology jobs. First, game developers were attracted to a job in which they could create a product that they valued and which is associated with a subculture in which most of them have identity stakes (Schwalbe 2005). I term these rewards "identity wages." Identity wages constitute a distinct type of identity reward for work because capitalists and workers implicitly agree that these identity rewards will function as a type of compensation. Managers, particularly in "knowledge-intensive" or "creative" industries, are aware that their workers want opportunities to signify a particular identity (Alvesson 2001; Anteby 2008; Gotsi et al. 2010).[6] Managers are able to exploit this when recruiting workers. Executives and managers emphasize or create opportunities to enact the identity that are compatible with the work and built into the workplace culture. Finally, workers may knowingly accept lower

[6] This phenomenon can occur even in the service industry, as demonstrated by Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta (2016). Still, "knowledge-intensive" firms are particularly fertile for this kind of identity-based control because workers are highly-skilled and because the nature and process of the product are highly ambiguous (Alvesson 2001).

wages, more uncertain work, or simply acquiesce to managerial requests more easily in exchange for these identity compensations.

A more specific type of identity wage arises from the intersection of capitalism with other systems of oppression such as patriarchy and white supremacy. The intersection of these systems allows capitalists to offer particularly potent identity wages to select groups of workers. These identity wages constitute a special type of identity reward in that they are expected or acknowledged aspects of a job, reinforce identities that signify greater worthiness or superiority in terms of respectability, morality, intelligence, physical prowess, or competence, even while conditioning workers to accept subordination within a capitalist system. For my participants, these wages derived from the culture of Fun Power. This culture allowed predominantly white and male game workers to enact and affirm their manhood, but proved a source of disruption, exclusion, and sometimes hostility to female workers.

Identity Wages and Gamer Identity

Within the games industry, owners of development companies are aware of the cachet that game work has for young "hardcore gamers" and use this to shape expectations about the work. For instance, Blizzard Entertainment, creator and owner of extremely successful game franchises including *World of Warcraft,* the *Diablo* series, and the *Starcraft* series, released a controversial recruitment video aimed at developers who "live and breathe" games (Walker and Williams 2014). The short video contains mostly male, mostly white, developers making statements such as, "Every component of our products is a labor of love." Another white

male worker says, “Everyone’s here for games. They’re here to make great games.” A white female developer informs potential employees that, “Everyone here wants to make an awesome game experience for everyone else just because we want to have that awesome game experience for ourselves.” Another white man compares working on games to “this fine art that you can contribute to yourself but that you also get to enjoy.” Later, a middle-aged white male worker reports that it is “very gratifying to make something that is shared and loved by millions of people around the world.”

These statements imply that working on games is a reward in itself. Just aspiring to do the job well in exchange for a wage is not enough. Instead, workers are expected to be passionate about the work for its own sake. This message is further reinforced, as Williams and Walker point out, by the lack of any discussion of wages, benefits, or other concrete compensations. Instead, Blizzard is explicitly offering the confirmation of a valued identity — identity wages — to prospective workers. They will be surrounded by other people who care about making “great games” that they then are able to play and enjoy, and, further, that millions of other gamers will play.

This kind of pitch is similar to recruitment pitches seen in U.S. armed services TV ads. For instance, one current army commercial asserts that “They didn’t join this team to become famous or to win championships. They joined because there was important work to be done and only some able to do it.” Later, the narrator tells the viewers that “You’ll find them where the lights don’t flash and the only contract they sign is with themselves and their country.” As with Blizzard’s recruitment pitch, potential army recruits are told that their reward will be reinforcement of a valued identity, rather than wealth or fame. The emphasis

is on doing work that not everyone can do and being rewarded through personal growth and service, associated with the identity of "soldier." The last line of the ad proclaims, "One day they may be asked what they did to make a difference in this world and they can respond: 'I became a soldier.'"

Recruiting tactics for game development studios like Blizzard are more similar to military recruitment pitches than they are to recruitment pitches for many other kinds of software development companies. While millions of people also use Microsoft Office, it is difficult to imagine Microsoft using similar recruiting tactics. Because their products do not tie into a subcultural identity, companies like Microsoft are less able to offer identity wages as part of their compensation package. In contrast, working at Blizzard will surround prospective developers with other gamers and give them status within gamer culture.

Taken alone, the Blizzard recruitment video could appear to simply engage in a type of identity regulation where prospective employees are socialized into the company, transmitting a set of values (creativity and passion about games) that the company embraces (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002). Opportunities to signify gamer identity, however, were explicitly built into the structure of the workplace and culture at Fun Power. Mike Ryan, the CEO of Fun Power and a white male in his late 30s, ensured payment of identity wages in several ways. For instance, the break room at Fun Power was equipped with a couch, several chairs and beanbags and a TV hooked up to several different game consoles. Workers regularly played video games like Super Smash Brothers (a fighting game allowing 2-4 players to battle each other using characters from popular games in the Nintendo franchise). This was played both during lunch and near the end of the work day. In addition, though Fun

Power initially developed casual games aimed at a middle-aged female audience (referred to derisively by developers as "Granny Games"), Mike made a point of reassuring his developers that the goal was to make "good" games — those for a less predominately female, younger audience more compatible with gamer culture, and later, making sure the developers had projects aimed at that audience. Mike emphasized this preference when talking about a publisher with whom he had a long-standing relationship:

> We got an e-mail from Slade saying that whole company is trying to move more from the conventional casual audience to a broader casual audience that includes women and men — which is great. A bigger audience means more money — and more fun to design. Of course, the first thing they've sent us back was another adventure, hidden object game. It's like, "I thought you were trying to get away from Granny Games!"

Mike sees these less-female coded games as not only more lucrative but also more appealing to design. These games, unlike the scorned Granny Games, offer more opportunities for workers to collect their identity wages through validating a gamer identity. Mike seemed incredulous that Gameco would opt not to pursue these higher-status games. Rather than making the kind of products that casual game publishers sought to market, Fun Power workers wanted to make innovative, high-status games:

> Rabidgamer has done a really good job of building their own IP [intellectual property] to the point where they can just be profitable off of that. I mean they can make the latest Furball and Lockbox [a popular game franchise] and make money off of that. Hopefully, someday we'll be able to do that, but right now we still have to worry about where funding is coming from.

One of the explicit goals at Fun Power was to become an independent developer — one that did not rely on funding from a publisher and one that made games similar to Rabidgamer's products. Their successful console game franchise included cartoonish violence consumed by a more male audience. Developing games like these would allow greater opportunities for validation of a hardcore gamer identity. Mike consistently stated this as the ultimate goal for the company. For instance, producing original intellectual property that would lead to independence was the logic underlying the 20 Percent Time policy that Fun Power implemented:

> Mike: Why don't you explain the idea behind 20 Percent Time?
> Darius: Ok, so — the idea is that since we end up making a lot of games for publishers, that we take 20% of our time and work on games that we're interested in making.

The policy allowed Fun Power workers to put time in on good games — games that appeal to a broader audience. In reality, Darius (a Black male producer in his late 20s) ran into difficulty regularly scheduling 20% time (though it did produce at least one game idea that was eventually released). Even though it frequently skipped and sometimes failed to generate enthusiasm from over-worked and underpaid developers, 20% time served to emphasize that Mike prioritized working on games the developers were interested in: those aimed at an audience who could validate their identities as gamers.

Most developers I spoke with had a prior investment in an identity as a gamer that influenced them to seek work in the games industry. As Brad, a white male "jack-of-all-trades" in his early 40s, said, "Well, we all go in [to the video game industry] because we

want to make the games we like, we want to play." Luke, a white male junior programmer in his mid-20s, expressed a similar sentiment in an interview:

> I think when I first started getting into PC gaming was in second grade with Wolfenstein [a series of games involving escaping from Nazi strongholds]…That's kind of where it started and then I played a bunch of PC console games up until college when I was at IU and not really sure what I wanted to major in. I was playing around with communications and all that and not really enjoying it or being very good at liberal arts so… And so then I just decided I'll try to get into the gaming industry. I decided well … I had been playing music for most of my life but I realized I didn't really feel like I fit in with the local musicians and I didn't really have the same passion to go write a whole bunch of songs and practice until the sun's up and record albums the way the musicians that I was hanging out with did, and I didn't really feel that I fit in totally with that crowd. I realized I knew more about videogames than anybody I knew, so that would probably be a good place to go. That's actually what led me into getting into computer science was not… I mean, I enjoyed playing with computers and I was good with them but wasn't really until I decided to get into games that I decided to change majors.

Luke's narrative of his path into the games industry mirrors Blizzard's recruitment pitch. He recounts feeling aimless until he discovered work for which he had sufficient passion to draw him into a career. He had been playing video games since early childhood. Despite long experience with music, he lacked sufficient passion to make a living at it. In contrast, his lifelong identification and expertise with games motivated him to study computer science, though merely being "good with computers" had not. He sought out the video games industry because it validated a valued identity.

This echoes a popular managerial ideology that has been increasingly embraced by creative and knowledge professionals: that of "do what you love" (Tokumitsu 2014). This ideology encourages workers to regard passion and interest as more important compensation than wages. While, on its face, this ideology could be seen as liberatory, in the context of alienated labor it serves to intensify exploitation by capitalists.

Marie, a game designer and writer (white female, early 30s), had a similar lifelong investment in games as an aspect of her identity. She was so invested in a particular adventure game that she worked on it as a project in her free time before entering the industry as a paid game developer.

> I happened to do a Web search for this old computer game series that I loved when I was a kid, called Trials of Honour. And I found a website for a group of fans who were making their own unofficial sequel because the last one in the series wasn't very… it wasn't very good. None of the people liked it. It was very different from all the others. And, like, the company had been bought by someone, then bought, bought and sold. And so it was never going to come back. So, we want to make our own game that is more satisfying. And I was like, "Oh, that sounds really cool." And it's kind of one of those things…when I was younger, yeah, I want to make games — sure. Kind of this little kid dream. So I applied to be a writer on the staff for that. And then that was all, since we didn't own the IP or anything. So it was unofficial, unpaid. Everyone's doing it in their spare time.

Despite not being paid for her work and knowing that the game could not be distributed for profit, Marie and the rest of her team were willing to devote years of their spare time to the game. Marie and a number of the developers I spoke to also talked about working on games in their free time, apart from the work they did at Fun Power or for other employers. For

instance, even after Scott, another programmer (white male, mid-20s), had left Fun Power, he and Ryan Neal, an artist (white male, late 20s), continued to meet on the weekends to develop a game they later released through the Apple App Store, though it failed to make them any significant profit. These developers so embraced the "do what you love" ideology that they were spending their free time creating industry products. In other words, these developers were paying themselves in identity wages alone.

For workers at game development firms, identity wages are part of the compensation package. Successful work in the games industry confirms that developers are experts on video games and, ideally, gives them status among other people who play games. For instance, when I asked Brad if he was particularly excited about his work on a current project, Who's for Dinner, he told me "I have fun with all the projects. I mean, I get to come to work and make games!" Though Brad had often mentioned frustration with publishers who did not pay on time or made what he thought of as unreasonable demands, producing these artifacts validated Brad's identity as a gamer, even when some of these games were for audiences that were not a part of this games subculture. For other Fun Power workers, the audience for games was more central to the confirmation of their identities as gamers and their satisfaction with their work.

> So I think one of the high points of the entire time at Fun Power was just a month ago, or a couple of weeks ago when we released Cog Mansion. One of my friends that I used to — he plays in a punk rock band that my band used to play with from Wilmington — and he was like, man I played your Cog Mansion and it was awesome. I miss the point-and-click adventure games, and it's like the most validation I've gotten from somebody I respect on our games in a long time, because

> none of my friends would ever want to play Castle Cleaners or Ice Cream Baron or anything like that. So it was really, really cool to finally hear somebody I can relate to say, "You made an awesome game and I played it start to finish."

Luke reaps greater identity wages when he is validated by other people who are more like him. For most developers, this means people who are younger, male, and who play games. Luke cites this as one of the most rewarding or notable points of his tenure at Fun Power. Luke's friend validates his identity as someone who is knowledgeable about games and produces "awesome" ones — an expert gamer. Most people who play games made by Fun Power are less able to offer this validation.

Luke's statement makes it clear that gamer identity is not equally available to people of all ages, genders, and races. For most of the time I observed at Fun Power, the developers were making games for a particular segment of the casual gaming market. As Brad, a developer who worked on both programming and art, told me, "Casual games are really played by a lot of middle-aged women. It's a huge demographic. So there are a lot of housewives ages 30-40 who play games like this." The developers often showed disdain for this audience, which they perceived as lazy or challenge-averse and overly focused on aesthetics. For instance, Mike Ryan, the CEO of Fun Power, told me this the first time I spoke with him about casual game development:

> For casual games, you don't want to make it too hard. You want to make sure you give them points or warm fuzzies for whatever they do. With hardcore gamers, they expect there to be to be a certain learning curve. Part of the fun is overcoming the challenge. For casual gamers, they have to be able to play the game for a while and then walk away.

Though Mike does not explicitly assign gender to either group, all his employees knew that Fun Power's audience at that point consisted mostly of middle-aged women. He characterizes these female, casual players as in need of emotional reassurance and hand-holding to keep their attention. Hardcore gamers play different games — the kinds typically played by developers themselves. These gamers embrace difficult situations and are willing to engage with a game for more time or more deeply. The focus is typically on conquering a challenging situation or opponent, rather than on aesthetics or emotional reassurance. This parallels conceptions of manhood. Men are supposed to be tough, able to control their emotions, and conquer or dominate others (Kimmel 1994; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). These masculine-coded characteristics are praiseworthy in the context of competitive, capitalist society (Crittenden 2010). Making a tough game for tough players can validate manhood, but weak players present no challenge.

Not surprisingly, then, casual gamers were regarded as avoiding challenge and being easily distracted by appearances. Darius and Luke had the following conversation about how their own preferences were not the best guide for developing a casual game:

> Darius: I mean, we want it to be challenging. That's why I play games. I want that sense of accomplishment if I have to try really hard to solve a puzzle and then I finally get it.
>
> Luke: I think maybe we went the wrong way with Steampunk Laboratory, though. I don't think that's what the people who play that really want.
>
> Darius <sighs>: Yeah — I think you might be right. I look at the games my aunt plays. Everything looks nice and clean, but it's pretty easy. It's repetitive <in resigned tone>.

The players for whom Fun Power designed games are not part of the same gamer subculture to which Luke and Darius belong. They play different games and for different reasons, and they differ in terms of gender and age. For instance, according to Nielsen figures, in 2013 HD console players (those who played on the high-definition, expensive PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360 consoles) were roughly 69% percent male, while players of first-person shooter (FPS) and sports games were even more male, 78% and 85%, respectively (Scimeca 2013). These types of games, the games more often played by developers, are male-centered and male-identified, as well as being male-dominated (Johnson 2005a). They involve dominating enemies, either with weapons or through the mock-battle of athletic competition. The developers knew their female players as lacking masculine-coded qualities such as determination and toughness. Not surprisingly, when Mike started the developers on a more mainstream, zombie-themed casual game, aimed at a broader audience, workers were far more interested in this game than in the other projects. As Matt, a programmer (white male, mid-20s) told me, other workers were avoiding work on other projects because "everyone wants to work on Who's for Dinner."

The audience for granny games could not validate developers' identities as gamers because these identities are tied up in manhood. Other men are typically the ones who validate manhood acts (Kimmel 1994). Some previous research has shown that women (as well as men of color and GLBTQ individuals) who play games frequently resist or are more hesitant to label themselves gamers than their male counterparts (Shaw 2011). Though some women do identify as gamers, they tend to be those who play "core" or "hardcore" console

games, rather than those who play less masculine-coded game content or genres (Scimeca 2013).

Identity Wages and Masculine Camaraderie

While the opportunity to be seen favorably as a man in the course of game development and the opportunity to be seen favorably as a game expert often overlapped, this was not always the case. The atmosphere of masculine camaraderie present at Fun Power laid the groundwork for workers to collect identity wages grounded in their identities as men. While the audience for video games has expanded (and diversified) considerably in the last ten years (Shaw 2010; 2011), gamer identity provides little social or cultural capital outside gamer culture. Manhood acts validate an identity with far more valuable stakes than those associated with gamer identity.

The workers at Fun Power had a friendly and casual relationship with one another, rooted in a male-identified and male-centered workplace culture (Johnson 2005). Joking about manhood-centered themes was common, as was socializing outside of work. For example, Luke's profile on a popular social networking site featured pictures of him partying with Ryan Neal. In another instance, Ryan told me that he and Scott met on the weekends to work on side projects of their own. Even the workers who did not socialize with one another outside of work talked about their weekends and joked about TV shows, comic books, sports, and video games. Workers at Fun Power usually did not stop goofing off when the boss entered the room. Mike often joined in the joking or play rather than reprimanding workers for being unproductive. For example, after a development meeting, I walked up behind Ryan,

who was discussing a website with Darius and Scott. I asked what they were looking at, and Ryan explained, "This guy took a different drug and did a different self-portrait every day." Ryan went through the portraits while Darius, Scott, and I made comments until Mike walked up:

> Mike: What's going on?
>
> Ryan: This guy did a different self-portrait on a different drug every day. This one's marijuana residue. This one's Ativan. This one's marijuana.
>
> Me: Seems like an awful lot of these are different kinds of marijuana.
>
> Scott: This guy just wanted an excuse to smoke pot.
>
> Mike laughs: Right.

I left shortly after this exchange, but Mike's presence did nothing to stop Ryan, Scott, or Darius from looking at the website or laughing about the drug-induced portraits the artist had drawn. In fact, Mike was curious about what they were looking at and laughed at their banter. This exchange, though not explicitly a site for manhood acts, was characteristic of the casual environment that enabled masculine camaraderie.

Masculine camaraderie, as evident at Fun Power and in other male-dominated environments, is distinct from other types of homosocial camaraderie. For instance, Petersen and Dressel (1982) document the homosocial camaraderie among heterosexual women who attend a male strip club. On the surface, this kind of camaraderie seems similar to masculine camaraderie in that it revolves around sexual joking and urging sexual daring. This homosocial camaraderie differs from masculine camaraderie in that it galvanizes individual

women to initiate flirtation, touching, and even objectifying men in ways that temporarily subvert gendered sexual norms for women. In contrast, masculine camaraderie serves to reinforce ideas about manhood that validate "man" as a valued identity of the participants.

Mike allowed, and even encouraged, a great deal of manhood-centered joking and play. For instance, workers fought Nerf gun battles with each other that sometimes included Mike. Though Nerf weapons use soft, foam darts, they are shot out of devices that are called weapons and designed to approximate guns. Nerf gun use provided an opportunity for Fun Power employees to engage in mock violence and contests of manhood disguised as play. The game that Fun Power employees sometimes played, Humans vs. Zombies, illustrates this. In this game, half the employees were humans and hid at the end of the long hallway that connected the office, opposite from the main (back) door. The rest of the employees stayed in the area just inside this door. The zombies tried to make it as far down the hallway as possible without being hit by a Nerf dart by the opposing human team in the front. The teams then switched places. This game allowed workers to enact mock battle, but in a playful manner in which workers could bond with one another. Similar to football and other sports that allow manhood acts, participants engaged in mock combat, albeit with less physical risk (Schwalbe 2008).

Mike also allowed his workers to play what I call "gay chicken." Guiffre and Williams (1994) argue that some behaviors that would technically qualify as workplace sexual harassment can be experienced as normal or pleasurable, depending on the source of the harassing behavior. Other scholars have shown that homophobic harassment is a

widespread type of joking and source of bonding for boys and men in various contexts (Kimmel 1994; Pascoe 2007; McCann, Plummer, and Minichiello 2010).

The workers at Fun Power engaged in a great deal of homophobic/homoerotic joking that they seemed to experience as an enjoyable part of the workday and that also served to reinforce their manhood. Gay chicken involves faux sexual advances between two men who are assumed to be straight. The assumption of heterosexuality is key to this kind of play, as is the assumption that both men actually find gay sexual activity unappealing or even disgusting. Participants made joking sexual advances, sometimes involving propositions or physical contact, until one of them refused to participate, presumably having reached his limit of disgust. Gay chicken could be won or lost. In the following excerpt, Mike, the CEO, took Darius' chair while he was out of the room:

> Mike comes in and sits down where Darius was sitting. Darius shakes his head.
>
> Mike: Ahh, you made it nice and warm.
>
> Darius hovers over Mike's knee as if to sit on it.
>
> Luke: Do it! Don't let him win!
>
> Darius: No - I can't do it. Mike's too creepy.
>
> Luke: I know - I couldn't do it either, man.
>
> Mike <in a deliberately creepy voice> What do you mean? <he laughs>.

Darius was not just letting Mike "win" his chair, he was also losing a contest of manhood. He signaled that he was too "creeped out" at the thought of engaging in a potentially homoerotic act, sitting on another man's lap, to sit on Mike's knee. On the other hand, men do not sit on

other men's laps. Women and children do, so sitting on another man's lap might signify submission or woman-like characteristics. Consequently, losing the contest due to homophobia — a "manly" trait — is less damaging to Darius' manhood than sitting on Mike's lap. Luke, despite urging him to sit on Mike's lap, consoles Darius, confirming that his choice is reasonable and that Luke would have made a similar one, faced with this manhood dilemma.

Although it was rare for Mike to join in the homophobic/homoerotic joking directly, he permitted and sometimes joined in this joking even during meetings. For example, in the exchange below, during a development meeting, there was discussion about moving desks around to accommodate a new employee:

> Mike: No — we could move Brad's desk over — and then move Ryan over closer to Luke.
>
> Luke: <puts his hand on Ryan's leg in a faux-possessive manner> We're already very close. <laughter>.
>
> Mark: Oh, god — you're going to make that corner of the office even MORE gay. <laughter>
>
> Luke: I don't know if that's possible. <slightly chagrined - puts head in hand> <more laughter>

Mike set the stage for this round of homoerotic/homophobic joking. This instance was less competitive and more of an instance where everyone was in on the joke. Even Mark, who sometimes seemed uncomfortable with this kind of joking, laughed and joked about the

office being "even more gay." This instance of gay chicken was an opportunity for bonding on the basis of this homophobic/homoerotic joking. The homoerotic joking affirms that all of the participants are heterosexual — and, therefore, manly. Desiring men is a womanly, and therefore inferior, characteristic (Kimmel 1994). Because the participants are willing to joke about homosexual relationships and show faux disgust and shame at the pretended relationship, paradoxically, they confirm that they are actually heterosexual men who are interested in women — not other men.

Another common form of joking and camaraderie involved beards — or lack thereof. Most of the men at Fun Power had beards at some time during my observations. This joking primarily revolved around Ryan who, by his own admission, could not grow a beard. On one occasion, Fun Power workers joked about Scott, one of the engineers, having shaved his beard:

> Mike: Sorry — all you guys without beards look alike to me.
>
> Mark: I don't know — I can tell the difference between Ryan and Alison.
>
> Mike: That's true.
>
> Ryan: See? It's ok not to have a beard.
>
> Luke: Yeah — if you're a woman.

This joke hinged on the idea that Ryan was less of a man because he could not grow a beard. Luke implied that he was more like a woman than a man — and, therefore, inferior. This allowed the other developers to signify manhood by comparison to Ryan. Mike not only

joined in but initiated this joking, creating an opportunity for most of the Fun Power workers to collect identity wages.

Fun Power meetings involved other instances of denigrating men by comparing them to women. On one occasion, Dillon, an artist (white male, mid-20s) with the company, sat next to the computer from which Max was virtually attending the meeting. Max could not hear very well and recruited Dillon to relay the messages:

> Dillon: OR DILLON CAN JUST TRANSLATE says John.
>
> Mike: Dillon is a pretty, pretty girl.
>
> Dillon: Dillon...<he stops, puts his head down and starts laughing, along with everyone else.> I'm just going to leave that one alone.

Mike jokingly insulted Dillon by comparing him to a girl in a situation where Dillon was supposed to repeat Mike's words. Dillon laughed in acknowledgment that this was not something he wanted to be and opted to “leave that one alone” rather than repeat it. Even though Dillon was compared to a girl, the intent was clearly not malicious and he was in on the joke to a large degree. The fundamental point of the joke is that Dillon is not a girl and that none of the developers were — which was tacitly reinforced as a good thing.

Mike allowed and facilitated an atmosphere where workers could collect identity wages by making jokes (including sexual ones) that would be inappropriate in many white-collar office environments. This environment reflected a male-centered and male-identified culture within the digital games industry as a whole (IGDA Developer Satisfaction Survey 2014; Walker and Williams 2014). Several developers made reference to enjoying this

atmosphere at Fun Power. For instance, Luke, whom I interviewed shortly before his departure for another job, told me that:

> Honestly, if I didn't get to sit back there working with the people that I do every day, I would've been gone a long time ago. That is what keeps most of us there. That and the culture. But, I mean, so many studios are downsizing in the industry that it is really hard to find good work. So yeah, that made it really hard. Confidentially, Ryan was the best thing about working there. I mean honestly I just loved working with him and Scott. They were really awesome.

Similarly, Scott, who also left within the second year of my observations, said:

> I do kind of miss working with — working with the guys. So there are advantages and disadvantages to working alone when I am not distracted near so much. But I'm also not entertained near so much. Um, the people in the coffee shops that I work at, they don't share our jokes.

Both of these developers mentioned their co-workers and the "jokes" or the "atmosphere" immediately when I asked what they would miss about working at Fun Power. Both men were a large part of the sexualized and masculine joking during their time at the company. Interestingly, neither went from Fun Power to a game company environment where they were interacting face-to-face with other developers. Scott was at a game company, but he was contracting and therefore did most of his work, as he alludes, at coffee shops on a laptop. Luke was moving to another tech company but it was not a game development job and he could not count on the same kind of atmosphere.

As with Roy's (1959) "banana time," Nerf battles and jokes about beards and homosexuality transformed the workplace into a place of play — and a place where consent

was constructed. The power relations at Fun Power were obscured — and compensated for — through the identity wages that workers gained through the joking and games. These identity wages derived from workers' ability to bond with one another while enacting manhood, and from a work culture and process that allowed validation of a gamer identity. Both at Fun Power and in the industry as a whole, these identity wages were not equally available to all developers.

Female Developers, Exclusion, and the Other Wage Gap

Males are not the only ones who identify as gamers and, further, they are not the only ones who can enact manhood (Pascoe 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2014). While the female developers I spoke to were not frozen out of collecting identity wages, they faced more resistance. In addition, what served as opportunities for male developers to collect identity wages, instead functioned as barriers for to female developers.

Sarah Brandon, a young white woman, was hired as a PR and marketing person at Fun Power in January of 2012. Joking on masculine and sexualized themes still occurred after her arrival, but was muted and less frequent than in the past. While the departure of Luke, Ryan, and Scott contributed to the reduced frequency of gay chicken in particular, Sarah's arrival had an additional dampening effect on the sexual joking. Darius confided that workers felt less comfortable making sexual jokes in front of Sarah, despite her insistence that they go ahead anyway.

> Darius: Well, you don't make as many dick jokes with a woman around. I mean, it's not like you're trying not to — you just don't. She gets mad if we don't make them around her. But you just can't make as many dick jokes around a girl.

While telling "dick jokes" served as an opportunity for the male developers to enact manhood, Darius implied that they felt less comfortable doing this kind of joking around a woman. Sarah could not affirm the manhood of other developers and was not fully eligible to enact manhood, despite resisting emphasized femininity and trying to fit in as "one of the guys."

Sarah generally wore jeans and t-shirts at work, not dissimilar to the outfits worn by the male developers. At one point, she remarked to me that she was "not that girly" and preferred not to wear skirts or makeup. All of these strategies seem consistent with trading power for patronage by disdaining emphasized femininity and seeking acceptance as "one of the guys" (Pascoe 2007; Schwalbe et al. 2000). Despite these strategies, the male developers still did not regard her as a peer. Sarah told me about another married male employee, Daniel, who began giving her a great deal of unwanted attention. Even after she asked him to leave her alone, he later texted her say that he had moved into her apartment complex. Mike, the CEO, told Sarah that he would fire Damon "if she wanted him to," but he kept his job (though Sarah made it clear that she wanted absolutely no further contact with him, a demand that he apparently respected). Darius, the producer, was also alerted to the situation so he could take over communications with Damon.

> Part of the conversation I had at one of my last days at Fun Power was I told Darius — I mean, I could talk to Darius about the Damon situation, and I told him, "I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna work with Damon ever again. You have to take over now." Uh, but I told him, and then I came into work late one day and he asked what I'd done the day before and I was like, "Yeah, I was up really late playing Counterstrike." And he's like. He pulled me aside and he's like, "What are you thinking?" And I was like,

> "What?" He's like, "You bring this on yourself, as a girl gamer. Girls don't play Counterstrike. You have only yourself to blame for attracting nerd attention." I mean, he was joking, but it was also like he was kind of serious. Like, I ask for trouble by advertising these things.

Darius is joking, but implies that Sarah brings unwanted attention from male co-workers on herself by playing a game that "girls don't play." Sarah even accepts this assessment, saying, "I ask for trouble by advertising these things." Darius is constructing hardcore games like Counterstrike, a first-person shooter (FPS) in which the players either participate in or observe a battle between terrorists and counter-terrorists, as a male space. He also implicitly constructs women like Sarah, who enter that space, as open to harassment. When "girls" or women play hardcore games, they invite harassment from the men who rightfully inhabit those spaces. They are not potential friends, comrades or fellow gamers, but sexual targets or encroachers.

The recent GamerGate scandal, in which a number of female game developers, gamers, and critics faced coordinated campaigns of harassment, including rape threats and death threats, reveals a similar attitude among many who play hardcore games (e.g., Hathaway 2014; Allaway 2014). This reflects the same victim-blaming rape culture ideologies that underlie street harassment and sexual assault (Brooks Gardner 1995; Scully and Marolla 1984).

Sarah was not the only female developer I spoke with whose efforts to fit in resulted in qualified and limited acceptance. For instance, Tiffany, a white female artist in her early

30s, had previously worked at several major game companies. She adopted the following strategy when proposing game ideas to other (overwhelmingly male) developers:

> Tiffany: So, I would say more — to give you an example, when I would propose a design idea, something that I took to doing was kind of like making the idea more masculine than it originally came to me. Because that would almost always get a better reception.
>
> A: Huh. Can you give me an example of — like, how would you make an idea more masculine?
>
> Tiffany: Well, put lasers all over it <both laugh>. Or like — well, a lot of times it can be the same idea but you just dress it up to sound more action-y and like more — more hardcore…like, you know, if I was pitching — if I was pitching like a gun, I wouldn't be like "Here's what it would look like. Here's what it would do." I would be like, <lower, more masculine voice> "You go into this room, and then you kill some dude." <both laugh pretty hard>. That is an extreme — that is a farcical example but that is the kind of filter that I used to run ideas through, and I swear to god, they got better results.

Immersed in a male-dominated, male-centered, and male-identified culture (Johnson 2005b), Tiffany knew that an idea for a gun could not merely discuss how it will shoot, but had to emphasize its potential to "kill some dude." To gain respect for her ideas, Tiffany made a bid for identity wages from the other developers through her tone and language. While a female body and self-presentation may prevent women from the full membership benefits of manhood, enacting manhood and being accepted as "one of the guys" offers repressive satisfactions to women who adopt this strategy (Pascoe 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Tiffany finds translating her ideas into a masculine tone to be the most efficient path to productivity and acceptance. Despite this recognition and the decision to try to cash in on identity wages to some extent, Tiffany could not be fully included in the culture of masculine camaraderie:

> Tiffany: …The thing that's really tough is that when there are big group outings, everyone is there with their wives and girlfriends and you're there with your husband. And, what happens is not that you hang out with the dudes and your husband hangs out with the wives.
>
> A: Right.
>
> Tiffany: What happens is that you hang out with the wives and your husband hangs out with the dudes. I mean, the other problem is that I have had some really, really close relationships at some of these studios. I mean, people that I was just wonderful friends with. And then you leave the company and it's much harder to continue a cross-gender friendship when you both have significant others.

Married men and women may feel constrained in developing more intimate cross-gender friendships than single people (Werking 1997). Cultural beliefs about men's "uncontrollable" sexuality (Scully and Marolla 1984) and the impossibility or difficulty of men and women having non-romantic friendships may constrain or prevent such friendships, particularly for married people (Lenton and Webber 2006). Tiffany clearly experienced these beliefs as a barrier to interacting with male developers outside of work, or even at work gatherings, in the same way that her male co-workers or men at Fun Power interacted with each other. In other words, Tiffany had fewer opportunities to develop relationships that would support gamer or identity wages. Camaraderie could extend only so far for Tiffany and other female game

developers, like Madison, a female game designer in her late 30s who was a team lead at Fenrir, a development studio working on an MMO (massively multi-player online game).

Madison started out as a rank-and-file developer and was later promoted to a team lead position. While Mike was able to retain friendly and casual relationships with his workers while still seeing results, Madison had to choose between being an effective manager and maintaining her existing friendships with other (mostly male) developers:

> I've had to stop hanging out with my co-workers outside of work. I really don't do that much socially anymore. And they all think it was me who changed — one day I was their friend and the next I had turned mean and sold out to corporate— but really it's them. I had one friend I really liked on my team. We would watch horror movies together and he would scream and try to crawl into my lap. And I had to stop hanging out with him — that was really hard. But it was because he would try to get away with stuff at work because we were friends. They think I'm being mean, but I'm just trying to do my job. It's like "You guys did this."

Before becoming a manager, Madison had work friendships in the past where she joked and talked about gaming at work, providing opportunities for the collection of identity wages. After her promotion, she had to choose between the camaraderie that allowed her to claim identity wages and maintaining her authority as a manager. She faced the same double bind as many women who enter management roles (Kanter 1977; Johnson 2005b). If Madison acted like a friend, she was seen as a pushover, but to counteract this she had to become someone who, as she later related, was seen as "too angry" to send to conventions and public events. Whereas yelling at subordinates who perform poorly might be seen both as normal and as an accepted form of enacting manhood for a male developer, Madison was labeled as

“mean” and kept away from conventions for the same behavior. While she told me that she got results and that her team was “the best,” she was only provisionally able to collect the identity wages that might have been available to a male team lead.

One exception to these accounts was Marie. As previously described, Marie had a role in the establishment of Basilisk and Griffin, the company she worked for, and its movement from a voluntary project to a business. Marie still cited sexism as a problem in the industry, but had not directly encountered sexism in her work:

> Marie: Um, I guess sexism. I suppose I've heard about that kinda stuff more than experienced it myself. Um, like, I'm sure you probably know about the whole One Reason Why thing [on Twitter]…Which was a lot of interesting stuff to read and some things that I'd read before, heard before…And thankfully that thing…I've never experienced any particular kind of sexist attitudes or prejudices or anything myself. Which I'm glad for.
>
> A: Yeah, that's great.
>
> Marie: I take that as a positive sign that, you know, these things are getting less and less — um, you know — I've certainly heard that and it's always prevalent enough to be concerning.

Marie helped shape the culture of her company from its inception. She also confided to me that while there were more men than women at her company, they had more women than usual. The role of Marie and other women in shaping the culture and the larger-than-usual share of women may have made it impractical to build opportunities for identity wages into the company culture.

As a number of researchers have suggested, having more women in an establishment contributes to a less sexist and more egalitarian gender regime (Blau 1974, 1977; Kanter 1977; Acker 2006). Also, Marie and other women working at Basilisk and Griffin had spent years working on *Honour's Shadow* (their fan follow-up to the *Trials of Honour* series), which established their dedication to games and likely cemented their status as gamers alongside the men who worked on the project. Notably, Marie had an optimistic attitude toward sexism in the industry and thought it might be diminishing — a sentiment I did not hear from any of the other developers I spoke to, male or female. In other words, it is possible that as women enter development studios in greater numbers, identity wages may become less tied to images of a male developer.

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to show how identity wages function as compensation for game development jobs that often feature long hours, high uncertainty, and lower pay than elsewhere in the tech sector. Many (and possibly most) video game developers are engaged with the gamer subculture or identify as gamers prior to entering the industry. Games and game culture are often salient to developers' identities both before and after they begin working in the industry. In addition, the industry is not only male-dominated, but features a largely male-centered and male-identified set of products and cultures. Opportunities to enact manhood represent another set of compensations for most workers in the industry.

While both male and female developers had some opportunity to collect identity wages as gamers, they were less available to most of the women I spoke with. "Gamer" is not a gender-neutral identity, and numerous features of the culture at Fun Power and other companies made it more difficult for women than men to be seen as enthusiasts for and experts at games (Shaw 2010; 2011). Further, though females can enact manhood, they face greater barriers to being affirmed for enacting masculine behaviors or traits (including a risk of discrediting themselves) (Pascoe 2007; Schwalbe 2014). While the validation of a privileged and culturally prized identity through joking and play compensates male developers for other deficiencies of their working conditions, the culture of male camaraderie not only fails to offer similar opportunities to female game developers, but actually erects barriers to their inclusion.

While a number of scholars have written about the role of identity work in management (e.g., Brower and Abolafia 1997; Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Anteby 2008; Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas 2008), few have shown how negotiations over valued identities in the workplace help reproduce capitalist organizational regimes. Du Bois ([1935] 1995) noted that working-class whites were not paid much, but received a psychological wage in the form of confirmation by white elites and a white supremacist society that they were better than their Black economic counterparts, by virtue of their whiteness. Schwalbe, McTague and Parrotta (2016) demonstrate that workers at an organic grocery store were moved to unionize and resist wage inequities and other issues primarily *because* identity rewards were withdrawn. I seek to extend these contributions by showing how consent bargains simultaneously reproduce a patriarchal gender regime and a capitalist organizational

regime. I have also tried to show how oppressed workers are excluded by these same negotiations that offer identity compensations to their privileged co-workers. These negotiations are especially consequential in the context of the current, neoliberal organization of jobs and work, in which material compensations such as stable, high wages, work-life balance, and job security increasingly vanish and repressive satisfactions and enticements, such as the validation of valued identities, become more central to attracting and retaining skilled workers.

The choice to rely on identity wages, rather than monetary ones, is likely to exacerbate segregation within organizations and professions for two reasons. First, it fails to offer or offers lesser compensations to oppressed workers because identity wages become tied to an image of a member of the profession that is not gender- (or race- or sexuality-) neutral. For instance, mostly female, casual gamers who value aesthetics and ease over challenging game play are derided, while developers openly identify more with gamers who prefer difficult, time intensive games. Second, workplace cultures that create opportunities for privileged workers to gain identity wages reflect these gendered identities and therefore further exclude marginalized workers. As related above, developers elicited identity rewards from masculine camaraderie, including sexual joking that they curtailed around female co-workers. In addition, female developers felt constrained in participating in this camaraderie because they felt less able to have friendships outside of work with married, male co-workers.

In this chapter, I have laid out the negotiation of identity wages as part of a capitalist control regime in which workers consent to their own exploitation in exchange for

opportunities to symbolically claim their patriarchal dividend (Connell 2002). Reliance on these identity wages in lieu of higher monetary compensation creates resistance to diversity among both employers and workers. In addition, identity wages paid out through masculine camaraderie create barriers to full participation and acceptance by female developers.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the decision to depart or stay at Fun Power and other companies when workers are being underpaid, either in identity wages or monetary wages. My analysis will focus on gendered patterns that emerged in the explanations workers gave for voluntarily leaving Fun Power (or other game development studios). All developers who stayed at Fun Power or had not/did not plan to switch job generally emphasized the opportunities for subcultural identity wages that were not present in previous jobs. In other words, decisions to stay in or leave game development jobs generally reinforced the validity of identity wages as compensation and continued to reproduce patriarchal and capitalist expectations for workers.

CHAPTER 3

ACCOUNTING FOR STAYING OR GOING

As established in the previous chapter, the vast majority of game developers I encountered identified with gaming and game developer subculture. At the same time, switching jobs within the industry was common (all but four of those I spoke to had held at least one other developer job in the past). In addition, four Fun Power developers left for other industry jobs during my observations while another three left the industry entirely. Given their investment in developer subculture, developers needed to fashion accounts to justify or excuse their departure. When developers gave accounts about their departure from companies or the industry as a whole, gendered patterns emerged in their accounts. This chapter examines these accounts, their sociological roots, and their implications.

Accounts are excuses or justifications one might offer to mitigate the negative consequences of some potentially discrediting action (Scott and Lyman 1968). In 1997, Terri Orbuch called on sociologists to focus on accounts that occur during points of transitions, such as religious conversion, switching college majors, or joining or leaving a subculture and on how statuses like gender and race might affect these accounts. While scholars have examined how gender shapes accounts in areas like crime desistance (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph 2002), gender transition (Mason-Schrock 1996), and job loss (Garrett-Peters 2009), little research has focused on gendered accounts for switching jobs and careers. While frequently switching jobs among highly skilled professionals has become normalized in the context of modern, neoliberal economic arrangements (Vallas 2012; Williams, Miller, and

Kilanski 2012; Williams 2013), voluntarily leaving a highly valued job still requires an account.

Because of the high value U.S. culture places on *having* a job, *leaving* a job requires an account. Such accounts are used to allay the concerns of friends, family members, and future employers. Developers who leave their jobs must give accounts that not only justify leaving any job, but highly-sought-after development jobs. While women have made inroads into highly-skilled jobs and working is normative for middle-class and educated women (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012), the need to account for leaving desirable jobs is still not symmetrical for men and women (Cooper 2000; Hochschild 2001; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015).

Further, developers who leave jobs often want to stay connected to the gaming world, and thus must also give accounts that make sense to other members of gaming subculture, a subculture that is identified primarily with straight, white men (Shaw 2011). As Scott and Lyman argue, effective accounts must be formulated in the proper idiom—meaning that they must draw on the proper cultural understandings and be put in a form that suits the account-giver, the audience, and the situation. In the case of game developers leaving jobs, these accounts are profoundly entwined with gendered expectations of both a general audience and of members of gamer subculture.

All accounts encompass the work of creating and signifying social identities, either of individuals or of groups (Scott and Lyman 1968; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). While identity work concerns how a particular individual tries to shape images of him- or herself, collective identity work focuses on the way groups create and regulate meanings attached to

and ways of signifying membership in a particular group. Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) identify four sub-processes through which collective identity work is accomplished: defining, coding, affirming, and policing. Defining involves creating an identity attached to a particular group or identity or managing an existing identity – such as the creation of Side B to refer to GLBTQ Christians who believe they must be celibate to appropriately conform with their beliefs (Creek 2013). Coding involves specifying acceptable ways of performing or signifying membership in the group. For instance, the successful performance of self-presentations, inclusion of appropriate lyrical content, and use of accepted musical styles might lead fans and critics to categorize a particular recording artist as "doom metal" as opposed to "black metal." Affirming involves the creation of opportunities for group members to validate their identities as group members – such as a music festival, a chat room, or a work meeting. Finally, policing involves regulating who is able to claim a particular identity. Someone who claims the identity of "vegan" but eats a cheeseburger will likely have their identity called into question by others who witness this act. If a person who claims a particular identity violates an important identity code, they may be called upon to give an account.

Often, accounts are given as part of collective identity work to challenge negative conceptions outsiders may have of a group to which the account-giver belongs (e.g., Ezzell 2009; Creek 2013). In contrast, exit accounts from a group or organization typically involve people making sense of their exchange of one identity for another (e.g., Mason-Schrock 1996; Davidman and Greil 2007; Garrett-Peters 2009). My research examines a case where exit accounts are both a form of collective identity work and a moment where the developers

I spoke with affirmed (rather than disowned) their subcultural identities. In doing so, game developers implicitly reinforced their gender identities and patriarchal assumptions embedded in the definition of "game developer" (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). In doing so, I respond to Orbuch's (1997) call to pay attention to the importance of transitional periods where account-making may be intensified and to the importance of statuses like gender in shaping these accounts.

I begin by discussing the subculture of game development, showing how this subculture provided acceptable vocabularies of motive (Mills 1940) that developers used to fashion exit accounts. I also consider Fun Power's culture as a source of vocabularies of motive and suggest that organizational culture also shaped possible accounts. In addition, I discuss how both organizational and subcultural vocabularies of motive arose out of collective identity work by game developers. I then explore how male and female developers gave different kinds of accounts that tied into both developer identities and gendered expectations. I find that men's accounts for leaving can be understood as manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2014). In contrast, female developers, though also capable of and willing to engage in manhood acts in certain aspects of their work, do not give such accounts for leaving industry jobs. My analysis also demonstrates that both women's and men's accounts for leaving developer jobs help construct and reinforce collective notions of what it means to be a game developer (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Finally, I discuss how this examination of accounts can give us sociological insight into the reproduction of inequality in organizations.

CONTEXTUAL RESOURCES FOR FASHIONING EXIT ACCOUNTS

Mills (1940) used the term "vocabularies of motive" to refer to the ways of accounting for action that are widely understood and routinely used in a particular social world. In U.S. culture, to account for leaving a job by saying that one has found another job that offers better pay and benefits is to cite a well-understood and acceptable motive for this action. In addition to broad cultural norms, the norms and practices of specific industries can be invoked to fashion acceptable accounts. In cases where an industry encompasses or overlaps with a subculture, industry norms contain ideas about what it means to be a member of the subculture and about who belongs. This was the case with game developers. Industry-wide norms and practices were resources for formulating exit accounts.

Like other tech workers, game developers are encouraged to show interest in creating and playing games outside of work (Kleif and Faulkner 2003). Beyond that, those seeking jobs in the games industry are encouraged to use their own time to develop demo games, art, or software — proving they can create games in order to be hired to make games. For instance, during a panel discussion at a local game development conference, would-be developers were repeatedly told the value of mods (modifying existing games in interesting or substantial ways) and game demos, created in their own time. As one panelist told those who didn't have industry experience: "It's viable to do pro-bono work, and do mods. Those can be your demos. I can't stress enough how valuable mods are. Internships are also fantastic." Statements like this imply jobs in the games industry are so desirable that applicants should be willing to do work for free in order to obtain paid work. In this

environment, it seems sensible for a worker to offer "love for the job" as an account for staying in a job where wages are being un-paid or underpaid.

Part of the implicit justification for doing work for free is that breaking into the industry may be a calculated risk. Tech startup culture has inculcated workers with the notion that they should gamble on lower salaries in exchange for partial ownership and the chance to profit from rapid growth and great success. Incredible (and vanishingly rare) successes such as Angry Birds are held up to independent game developers as real possibilities. While this Do What You Love (DWYL) ideology elides and reinforces class divisions, it also contains notions of a historical and cultural notion of manhood (Joseph 2013; Schwalbe 2014). Under this neoliberal idea of manhood, men act as clever, self-interested agents who make decisions to maximize their own career goals. Under DWYL, individual workers are exhorted to value intrinsic satisfaction over wages — while still selling their labor for a wage. Workers can use readily available language that recalls these notions of manhood and the need to make rational calculations as an account for leaving a job where wages are unpaid.

The games industry has drawn criticism for demanding long hours and mandating "crunch time" to meet deadlines. In 2004, an anonymous blog called EA Spouse outed mandatory 85-hour work weeks without extra pay or compensatory time off, ultimately leading to a $15 million legal settlement on behalf of EA employees. In 2008, Mike Capps, the President of Epic Games drew fire for saying that the 60-hour work week should be an industry norm and that he wouldn't hire anyone who could not work those hours. A 2013 survey of developers found that close to 70% reported working on crunch-time schedules for

periods of a month to a year. Given these industry practices, an account that cited excessive work hours as a reason for leaving would make a great deal of sense.

On the other hand, the visibility of the EA Spouse blog represents the presence of an alternative narrative that suggests long hours and mandatory crunch time are neither necessary nor acceptable. For instance, following Mike Capps' controversial remarks, the International Game Developer's Association (IGDA) released a press release stating that the organization:

> believes unequivocally that enabling your employees to create for themselves a high quality of life is a good business practice, and there are direct, negative consequences to ignoring your employees' quality of life. But work/life balance also goes far beyond the number of hours worked. Quality of life also varies significantly according to the individual.

This official statement by a professional organization supplies an alternative to the message that game developers should be constantly available to their companies and willing to work long hours. Jason Della Rocca, the former executive director of the IGDA, made a less equivocal statement about the problems with crunch and long hours during a presentation:

> Managers assume that everyone working 40 hours a week — not many do that, but they assume that. So when you assume they do steady work at 40 hours, if they get this much done at 40 hours a week, if we crack the whip and require more hours, have them work overtime…managers assume this is this linear function. If developers work longer hours, they'll produce more. That's not true. There's a threshold point where developers will start making mistakes. If you're not sleeping enough, your immune system gets weak. If you have them work over a certain amount of time, productivity remains back at 40 hours a week. In dire cases, productivity during

> crunch is way below what the team was producing at 40 hours. You get negative productivity. People are causing more problems than they're solving.

While Della Rocca's criticisms focus on the business problems entailed by making developers work long hours, they provide a different avenue for resisting or attacking the demand for crunch periods and mandatory overtime at many studios. Given competing narratives about hours, some developers might give accounts for leaving or switching jobs that emphasize the family and productivity problems posed by required crunch time.

Other aspects of gamer culture can be drawn upon to formulate exit accounts. There are, for example, sexist aspects of gamer culture that can be invoked to make exiting seem eminently sensible for women. This sexism was evident during the GamerGate scandal, in which a number of female game developers, gamers, and critics faced coordinated campaigns of harassment, including rape threats and death threats. The way rape itself is treated in gamer culture further reflects the sexist climate. For instance, the 2013 release from Tomb Raider's developers, Crystal Dynamics, featured an attempted rape of protagonist Lara Croft. The president of the company made several controversial statements attempting to justify this choice. For instance: "The ability to see her as a human is even more enticing to me than the more sexualized version of yesteryear. She literally goes from zero to hero... we're sort of building her up and just when she gets confident, we break her down again." This statement casually equates rape with a character-building exercise. Here again, to cite objections to rampant sexism as a reason for exiting the gaming industry would make perfect sense.

In addition to the culture of the gaming industry, Fun Power's organization culture provided further resources for fashioning exit accounts. For example, because publishers

held the purse-strings and often saw things differently than developers, disagreement often arose about whether a milestone had been fulfilled. This often delayed payment and was one cause of the underpayment of salaries discussed below. Mike and other Fun Power staff used a variety of negotiation strategies to try to avoid disagreement about milestones, which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter.

Fun Power, like many other small, tech startups, lacked formal policies to govern matters like vacation time, family leave, and sexual harassment. Past research has shown that formal policies are associated with better outcomes for marginalized populations in the workplace (Anderson and Tomaskovic-Devey 1995). At Fun Power, the lack of formal policies hampered workers' ability to ask for family leave and report harassment. Consequently, workers could cite lack of formal recourse for parental leave or sexual harassment by co-workers in their accounts for leaving the company.

Fun Power's economic precariousness was another feature of the organization that could be cited to account for leaving. Like many new startups, Fun Power was not immediately profitable. Unlike some startups, it also lacked backing by venture capitalists who could provide an operating cushion. Consequently, the company experienced a long period during which wages were either reduced or not paid. Given that members of Fun Power's educated workforce expected to get paid for their work, and paid at the salary agreed upon, to cite a lack of regular pay as a reason for leaving was an understandable and honorable account, though, as I will suggest later, things were more complicated than this, especially for men.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Fun Power also had a culture of masculine camaraderie. The developers at Fun Power were almost exclusively men and often had friendships that extended beyond the bounds of the workplace. At work, joking about beards, sexuality, and bodily functions was a common form of bonding, even in development meetings. Many of the desks sported Nerf weapons and Nerf battles, as well as gaming in the breakroom during lunch, were frequent occurrences. Given that the company's slogan emphasized being "powered by fun,"[7] those who chose to stay at Fun Power could reasonably cite this cultural environment and the opportunities for identity wages as reasons for staying in the job, despite underpayment of wages.

What I have suggested here is that features of the industry culture and the culture of the organization could be cited to fashion sensible, acceptable exit accounts. Fun Power's dire economic straits could also be cited to account for leaving. Context thus provided resources for fashioning accounts in an appropriate idiom, as I will show below. My analysis also shows that the accounts people gave for leaving were tied to their gender identities and their identities as gamers and developers. Women and men tended to give different kinds of exit accounts. In the next section, I describe this gendered pattern of accounting and offer an interpretation of men's accounts as elements of manhood acts.

[7] The slogan is altered to protect confidentiality but preserves the meaning of the original.

GENDER PATTERNS IN EXIT ACCOUNTS

Men's Accounts

Like many new businesses, Fun Power was not immediately profitable. Unlike some tech startups where venture capital allows for this lack of profitability, Fun Power appeared to have a relatively thin cushion. Within the first year of my observations, Mike became unable to make payroll – resulting in either paychecks below listed salary or an absence of pay at all — a state of affairs that lasted for around 12 months. All six men who left Fun Power voluntarily[8] mentioned unpaid wages as a primary reason for leaving, but did not frame this problem in purely financial terms. The men, especially, gave accounts that generally conformed to and reinforced an image of male professional workers as tough, independent entrepreneurs who were willing to take risks and make difficult decisions in order to control the trajectories of their careers. Male developers were defining themselves in ways they knew would be broadly accepted by other members of the industry because they knew the codes and how to appropriately signify class and manhood as they pertained to developers (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Unpaid wages were tied to at least one of the following three justifications for departure: 1) leaving to maintain financial independence; 2) leaving to assert economic agency; and 3) leaving to preserve or re-attain breadwinner status.

[8] The sixth man who left Fun Power during my observations also left the country. Though he initially agreed to be interviewed, I was unable to find a mutually agreeable time to interview him before his departure.

Leaving to maintain financial independence

Though being paid less than one's salary – or not being paid – seems like sufficient reason for quitting a job, the neo-liberal values that underlie the "Do What You Love" (DWYL) ideology and startup culture undermine this expectation[9] (Cohen 2011; Tokumitsu 2014). As mentioned above, these ideologies were embraced and encoded into the collective identity of "developer." While this included the idea that developers should be willing to take entrepreneurial risks, this conflicted with another identity that many sought to embrace. Specifically, it conflicted with the image of men as breadwinners – another image present in both games industry culture and Fun Power's organizational culture (Joseph 2013; Schwalbe 2014). Signifying manhood for working age American men requires financial independence in a way that signifying womanhood does not. While it is uncontroversial for women of working age to leave the workforce or take time off work for family, the same is not true for men (Cooper 2000; Hochschild 2001; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015).

Consistent with these contradictory expectations, all of the game developers who left Fun Power for other jobs felt the need to justify their departure as a result of rational calculation. All of them not only mentioned unpaid wages, but emphasized the situation as a threat to their financial independence. For instance, Scott, a former engineer, explained his departure this way:

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[9] Startup employees are often hired for lower salaries than they would normally be paid and may join with the awareness that their pay will be unstable, but that they will receive shares of the company or other perks in exchange (Cohen 2011).

A: What led you to the decision to leave Fun Power?

Scott: [laughter] Um, you may be aware of this. I don't know how aware you are, but I'm basically owed quite a lot of money.

A: I've - I've heard a little bit.

Scott: Yeah. It's…[pause]

A: Confidentially, people have told me a lot of that.

Scott: It's pretty grim. Um. <pause]>My bank account was dwindling. I needed to build it back up. I couldn't stay there any longer. I liked working with the guys and the projects were fun, but I had bills. I need to feed myself. This fancy Japanese food doesn't come cheap.

Scott goes beyond explaining that he was owed back wages. He justifies his departure by establishing that he was in danger of being unable to pay for basic necessities. Scott emphasizes that he was still enjoying the projects and the people, consistent with his identity as a game developer. Despite this, ultimately, he could not suffer the ongoing threat to his financial independence.

The only woman who worked at Fun Power during my observations faced similar conditions, but never mentioned unpaid wages as an impetus for leaving. Manhood requires independence from the control or generosity of others (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Johnson 2005a). Being unable to support oneself, as Scott was, is inconsistent with manhood in late capitalist society. Male developers gave accounts that emphasized their need to be financially independent and in control, as with Luke's explanation of his decision to leave Fun Power:

> Luke: So… I mean this [unpaid wages] is 90% of the reason I'm leaving. It's just that I realize that I don't think I'm ever going to see that money again and there's somebody in San Francisco that's going to pay me double what I make now.
>
> A: So the frustration is partly financial?
>
> Luke: Oh yeah, yeah. Ryan said, "Mike owes me a car." I mean that's pretty much everybody in the company is owed that level of debt.
>
> A: You're going to have a sweet car.
>
> Luke: Yeah, you know, 15 grand, a pretty good car. So… yeah. It's depressing…

Luke emphasizes that he is owed so much money that he could purchase a "pretty good car." Being paid under his salary has potentially deprived him from buying what is both a status symbol and a necessity in late American capitalist society. Being denied this promised spending power is not just inconvenient, but depressing.

Leaving to assert economic agency

While the male Fun Power developers I spoke to cited a threat to financial independence from reduced or missing wages as reason to leave, another theme involved asserting economic agency. For instance, as well as missing wages, Luke emphasizes the lack of a profit-sharing scheme or any action towards such a scheme in his decision to depart:

> Luke: I would say both small start-ups and the gaming industry [have financial instability], so we kind of have a double whammy but what most small companies do is they also get equity. They say you can have a fraction of a percentage of the company in case it gets sold or acquired and what happened here was with Mike when he founded the company it had Radius as the founding partner and basically they own 50% of the company. So Mike is actually completely unable to issue equity

to anybody because he would then lose control of his stake so his hands are tied. All he can say is, hey I'll make it up to you someday. Sorry you're missing payroll again.…[Mike] says we're going to have profit sharing and all that but it remains to be seen. We've never had profits. We've always had deficits. I kind of talked to him about… I thought it was affecting morale. Maybe more projecting my own feelings. I phrased as, you know, I think everybody is having some morale issues due to this. Later I kind of realized I was looking for jobs. No I was probably talking about myself subconsciously there. But I was just like, you know, you have to offer some kind of concrete plan for how people are going to do profit-sharing. If you can't do equity, ok but lay out in concrete terms what the profit sharing is going to look like because people have to have something that they can actually get something on paper or are you just saying we're going to share profits?

A: So what kind of a response did you get when you brought that up?

Luke: Honestly I felt like I was not necessarily getting blown off, although it was a little like that. I mean it just… We had the talk. He acknowledged my concerns and then nothing happened. So at that point I was like, it sounds like my voice isn't being heard. I don't feel like things are going well. I know other people are trying to find work elsewhere because of the pay. I guess the day that I finally resigned myself to "I have to find another job" was the day that I accept that I personally believe this is a sinking ship. He acknowledged my concerns and then nothing happened and I'm like, all right. I'm going to start looking around. I think what really did it was his plan to mitigate the missed paychecks was to bring us to temporarily reduced pay. So basically operating at like 15 or 20 percent below stated salary so that we would at least have steady pay, if not full pay. I think the point that I really, that I was like, "All right, time to start sending out resumes" was around Thanksgiving when even with reduced pay it was a half a week late. He couldn't even make pay at the reduced rate. And I was like, "Screw that." So… yeah. That's what happened.

Luke, like other developers I spoke with, appears to have internalized a neoliberal vocabulary of motive. Whereas workers in white-collar jobs in the past were encouraged to stay loyal to a single organization that would encompass their whole career, modern professionals are encouraged to think of themselves as free agents, taking on risk and possible reward in the job market on an individual basis (Vallas 2012; Joseph 2013; Williams 2013). This emphasis on individual choice and freedom echoes idealized conceptions of Western manhood, as well as developer identity (Connell 1992; Schwalbe 2014). Not incidentally, this also externalizes risk onto individual workers.

Luke suggests that reduced, absent, and late pay might have been mitigated if Mike had been able to offer shares of Fun Power to him, as is common in tech startups. While shares of a small, precarious games startup would not have altered Luke's financial situation in the moment, it would have given the appearance of a calculated risk that could pay off big. The situation at Fun Power did more than deprive Luke of wages: it deprived him of the ability to see himself as a powerful and manly actor in control of his economic fate. Luke's account for leaving both draws upon and reinforces images of neoliberal manhood promoted within the games industry as a whole and the larger context of neoliberal capitalist patriarchy.

Leaving to maintain breadwinner status

Another economic aspect of manhood cited as a reason for departing was the inability to support dependents. Mark, the former Technical Lead at Fun Power related the following story about a close friend – and single mother — to whom he had offered financial support.

A: And that's certainly not the first time I heard about that between agreed upon salary and actual salary. It's something I've heard.

Mark: Did you realize it was under 60 percent?

A: Wow.

Mark: Yeah. I worked there for 3 and a half years. I got paid for 2 and a half of them.

A: That's a big gap.

Mark: Yeah it is. Being out of work for a year sucks. Being out of work for a year when you still get to drive to the office. Every day sucks even worse…My 2011 W2 had a number that was just over half what was on my offer letter. This got really, really bad for personal reasons. So there is a woman that I knew and this was back when I was still being paid properly and based on my offer letter I strongly encouraged her to quit her current job, maybe start working part time but go back to school full time, promising her that I would help her out. I'd pay for her tuition, I'd help with the rent, whatever she needed to do …But she did this at my encouraging and then suddenly I was not able to provide for her in the way that I had promised and then… there are multiple issues involved, obviously. But not too long ago social services took her kids. She has them back now. I can see a direct line between promise of one amount of money, totally failing to deliver on it, and Candice is going to Social Services trying to get her kids back.

A: So she was counting on the extra income that you had offered her and you weren't able to provide it, that contributed to her inability to take care of her kids.

Mark: Essentially, yes.

Mark's discontent with unpaid or underpaid wages hinges not just on his own financial well-being but on the fact that he had agreed to provide financial support to a close friend. He asserts that his inability to provide her with the promised support contributed to the removal of her children by social services. Despite the relative historical anomaly of men as the only

or primary income-earner for middle-class families, this idea persists in workplaces, in general, and is frequently used as a rationale for gender inequality (Kanter 1977; Acker 1990; Budig and England 2001; Roth 2004). In the games industry, the assumption of (mostly male) developers as the primary or only income earner is built into the organization of work. Other developers at Fun Power invoked similar breadwinner imagery in providing accounts for leaving or explaining why they accepted such accounts.

A divergent account: Leaving to father

While most accounts drew on the gendered vocabulary of motives available to game developers through developer subculture present within Fun Power and the industry as a whole, one developer, Damon, gave an account that sought to provide an alternative definition of who a developer could be: an involved father. Damon related his experience with requesting time off from Mike because his wife was expecting a baby:

> I guess the most recent frustration – my wife's pregnant and she's due in February. So, my first child I had – I was still at Dog Eat Game and what I did was – they're on a typical kind of vacation schedule where you're allotted this number of days per year, blah blah blah, and you can save them up, take them whenever you want. So, that's kind of what I did then. I saved them up and was actually – it was two weeks paternity leave they granted, on top of whatever vacation time you took so what I did with my first child was I actually took the whole two months off and got the large majority of that paid because of paternity leave and vacation …And so, I was talking with Mike just the other day about, you know, how this was going to be handled because he's got this kind of "Oh, we don't track vacation time! We're very free form!" but I know for a fact that if I'm gonna be off for two months, that would be a problem, you know? So there's kind of this – this ceiling to that – that freedom and I

> just wasn't sure where it was. So he said he had to think about it for a couple days and I assume he had to talk to MedSerious [publisher] about that since they're kind of footing the bill and he gave me a response yesterday saying "Well, we'll give you one week off and three weeks you can work remotely." And that was it. So that was pretty –pretty, I guess, disappointing. Not that I wanted to take two months completely off again, necessarily, but it kind of shoots that whole idea of flexible – totally flexible atmosphere in the foot, so…

Damon had noted earlier that the flexible hours were a major draw for him in terms of working at Fun Power: "after I left Dog Eat Game I didn't want to be back in video games because of [mandatory crunch time]. It took John and his promise of the flexible hours to win me back."

Damon's account is unusual in that he explicitly questions the expectation for game developers to expect and tolerate crunch time and to prioritize work over family and flexibility. Damon, alone, among the developers I spoke to explicitly criticized this set of expectations. Though Damon also mentioned unpaid wages, he was particularly disappointed by the lack of flexibility and family leave options. While other accounts reinforce a gendered vocabulary of motives where men and women leave development jobs for different reasons, Damon raises the possibility of family obligations as an acceptable motive for both men and women to change positions within the industry. In fact, Damon also mentioned that he had interviewed with Chainsaw Games – a major developer responsible for a popular series of AAA post-apocalyptic third-person shooter games. The company is renowned for lots of crunch time and long hours. He said that the interview went well and was surprised to learn he had not gotten the job, but told me his emphasis on family may have hurt him:

> I think maybe that's why they didn't hire me, actually, because I would talk about how I wanted to have that work-life balance. And they were like, "What, you want to have a life? Never mind. We've got plenty of people that don't…"

Damon suggests that he was not signifying developer identity in a way that his interviewers at Chainsaw Games were willing to accept. By emphasizing his desire for flexibility to care for and spend time with his family, he is challenging the identity code that specifies developers should be primarily devoted to making games and willing to work long hours.

While the apparent difference in Fun Power's stance on work-family balance attracted Damon, the "no policy" approach was ultimately a disappointment. In reality, Damon was unable to take more than a week of paternity leave. The lack of formal policy on leave left Damon and other employees to individually negotiate parental leave agreements. Despite the apparent contrast between long hours and mandatory crunch time at console companies, Fun Power's lack of formal leave policy reinforced a gendered vocabulary of motive by forcing workers to rely on informal negotiations, grounded in implicit collective definitions of a (male) ideal developer with minimal family obligations.

Women's Accounts

Pushed and pulled: Leaving for women

In U.S. culture, the breadwinner is implicitly male. Men are assumed to have families to support through financial means, rather than through unpaid caring. Instead, a partner to do the unpaid caring must exist. As Tiffany, a former developer for console development company Rabidgamer said to me, "[Y]ou can't be a primary parent and work at a console company. And almost every guy I've worked with – his wife is a stay-at-home mom."

Tiffany's explanation for her own departure from Rabidgamer to teach development courses at a local community college and re-entry into the games industry to do development on a small, casual game mirrors this reality:

> Tiffany: Oh, so I always knew that I wanted to end up teaching from the standpoint of, there is so much overtime in video game development. And I knew that, while that was acceptable to me for a time, after I grew up, that wasn't going to work for me anymore. So, I always wanted to have my Master's so I'd be able to teach. That's always been the goal.
>
> A: So, then what led you to go back to development?
>
> Tiffany: Um, I guess the money. <both laugh> Um, but it was also, I guess I was – I mean, I work from home right now, working on a casual game. I – I'm working on social, casual games now as opposed to console, which I have to say is <pause> so much less stressful, it doesn't even compare.

Tiffany equates being a "grown-up" woman with having responsibilities incompatible with required crunch time: Her male colleagues could rely on having a wife at home to take care of family obligations. This set of arrangements reinforces both collective definitions of an ideal developer and implicit expectations that it is normal and natural for women to be primary carers (Acker 1990; 2006). While she did not seek to renounce her identity as a developer, within the culture of Rabidgamer Tiffany could expect that co-workers and future employers would accept her account that family obligations prevented her from working at a console game company.

Sarah, a social media expert who was hired in 2011 and worked briefly at Fun Power, had a different reason for leaving. Sarah's departure was due in large part to harassment,

both generally, but also specifically from a married male Fun Power employee, Daniel, who began giving her a great deal of unwanted attention — going so far as to move into her apartment complex without warning her beforehand when he was experiencing difficulties with his wife. When Sarah told Mike, the CEO, about this situation he was sympathetic, and even angry on Sarah's behalf, helping her to identify Daniel's behavior as sexual harassment where she had not. But Fun Power lacked a formal sexual harassment policy. Instead, Sarah told me: "Mike basically told me if I want him fired I would, I could. Uh, which was the right thing for Mike to do, but — I haven't really talked to Mike about this since then, but it put too much pressure on me." Instead of being personally responsible for the firing of a male co-worker who had harassed her, Sarah chose to leave — not just Fun Power, but the industry. She told Mike to allow Daniel to keep working, despite the hostile, even traumatic, environment this created for her:

> And so I was like, "No, just let him have the job because I know he needs to finish things for his projects." But you know where he sits? He's in the hallway. So I had to go by him all the time. I was so uncomfortable, so uncomfortable. [laughter]. Like, I didn't wanna go to work. I didn't wanna be in that environment. I didn't wanna be near him. Um, it was really brutal, just like brutal. [laughter] Having realized he was essentially stalking me, expecting something more, he had made something in his mind that was not. And that's when I realized, um, the kind of person I am that would happen with me at any game company I ever worked

The lack of a formal sexual harassment policy combined with the sexist vocabulary of motive present in the industry and within fan culture encouraged Sarah to blame herself for Daniel's unwanted attention and to prioritize his project work over her right to work in a safe and

comfortable environment. Mike, the CEO, implicitly reinforced these priorities. Instead of developing a formal policy that would have outlined appropriate behavior and meted out established punishments for infractions or even taking administrative initiative and punishing Daniel, Mike offered to offload responsibility for Daniel's future employment onto the woman he had stalked and harassed. This reinforces the notion that usefulness as a good (male) developer supersedes the safety and comfort of women in the industry.

Sarah's account for departure also reinforced the lack of formal policies governing sexual harassment. Instead of her harasser suffering any kind of reprimand or consequence, she left. Her departure implicitly reinforces the idea that no accommodations need be made for women in the games industry and that they should leave if they are uncomfortable. This attitude is common in other areas of tech and STEM and implies that women who want protection from harassment are asking for special treatment – rather than the same treatment as their male peers. Again, this implicitly reinforces the idea of what a developer should be. Women are allowed, but only if they will eschew having/being primary carers for children or can ignore and brush off sexist jokes or even outright harassment. In other words, women can be developers when they act like "one of the guys" or when they trade patronage for power (Schwalbe et al. 2000). As long as they do not try to threaten the identity codes or definitions in place, they can be accepted.

Accounts for Staying

Accounts for staying also served as collective identity work about what it meant to be a developer. The men who stayed also put the decision in terms of risk and reward but found

the intrinsic rewards associated with the job trumped the instability of extrinsic rewards like wages or guaranteed family leave/vacation. Discussing the financial situation and underpayment of salary at Fun Power, Darius said:

> Darius: Yeah. Well, it's getting better. I hope it is. I'm in the position where I love my job because I get to come in and work on games every day and I'm lucky enough to be able to afford getting paid half my salary…But I've done my time in corporate America and I'm not going back to that if I can help it. So I'm here until the company fails.

Darius gives an account for remaining at the company. He deploys an identity code when he says that he loves his job because he gets "to come in and work on games." Loving the work of games so much that you will work for free is a way of signifying game developer identity. Darius acknowledges that he has resources not available to all the developers that allow him to accept the loss of wages. This allows him to resist having to find a corporate job. For him, the benefits of loving the work he does and of the company culture, including an environment of masculine camaraderie, are sufficient compensation for the underpayment of wages. He has internalized the DWYL ideology and is willing to forgo reasonable compensation in favor of fulfilling work (Tokumitsu 2014).

Brad, a developer who worked on design, art, and programming, echoed this emphasis on company culture and the contrast with corporate jobs:

> Brad:…There's a creative atmosphere. Everyone in the games industry just has a drive, a passion. You don't really get that as much at other companies or in other industries because people are more – not really diversified, but more specialized for their individual fields, whereas the games industry is much more of a hobbyist

> industry – and everybody's that's there enjoys the games. That's one of the greatest things about it is just the camaraderie and the enjoyment that everybody gets out of the product. And obviously the creativity itself is a lot of fun. You get to make new games, new worlds and it's just good to be a part of it. We really do go to work and don't feel like we're working. – Well, that's not entirely true, but you know what I mean.
>
> A: Is that different from most other jobs you've had?
>
> Brad: Oh, yeah, most definitely. I've definitely been on both ends of the spectrum where it's been more of a corporate atmosphere where you're expected to dress a certain way. You know, if you're below business casual, you're underdressed. Those kind of atmospheres - they're good workplaces but the creative aspect is a lot more subdued…. Anytime people can be themselves and have the opportunity to interact in an open atmosphere, I mean, it really fosters a lot of creativity, a lot of communication.

Brad finds that a job at Fun Power is worth it, even with decreased wages, because it almost does not feel like work. He is properly signifying game developer identity by emphasizing that he is doing what he loves. His developer identity — who he can be in a games industry environment — is equated with being himself, and this is more valuable than possibly higher wages in a corporate environment. Like Darius, he embraces the DWYL ideology that encourages workers to forgo or accept lower wages in exchange for enjoyment or fulfillment on the job.

DISCUSSION

Transitional points in a life course often require an account, not only to make sense of one's motivations to others, but also to repair or make sense of behavior that might

undermine a valued identity (Mason-Schrock 1996; Orbuch 1997; Garrett-Peters 2009). Vocabularies of motive often apply differently to different kinds of people: for instance, men and women (West and Zimmerman 1987; West and Fenstermaker 1995). While switching jobs has become increasingly common for skilled professionals under new, neoliberal economic conditions (Vallas 2012; Williams, Miller and Kilanski 2012), vocabularies of motive for leaving jobs remain divergent for men and women (Cooper 2000; Hochschild 2001; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). Examining how gender shapes exit accounts for leaving jobs, particularly in male-dominated, professional jobs, gives insight into the reproduction of inequality within such fields.

While leaving a job always requires an account, leaving a job in game development, which most developers considered a "dream job," may especially be called into question. Male and female developers generally gave different types of accounts for leaving game jobs for other game industry positions or for positions outside the games industry. Men generally gave accounts that affirmed their status as good developers who loved making games but also as independent, rational economic actors – possibly actors who had others depending upon them. While women also portrayed themselves as people who loved games, the women did not portray themselves as rational, economic actors. Instead, the few women I spoke to who moved out of industry jobs cited the need for a more flexible, parenting-friendly position, or the presence of sexist harassment and discrimination.

Those who stayed at Fun Power also gave accounts to justify their continued presence in jobs in which wages were being unpaid or underpaid. These accounts emphasized the love of games and the intrinsic rewards of the job as more important than financial precarity or

other drawbacks of the job. They called on accepted definitions and identity codes associated with gamer and development subculture to justify their decision to stay (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996).

In fashioning accounts for staying and going, developers were drawing on identity definitions and codes supplied by gamer and developer subculture (Cooper 2000; Shaw 2011). Industry-wide narratives emphasized the importance of being willing to make games in one's own time, being devoted to the job over family obligations, loving the work, making rational and calculated decisions, valuing masculine camaraderie, and tolerating sexism. Developers were more likely to have their accounts honored by other members of the subculture when they drew on, rather than challenging, widely accepted definitions and identity codes surrounding developer identity. Specifically, developers generally gave accounts that reinforced the definition of a developer as someone who loves games, values the masculine camaraderie of the games industry, makes rational choices about financial risks and rewards, aims for financial independence and the ability to support dependents, and prioritizes making games over family obligations.

The one attempt to bring in the alternative narrative of developers as people who prioritized family time and work-life balance was rejected or, at best, met with very limited success. This alternative definition of being a developer was not accepted. Though some of this was due to economic constraints, it also had to do with the culture of Fun Power and the culture of the industry as a whole. A lack of formal policies gave an appearance of flexibility but also allowed for more close policing of acceptable and unacceptable ways to enact being a (male) developer.

When developers gave accounts for leaving a "dream job" or staying in a job in which their wages were unpaid or underpaid, they were doing collective identity work. The process of collective identity work cannot cover only routine, expected action. Groups must decide and pass on appropriate vocabularies of motive for non-normative behavior. Within a profession or a work subculture, giving accounts that others accept constitutes successful identity work. Examining the way members of a profession-based subculture justify leaving a job in that field or staying in a job despite poor conditions gives us insights into how professionals use accounts as opportunities to affirm subcultural identities.

As Acker (1990; 2006) has observed, professional identities are not gender neutral. Nor are subcultural identities (e.g., Bettie 2002). Despite changes to bureaucratic institutions and practices (Williams 2012), assumptions about the kinds of people who can and should belong to a profession persist. When members of a professional subculture seek to give accounts that other insiders will honor, they are likely to deploy accepted identity codes and definitions. In deploying these codes, they affirm their membership in the group but also potentially reinforce sexist, racist and classist notions of what a group member looks like. In other words, gendered vocabularies of motive elicit gendered exit accounts, which then reproduce gender inequality within male-dominated professions. As previous research has shown, women's labor force participation and wages are least unequal when men and women both participate in childcare and family leave is available to both parents (Hochschild 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). As long as women, but not men, are able to account for leaving a job because of family obligations, gender parity in the workplace will remain elusive. Likewise, as long as men, but not women, can have accounts honored that emphasize their

need for financial independence and adequate compensation, gender segregation and wage penalties for women will persist. (Hochschild 1989; Schwartz 1989; Budig and England 2001).

In the next chapter, I move from gendered vocabularies of motive to negotiations over the labor process within game development. Through a negotiated order lens (Strauss et al 1964; Maines and Charlton 1985; Strauss 1978), I examine the gendered strategies used by developers to negotiate control over the process of game development.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEW CRAFTWORKER: NEGOTIATING PROCESS AND PRESTIGE

Most independent game developers would probably be startled to be compared to 19th century American craft workers, but the comparison is apt. In both cases, groups of highly skilled, predominantly male workers possess specialized knowledge that allows them to work together make a product from start to finish. In both cases, those who will sell the product to others, and primarily benefit from their profits, contract projects out to groups of workers rather than directly supervising the work. Both groups, capitalists and workers, have a stake in controlling how the work is done – the labor process – but control of the process is contested. Finally, in both cases, workers and capitalists use various strategies to gain or maintain control over the labor process.

In the games industry, publishers typically fund and distribute games, but the work is often done in independent development studios where a group of skilled game developers do the creative work of making games. While publishers and developers typically agree on a production schedule (a set of milestones that serve as payout dates), direct control over how the game is made rests primarily in the hands of developers. This does not mean that publishers do not contest and seek to limit this control.

In this chapter, I seek to show how game developers seek to maintain control over the labor process through negotiations with publishers and how these strategies are rooted in identity investments. I begin by examining the social and historical conditions of the digital games industry in relation to larger struggles for control over the labor process. Next, I explore collective identities that developers ascribe to themselves and to publishers. I then

situate negotiations for control over the labor process within negotiated order theory (Strauss et al. 1964; Strauss 1978; Maines and Charlton 1985), tying this to identity contests and collective identity work within organizations (Schwalbe, McTague and Parrotta 2016). I demonstrate that negotiations for control of the labor process between developers and publishers were also negotiations of who a game developer was and what a game developer should be able to do.

CRAFT WORKERS, GAME DEVELOPERS, AND CONTROL OF THE LABOR PROCESS

Worker control of the labor process conflicts with a long trend toward the deskilling of labor (Braverman 1974). The ability to extract surplus labor from workers depends largely on how much workers are able to resist the efforts of capitalists to lower the amount of compensation for work relative to the amount of work completed. The history of deskilling goes back to the early 20th century and the legacy of Frederick Winslow Taylor.

Skilled craft workers in the 19th and early 20th centuries had long traditions of jealously guarding the knowledge of their trades (Montgomery 1979; Cockburn 1983). Those wishing to enter trades endured long apprenticeships during which they would often do dirty, manual tasks until the last few years of their apprenticeship, at which point the master artisans would finally begin to impart knowledge of the necessary skills. Guilds, and later, unions, ensured that existing members could choose to whom they would extend apprenticeship and eventually award journeymen status. Craft-workers held each other to a behavioral code, deeply rooted in class solidarity and mutualistic support. In 19th-century

American enterprises, craft workers were expected to behave in a "manly" way towards both supervisors and other workers. This entailed disdain for managers and a refusal to work in their presence and a strong proscription of "hogging" or "undermining" the work of fellow artisans. Those who "connived" for the job of another or disobeyed collectively-established limitations on output were sanctioned by trade unions, which often successfully forced managers to oust deviants.

Taylor (1911) and his disciples sought to undermine these restrictions on output and control over work pace and process by careful observation and documentation of various skilled jobs. Despite considerable resistance, observation of tasks gradually allowed capitalists and managers to divide complex tasks into smaller jobs that were easier to learn and, consequently, allowed for the employ of cheaper, more easily replaceable labor.

This observation and control was enabled by the centralization of labor into factories (Montgomery 1979; Jacoby 1985; Clawson 1980). In the U.S., production of textiles, shoes, and other goods took place primarily in the home until the middle to late 19th century (Jacoby 1985). Work moved into factories, driven initially by attempts by capitalists to control the pace of labor and the process, rather than by technological innovation (Braverman 1974; Clawson 1980). Braverman theorized that when workers possess specialized knowledge about the labor process or, in other words, when they are skilled, they have substantially greater ability to resist the demands of capitalists because they are difficult to replace. Consequently, capitalists developed numerous methods for breaking down and removing the amount of skill needed to complete work.

The exceptional power and government backing of capital in the U.S. largely removed struggles about the labor process from the domain of collective bargaining (Fantasia and Voss 2004) and, consequently, from struggles between capital and labor in most blue-collar occupations. Braverman (1974) argued that white-collar and professional occupations that have historically offered a large amount of discretion and autonomy about how the work will be done have more gradually become the target of capitalist attempts at deskilling. More recent scholarship finds that, rather than deskilling, other Taylorist principles have encroached upon managerial and professional jobs (Crowley et al. 2010). First, firms have used several structural measures that select for workers who show a willingness to put in herculean effort on behalf of the company. Outsourcing during times of higher demand and using contract workers puts the onus on professionals to maintain good relationships and signal high commitment to the organization. Companies also use what Crowley and her co-authors call "structured insecurity," or building in policies that routinely shed low-performing workers. Finally, project-based teams with limited duration emphasize the need for workers to conform to company culture and work well with others.

A second Taylorist innovation in the professional and managerial occupations involves soliciting worker input and using worker ideas for the good of the firm. While professional and managerial workers have typically had much greater input than manual workers, Crowley et al. found a higher instance of firms asking for worker input in these jobs, though this was not significant. On the other hand, other scholars have found that managers structure tech workplaces to maximize creative and innovative worker input (Cooper 2000, Kunda 1992).

These innovations reflect the general intensification of competition under global neoliberal capitalism. Another feature of neoliberal economic arrangements reflected in the games industry involves the externalization of risk. Publishers face a market of fluctuating tastes and rapidly changing technologies. They respond to this, in part, by externalizing risk through paying for games piece by piece, often upon receipt of that piece. While this has potentially negative consequences for independent game developers – for example, having a game abandoned by the publisher before it is finished – its consequences are far less exploitive than in unskilled industries (cf. Bonacich and Appelbaum's [2000] work on the externalization of risk in the garment industry). The complexity and skill involved in game development combined with the contract system used by publishers allows developers to exercise a great deal of creative control over how to make games. Despite the lack of deskilling in development and other professional jobs, publishers take pains to control the labor process as much as possible. Yet they cannot do so through direct supervision or design of the labor process. Instead, control over the labor process is negotiated through meetings, e-mails, and phone calls, and the writing and revision of game design schedules and Game Design Documents.

NEGOTIATED ORDERS, INEQUALITY, AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY WORK

I examine the ongoing negotiations between publishers and the Fun Power staff through the lens of the negotiated order perspective. This work arises primarily out of the work of Anselm Strauss, first originating in his ethnography of a psychiatric hospital (1963). This perspective was further developed (Strauss et al. 1964; Strauss 1978; Maines and

Charlton 1985) as an antidote to organizational theories that elided human agency while reifying organizations and institutions. The negotiated order perspective sees organizations as consisting of patterned and ongoing interactions and negotiations amongst members and stakeholders. Formal rules, policies, and norms are the sedimented result of past negotiations, but are subject to re-negotiation as organizational members constantly reinforce, challenge, and re-interpret past agreements (Busch 1982; Hall 1995).

The negotiated order perspective provides a much-needed framework for theorizing organizations in a way that brings interactions and individuals to the forefront rather than obscuring them. Still, the perspective has faced persistent criticism for lack of attention to power and structure — the non-negotiable elements of the organization that resulted from previous negotiations (Day and Day 1977; Nadai and Maeder 2008). Busch's (1982) concept of sedimentation — non-negotiable context arising out of previous negotiations — helps somewhat to address the latter criticism, but a systematic consideration of how inequality enters into and conditions negotiations remains absent. Though some scholars (Kolb and McGinn 2009; Kolb 2009) have done work to incorporate a feminist perspective (Acker 1990), this work focuses primarily on women's difficulties negotiating patriarchal organizational orders. Yet gendered processes condition negotiations in spaces inhabited primarily or exclusively by men (Kleinman 2007).

Schwalbe and his co-authors' (2016) examination of identity contests in organizations provides an avenue for considering how inequality conditions negotiations within organizations. Though they focus primarily on identity contests within organizations, their work also integrates collective identity work with negotiated order theory. As explored in

Chapter 2, organizations such as Fun Power can offer identity rewards to attract and retain workers. When these identity rewards are endangered, workers experience identity threats. When an entire group of workers experience identity threats, this can, under certain conditions, lead to an identity contest between groups of workers with different identity investments. Identity contests involve a conflict between at least two groups with opposing interests where identity rewards for the different groups involved are at stake. The negotiations that take place during identity contests drive organizational change.

Identity contests incorporate an avenue for integrating power and inequality into negotiated order theory because they involve contests between groups within an organization over scarce resources (identity rewards). When different groups compete for scarce resources, inequality arises. Groups will generally draw on existing resources to try to "win" the contest, exposing past, sedimented inequalities. When more powerful and privileged groups use superior resources to obtain the outcome they desire, these contests result in the reproduction of inequality.

Further, just as organizations are not race or gender neutral, neither are organizational identities (Williams 1992; Acker 1990; 2006; Wingfield-Harvey 2009; Schwalbe 2014). When those possessing privileged identities use this privilege as a resource in negotiations over identity rewards, they are likely to reproduce ideas about who does what kinds of job. As I showed in Chapter 2, developers at Fun Power received identity wages that were tied to a masculine image of developers. These workers experienced identity threats due to publishers' attempts to curtail developers' control of the labor process. Rather than an intra-organizational conflict, this produced inter-organizational conflict between Fun Power and

the publishers who funded them. This inter-organizational conflict did not lead to lasting organizational change, but instead fueled ongoing negotiations over who would dictate which parts of the labor process. In addition, it allowed developers to occasionally resist or diminish publishers' attempts to curtail developer control of the process and product.

In this chapter, I first examine some of the gendered identity work Fun Power workers did with respect to themselves and publishers. I then explore the negotiation strategies used by Fun Power workers and how they are grounded in this gendered identity work. As I investigate the strategies developers use to position themselves as experts and struggle for control over the labor process, I draw on negotiated order theory (Strauss 1978; Fine 1984; Maines and Charlton 1985), Acker's (1990) notion of inequality regimes, and the idea of identity contests (Schwalbe, McTague and Parrotta 2016).

GOOD DEVELOPERS, GOOD PUBLISHERS, AND BAD PUBLISHERS

As well as negotiating with publishers and discussing how best to maintain control over the labor process, Fun Power developers engaged in a number of collective identity work strategies focused both on developers and on publishers. These identity works strategies set the stage for developer collaboration in negotiations with publishers, reinforcing the ingroup identity of developers and strengthening the boundaries between them and publishers and publisher representatives. These strategies also established a "good developer" as a particular kind of person who happened to be white and male. In Chapter 2, I concentrated on the identity wages that attracted developers to the industry and the opportunities Fun Power management created for them to collect these rewards. In that

chapter, I focused primarily on the collective identity work process of affirmation – where group members find or create opportunities to enact valued identities (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Here, I focus on other subprocesses of collective identity work developers engaged in – defining, coding, and policing — to create an image of a "good developer," both among themselves and for publishers and clients. Being a good developer entitled developers to collect identity wages, including controlling the labor process. Developers drew on the image of good developers during their negotiations with publishers.

Defining Good and Bad Developers

Fun Power developers shared an idea of what made a good developer, an idea that was reinforced through both informal interactions and formal procedures. Being a good developer had two primary components. Despite Mike's insistence that at Fun Power "We don't work 90 hours a week…People go home on the weekends," working long hours and putting in extra time was a way to signify being a good developer. Developers consistently praised those who put in long hours working on the games or the engine. Brad and Mark were most often complimented for this as they were the most likely to put in extra hours outside of what was required by deadlines. For instance, Scott, made the following comment when we were discussing "crunch time," as it is called when developers put in extra hours to make a milestone:

> Scott: In cycles, um, you know. When you're about to release something or show something off at a trade show there's always some measure of crunch time where you're working a lot.

A: Right. Although, it doesn't seem like crunch is ever too intense at Fun Power. Like, in the sense of upping the crunch.

Scott: Mmm. It depends on if you're Brad or not.

Brad had a reputation for putting in time on weekends and evenings to help Fun Power meet milestones. Even though this was not required, as it sometimes is during game development cycles at Triple A companies, Brad would put in the extra time anyway. Scott jokes that intense crunch time occurs at Fun Power — but only for Brad. At one point, after her departure, Sarah Brandon described Brad as "the most valuable employee they have" because he was doing another (bad) developer's work on top of all of his own — essentially performing two jobs.

Like Brad, Mark was well-regarded and seen as good developer for putting in extra time and effort. He was technical lead and had essentially built Fun Power's game engine[10] single-handedly. This typically elicited expressions of admiration and respect from other developers. For instance, in one development meeting, Mike was reviewing what each person was working on and made the following statement:

Mike: Mark works on the engine and a little bit on everything else.

Brad: <laughs> Mark is a superhero.

Mike: Yeah, he's does everything because he's pretty much our programming team.

[10] A game engine is a specialized software package that takes care of routine tasks like in-game physics and rendering images so that artists and engineers do not need to include code for these operations every time they add new content to the game (Ward 2008).

Mike describes Mark as constituting most of the programming team, despite Brad, Luke, and Matt also doing programming work. This hyperbole signals recognition of Mark's extra work and the informal status he has gained as a result. The long hours Mark has put in and the work he has done above and beyond what was asked of him makes him a "superhero" in Brad's eyes. Portraying a programmer who puts in extra hours and goes above and beyond as a "superhero" is consistent with Cooper's (2000) notion of nerd masculinity. Like the workers she studied, Fun Power developers put in extra hours to signify manhood.

The second component of being a good developer was a high level of skill or talent in one's field. Good developers did excellent work and came up with good solutions to problems. No one had to go back and re-do the work done by good developers and the work they did was excellent, rather than merely adequate. For instance, a number of people praised Ryan Neal as an exceptionally good artist. Scott called him "a fantastic artist….one of the best…that I have worked with." While praise like this was not uncommon, the expectation of high levels of talent was made even more visible by policing of bad developers

Several developers were mentioned by others as being bad developers because of a lack of dedication, but more importantly, because of a lack of skill. For instance, Sarah, the social media manager, and Mark, who was technical lead until his departure, both mentioned issues with developers who did poor quality work or were unable to come up with clever solutions to problems. When I interviewed Sarah after she had left Fun Power, she expressed frustration that Mike had been reluctant to fire people she considered bad developers:

> Um, I wanted to let Ken go way earlier but... I mean, the argument that I kept facing was, um, they needed somebody to do the work, but my argument was we had people

> doing the work wrong and taking time away from others. So, like, William would do Who's Coming to Dinner levels. And Max would have to spend — so he was spending 2 or 3 hours making Who's Coming to Dinner levels — and Max would have to go spend 2/3 of his hours redoing all of the work that William did. And so financially this just doesn't make sense in any way, shape, or form …And Ken would just make promises that he would do this and this and he never delivered. And then he would completely come up with crappy products and then say it's not my fault because we don't have enough people. So, there was some fault on Fun Power for not having enough developers. But, on the other hand, there was one evening where Shane spent a whole week doing a project and Mike had to go and redo it. It took five hours over night because he and Mark just cracked down and they did it in like five hours! The entire thing. So, things didn't add up.

Sarah emphasizes that Ken and William should have been let go much earlier because their work, as well as being slow, was of poor quality. Ken, an engineer, and William, an artist, both did work so shoddy that other employees, and even Mike, himself, had to re-do the work. Resenting co-workers who underperform is understandable and not restricted to the games industry. Still, the expectation of immediate, very high competence levels, and the tendency to simply re-do work or dismiss a person after they perform poorly, has consequences for who is likely succeed in development.

Women are less likely to see themselves as highly competent, particularly in science and math arenas (Ridgeway 1997; Correll 2001), and women and non-whites tend to have their performance viewed less favorably than white men who perform at the same level (Reskin, McBrier, and Kmec 1999). This has consequences for who is likely to be seen as a

good developer. Mark expressed similar expectations for good and bad developers, but also hints that competence is not perceived as tightly coupled with training or qualifications:

> Yeah — one: he has no formal training. That's certainly not a barrier but he also has… he's not very good at it. I'm trying to think of how to translate this technical issue that really highlighted that… in the way that you'd understand. The problem that Ken was trying to solve was is you click on a character and it's supposed to highlight all the spaces where they can walk. When I told some of my former colleagues, other engineers who had been with games and worked regular software engineering what Ken's initial solution was they started laughing for about a minute. It was that bad. Ken was not even on the right track to find a good solution. He thought he was doing the right thing.

Mark and his former colleagues find Ken's solution to a technical problem laughable. Mark implies the worst part was not Ken's initial wrong answer so much as that he had no idea it was wrong. Beyond coming up with a poor solution, he does not recognize it as bad. As his colleagues saw him, Ken lacked the natural talent to be a good developer. Fun Power developers often characterized skill as a programmer or artist as being innate, rather than learned.

Luke told me that programmers and artists tended to have "very different personality types," implying that certain kinds of people are likely to have engineering ability while other kinds are likely to have artistic talent. Constructing engineers and artists as "types" of people makes implicit expectations about how each group will look and behave. Those who do not fit the "type" will likely face greater barriers to the acceptance of their skills. Those

who already make up most of the developers in both jobs (white men) will be seen as the norm for good developers.

Developers also attributed being a good developer to natural talent. For example, Mark explained to me that he had read about programming ability and found that there tends to be a bimodal distribution, where scores cluster around a point representing high competence and another one representing lower competence. He related his opinion on how to deal with the two groups:

> And so there's basically two lines of approach on this. One group is trying to say how can we take this lower group of students and bring them up and the other line of approach is how can we identify who is in each group as early as possible?... So then of course there's the other group that's trying to figure out how do we get the lower group and bring them in the first group. I think these people are wasting their time and actually doing a great disservice. These are the people who are saying well, instead of teaching C, maybe we should just teach people Java because it's an easier language. But what's happening is all that means is you're taking someone who really shouldn't be doing computers and making them think they kind of can or maybe could if they worked on it long enough. So eventually they end up in a career that they suck at for however long until they change their career…A lot of colleges are now teaching Java for the sake of making it easier for the people who should just be flunked out in their freshman year…Everything that I've read about this indicates that that's a real separation. That exists in something fundamental in the way the brain works and there doesn't seem to be any way to transgress it.

Mark explicitly sees programming talent as innate. Regardless of prior knowledge, he sees developers as falling into two categories of competence that cannot be changed through additional instruction or time. While this philosophy may seem meritocratic on its face, it

serves as a way to naturalize and justify the success of mostly white and male developers and the absence of women and people of color in game development jobs.

Fun Power workers defined good developers as people who put in many extra hours, displayed high levels of competence with little training or assistance, and who had natural talent that suited them for their positions. This also meant defining good developers as white men without primary childcare obligations who were confident in the game development environment and who did not need to ask for help or additional training to produce high quality work. Fun Power workers' identity work strategies around publishers tied competence and worthiness of respect to the publishers' recognition of developer skill and willingness to allow developers to exercise that skill with minimal intervention. In fact, good developers could not enact that identity unless they had sufficient control over the labor process to use their superior creative and problem-solving abilities.

Constructing Good and Bad Publishers

As well as defining good developers, Fun Power developers shared assessments of good and bad publishers in development meetings and casual conversation. This allowed workers to reinforce the criteria for good and bad publishers, as well as sharing or discussing changes in personnel or company policy that might shift a particular company from one category to the other.

> Mike: Sam Entwhistle who's the head of their Apple division has okayed the idea of an iPad release for no fee, but a royalty <Luke raises both arms in a victorious posture> and he's agreed to give us another month for that. Now, that's just from the Apple side so it still has to go back to the PC side, but he set up a meeting with

> Tanaka-San who is in the country right now but he's at Casual Play which we're not going to because Top Choice is going to be there - I don't wanna talk to them. Goliath is going to be there – I don't wanna talk to them, either. <laughter> And Gameco will be there – well, we just flew out and talked to them for a week. <pause> I've said before that Gameco considers us one of their go-to teams when they want to get things done. Well, I heard - and this stays internal - but Guy told me that he's also frustrated that Gameco works kind of slow because it could lead to them losing good developers. So, that's good to know because they think of us as good developers, but it also means they're going to be slow with things so that's something to watch out for.

This discussion during a development meeting conveys a great deal of information about how Fun Power workers regard various publishers and how they are regarded. Mike tacitly confirms that Goliath and Top Choice remain in the bad publisher category by stating that he does not wish to speak with them. He also conveys that Gameco may be engaging in troubling behavior that could somewhat jeopardize their designation as a good publisher. Regularly sharing assessments of publishers and their relative willingness to cede control over the labor process was a common occurrence in development meetings. Developers also sought to reinforce their collective expertise and entitlement to control the labor process through ridiculing publisher demands and knowledge.

Among themselves, Fun Power developers frequently commented upon or joked about the perceived stupidity or incompetence of publishers and publisher representatives. In comparison, they portrayed themselves as experts with a nuanced understanding of the development process:

> Darius: Ok – Steampunk Lab. So, Top Choice just did their Company Play Day where everyone at the company plays the game and then takes a survey about it and they just sent us back the results for that. They were pretty good, overall, but Katja is still talking about and *talking about* how they'll only include it if certain conditions are met that have nothing to do with it.
>
> Mike: But that's just Katja being stupid, honestly.

Mike and Darius both express contempt for Katja accepting the milestone only if Fun Power meets criteria "that have nothing to do with it." Both of them tacitly accept that they are better qualified and more knowledgeable than Katja, and that she should accept their assessment of what is and is not relevant to the milestone. Darius makes the point that the survey results from the Company Play Day were good, so Katja should be perceiving the current milestone more positively. Though this did not help them convince Katja of their position, deriding her for failing to recognize their superior intelligence and expertise reinforced their collective identity as developers and the conviction that their perspective on development was the correct one.

Katja was far from the only publisher representative to receive this kind of derision. For instance, the Fun Power team had this to say about Nick, the head of a new publishing business:

> Dillon: So we were supposed to get paid last week?
>
> Darius: Yeah. He said he'd wire it early last week and then nothing. I told Mike, I think Nick just doesn't have the money.
>
> Max K.: Well, when I was out there visiting I got the impression that Nick has way too much to do and he needs help. He's still trying to get his publishing business off the ground.

Brad: Where did he work before?

Darius: CreateFate.

Max K.: And we see how well they're doing.

Darius portrays Nick as untrustworthy. He relays suspicions that Nick has promised Fun Power money that he simply does not have. Max suggests extenuating circumstances, but also implies that Nick is generally bad at business or untrustworthy as his last employer, CreateFate, is a studio that was laying off developers (and later closed).

As well as the publisher representatives of bad publishers, Fun Power developers frequently ridiculed publisher input and demands with respect to the game development process. Steampunk Labs had a particularly arduous development process that drew the ire of the team:

Me: How did the Steampunk Labs Beta go?

Darius: <laughs> Well, it got accepted – but it turns out that wasn't actually beta.

Me: What?

Darius: It was another one of their made-up milestones.

Mark: It turns out that was the beta candidate – so all that stuff about optimizing for beta didn't really mean anything.

Darius: Right - so we were actually working on a candidate to submit to be the beta candidate and then we'll have to submit a candidate for the actual beta at some point.

Top Choice, the publisher funding Steampunk Labs, required not only the conventional milestones such as alpha, beta, and gold master, but also sub-milestones. Darius and Mark, as well as the rest of the team, regarded these sub-milestones as unnecessary and a waste of

their time. Darius refers to the beta candidate milestone as “made-up,” and Mark implies that the process of developing it was meaningless or misleading. This reinforces that the developers know what “real” milestones are or should be and that Top Choice is wrongly interfering with the labor process by imposing additional and meaningless work on the developers.

NEGOTIATING WITH PUBLISHERS

Mike, Fun Power’s CEO and primary business development liaison, generally sought out several smaller projects at once from publishers and other clients. In lieu of any venture backing or other capital, balancing several projects was, in itself, a strategy to reduce risk and give the developers more leverage to resist publisher demands. As he told me the first time I met with him:

> Unlike a big company like Epic, where everyone’s working on the same game, we usually have a few going at a time — which can be hard. But their payroll is about half a million and ours is going to be more like $50,000 for a month. So they have to go for the big projects. The small projects are easier to find, but they’re less money. But it’s less of a risk. We get paid by the publisher based on milestones. If a publisher doesn’t pay on time and you only have one project <he shrugs and shakes his head>.

Mike portrays pursuing numerous small projects with different clients as challenging, but worthwhile in order to ensure less financial risk. As I later learned, publishers’ payments may be withheld for reasons other than bureaucratic inefficiency or neglect. Instead, withholding payment on a milestone was a strategy numerous publishers used when Fun Power developers and the publisher disagreed about whether a milestone had been met. Publishers

used their greater financial bargaining power to try to dictate details of the product and the process.

Despite publishers' greater financial leverage, Fun Power developers did not willingly relinquish control over the labor process. To do so would have jeopardized their identity stakes as developers. Instead, they used a number of strategies to resist publisher attempts to dictate how and what would be done for specific milestones and projects, including asserting developer identity, citing prior agreements, resisting detailed contracts, choosing projects carefully, and acting in good faith.

NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

Asserting Developer Identity

Fun Power developers based many of their claims about why they should dictate the labor process on their identities as good developers. As discussed above, the image of a good developer was multi-faceted, encompassing not only technical expertise, natural talent, and a willingness to work long hours, but also being a white male without childcare responsibilities.

Developers have years of formal or informal training that equip them to use programming languages or graphics software entailed in creating games. In contrast, publishers usually assign producers as liaisons who deal with development studios. Producers typically have a background in project management, rather than in digital art, programming, or some other development field. Consequently, producers often lobby for features or timelines that are technically impractical or infeasible. Developers at Fun Power responded

to these demands by emphasizing their own technical expertise and ridiculing or undercutting that of producers. For instance, the following exchange occurred in a production conference call for Steampunk Laboratory, a project whose producers and publisher reps drew particular ire from developers:

> Male Top Choice producer: I do think this — these problems are a serious issue, though. I mean, we would really have reservations about releasing a game that had these kind of performance issues. But if you need more time, let us know and we can give it to you.
>
> Darius clicks in: I think you're absolutely right, and that's a priority for us. We wouldn't want the game to go out with performance issues, either, but I don't think anyone in this conversation is an [software] engineer — unless one of yours is on this call? <he pauses>
>
> Male Top Choice Producer: No.
>
> Darius: Well, then I think these are all technical problems and they won't be hard to fix, but I think we'll be able to eliminate most of the problems without too much trouble.

The Top Choice producer raises concerns about performance issues rated to frame-rate delays (what some gamers call "lag"). He offers to let Fun Power have more time to work on the game before the release. Though this may sound like a generous offer because Fun Power is paid on the basis of milestones, "extra time" effectively means "working for free." Darius is not a software engineer, but Brad, a major engineer on the project, was also on the call. Darius references the technical expertise of the team he represents (including Brad's) to shut down the suggestion that Fun Power needs more time to meet the milestone. By pointing out

that neither the producer speaking nor anyone else on Top Choice's side is qualified to assess the time needed to address the technical problems with the game, he successfully shuts down the attempt to push back the production schedule.

This use of technical expertise to dismiss the objectives of non-experts is not gender neutral. Within technical fields, mastery over computers and code serve as badges of manhood (Cooper 2000; Kleif and Faulkner 2003). Manhood acts demonstrate dominance over other people or objects (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; Schwalbe 2014) and engineers and other technical experts vaunt their mastery over computers or code for this reason. Darius's comment to the Top Choice team is a reminder that the Fun Power team has mastery and dominance in an area that most of the publisher's team does not.

While claims based on developer identity were more often overtly about technical expertise, in several cases Mike explicitly depicted his predominately male team as breadwinners with dependent families. For instance, when a disagreement about a milestone for Steampunk Laboratory got particularly heated, Mike resorted to yelling at the producer, "THESE GUYS HAVE FAMILIES, AND WHAT DO I TELL THEM IF I CAN'T PAY THEM BECAUSE YOU'RE DRAGGING YOUR FEET ON THIS MILESTONE?" While ultimately unsuccessful in changing the publisher's mind in this case, it did give them pause. Good developers were technical experts who put in long hours to support families, and, therefore, deserved respect.

Though the other strategies developers used were less explicitly about manhood, they were still grounded in the notion of good developers whose technical expertise and unfettered devotion to the job entitled them to control over the work. Control over the labor process was

crucial to developers' ability to enact their identities, and Fun Power workers sought to protect it.

Citing Prior Agreements

Developers had a number of strategies for maintaining the labor process that revolved around formal documents, such as Game Design Documents (GDD), which specified in detail the features and design of the games, and legal contracts with publishers. One of these strategies was to invoke the specifications laid out in the contract or GDD when publishers asked for more work, different features, or more labor-intensive character design, or otherwise requested something that would curtail creative control or require more output without additional compensation. For instance, in the following exchange, the team was discussing a game for which Aneewii, the publisher, had promised to provide rough models of fantasy characters for Fun Power to flesh out for use in the game. In practice, Aneewii had failed to provide the promised models but was still asking for a large number of character designs:

> Darius: I don't think it's gonna be hard to get them to give us more time to do 200 models.
>
> Brad: For free.
>
> Darius laughs, "Right – I think they'll be like, 'Sure – another month to do 200? No problem.
>
> Max K.: We're gonna need more money if they want us to do 200.
>
> Ryan: <shaking his head> 200 characters is a lot. I don't think we're contractually obligated to provide 200.
>
> Brad: We said in the GDD that the number of models was contingent on them providing the models. I can find it for you in the GDD, if you want.

Max K.: We should also send them some examples – like changing the skin color and textures – and let them know what they're going to get if we need to go to 200. I mean, we're going to have to do a lot of that just to get to 100. If they're fine with that, we can do it with just a little extra work.

Ryan: <to Darius> I think you should keep saying that the original number was contingent on them giving us the models.

Darius: Well, I'm just nervous about that because that's the number we came up with.

Max K.: Oh – so they took that to Warlocks of the West [the IP owners] and now Warlocks expects that.

Darius: Yeah – I'm thinking the number might not be in our contract, but in the contract between them and Warlocks.

Ryan: That's not our problem.

Brad: Yeah – we're not gonna lose our kneecaps if we don't have 200.

Here, the development team is discussing how to address and ameliorate or reject the demand for 200 character designs, given that Aneewii has not provided the promised models to them. The conversation begins with the team confirming that the publisher should be happy to give extra time to complete the extra work, given that the extra work was contingent on promised material that never materialized. Max K., the art director for Fun Power, argues that the extra work should also involve additional compensation. Max emphasizes that the developers work has value and they deserve to be paid for additional time spent designing 200 characters. In addition, he mentions that Fun Power should manage expectations for Aneewii by showing them that the characters will be variations on themes, rather than 200 unique designs. Additional discussion determines that the demand for 200 characters does not appear anywhere in the paperwork between Aneewii and Fun Power, but only between Aneewii and Warlocks of the West, which holds the intellectual property rights for the characters and

setting of the game.

This is an important point because Aneewii is beholden to Warlocks, and Fun Power may be able to use this as leverage to extract additional compensation for the additional work or to convince Aneewii to more readily accept Max's suggested workaround rather than demanding 200 individual character designs. As Brad notes, the Fun Power team is not "going to lose our kneecaps" but Aneewii, by implication, might, if it does not deliver. While publishers usually have greater leverage in dictating how a contract or GDD should be interpreted, knowledge of Aneewii's agreement with the owner of the licensed property provides a potential edge for the Fun Power team in their attempt to avoid extra work without extra compensation.

This situation represents an important variation on the developers' typical orientation to control of the labor process. While the team consistently expressed annoyance when publisher demands restricted or thwarted their creative control of original game ideas, the characters and setting for this particular game were owned by a third party licensor. In negotiations like this, control of the labor process is restricted by sedimented legal agreements surrounding the intellectual property, as well as the contract between Fun Power and Aneewii. When negotiating with publishers for licensed intellectual properties, Fun Power developers seemed more interested in minimizing workload (in this case, by changing skins and textures on characters) than in getting additional time for or control over the end product. This resembles output restriction by craft-workers and skilled factory workers (Burawoy 1979; Clawson 1980) in that the Fun Power workers are, understandably, more interested in adjusting their level of effort to match level of compensation. Because they have

limited control over the process or the product, they instead focus on not being controlled or taken advantage of by a publisher seeking more work than is deemed fair.

Protecting Autonomy in Contracts

A related strategy developers used to maintain control over the labor process involved writing favorable contract language. Though I was not directly privy to conversations about contracts, these negotiations were discussed, sometimes at great length, during development meetings and in other interactions among the Fun Power staff. Though it might seem that highly specific contracts would leave less room for publishers to argue that a milestone had not been met (and, therefore, payment would be withheld or delayed), the production process was also highly uncertain. Size constraints on a game to be downloaded, publisher preferences, unforeseen technical issues, or simple time crunches could yield a final game that looked very different from the GDD. Consequently, a highly detailed contract could also undermine developers' control of which features to keep or how to address technical problems.

Accordingly, Fun Power developers resisted attempts by publishers who wanted highly detailed, specific contract agreements. For instance, the following exchange occurred in a development meeting:

> Dillon: Has Hobgoblin started yet?
>
> Darius: Well, I guess we can talk about that. So, Nick apparently said he was going to wire us the payment for the last milestone Monday or Tuesday of *last week* and nothing else has happened. The other thing that's going on is that he's wanting to put not just the milestones but everything we're going to have for each one into the

contract. And I just think it's not in our interest to have something that granular into the contract.

Brad: Yeah – someone needs to tell Nick that that isn't going to work for him either when he wants to make changes – because you know he's going to want to make changes.

Darius: Right, but that doesn't count, of course. I'm just concerned that – we got into this with Steampunk Laboratory, for example, and they had this specific list of things they wanted us to do and if we did all kinds of other stuff, it didn't matter – they'd refuse the payment if we didn't have this one thing done.

Brad: It's hard for us to know how things are going to go at this point.

Max K.: Right – I mean, I think the one producer we used to work with who understood this was Guy, but he understood that we needed the flexibility to try to design the game and make sure it was fun. With Nick, it's not that he doesn't trust us but it really comes down to: do you think we can make this game and if you don't, why are you paying us to do it? I really don't see how games get made that way. I just don't. So...that's my position-slash-rant. <laughter>

Darius expresses reservations about the contract Nick is proposing because it includes a specific list of what will be included for each milestone, rather than a more general agreement on what stage of the product will be delivered when. A more typical contract specifies when the developers will produce widely-accepted milestones such as alpha (a preliminary version of the game in which features are still being added) and beta (a feature-complete version of the game, but still containing bugs and potential problems). The contract may generally outline what this means but will not specify exactly which features will be contained in alpha vs. beta. Max contrasts Nick with Guy, a producer who did not try to

wrest control over the labor process from Fun Power but rather allowed them considerable autonomy. Unlike Nick, who seems to distrust the Fun Power team, Guy, from Max's perspective, was a good producer because he recognized that developers, not publishers, were best suited to determining whether a game was fun. He acknowledged their technical expertise and dominance in the realm of game design. Max sees Nick, in contrast, as wrongly failing to bow to the team's expertise and attempting to exert unwarranted control over the labor process. The failure to acknowledge this expertise is an insult to their reputation as good developers – as men who exert control over technical problems in order to produce good games.

While producers may have features (mini-games, characters, plot elements) that they want to see in the game, insisting on these features can pose both technical and aesthetic problems for developers. A particular game mechanic might be simply too technically difficult to integrate[11] or a particular plot point or character might feel forced and out-of-place within the game world. While Brad suggests the granularity of the contract will also be a problem for Nick, Darius reminds him of the power differential between publishers and developers.

Publishers like Top Choice, with whom Fun Power worked on Steampunk Laboratory, have the financial leverage to insist on certain elements, even if they appear

[11] For instance, a mechanic or feature that seemed simple to producers, like making a character's clothing or hair customizable, could potentially require days or weeks of extra art and programming on the part of developers if there was nothing in the original code that supported character customization.

largely irrelevant to what the Fun Power developers would consider a viable alpha. Putting these specific requirements into a contract provides greater leverage for publishers to demand them before paying out, and less room for developers to argue that they are unnecessary or can or should reasonably be delayed. Ultimately, Nick prevailed in having a list of specific items attached to each milestone in the contract, though Fun Power was able to advocate for a review of these items before each contract:

> A: Are you still doing the really fine-grained contract stuff, then?
>
> Darius nods: Yeah. We did tell Nick, though, that if they wanted that level of granularity in it, we needed to be able to protect ourselves. After every milestone, the first thing we do is review to see if the next list still makes sense. 'Cause it's hard for us to even know how the project's going to go that far out.
>
> A: And was he receptive to that?
>
> Darius: Yeah – well, he said he was. They always are fine with an idea until it comes down to it. I think it's going to be an issue when we want to do one thing for a milestone and he wants us to focus on something else. Like, we'll be in the middle of one thing and we'll be like, we think we need to focus on finishing this up for the milestone and he'll be like "No, I really think you should do this other thing." So, you can kind of see what's going to happen, but there's not much you can do about it. Well, except not take the project, which we're actually thinking about if Galactic Emperors goes forward.

While Darius appears to feel that the feature review before each milestone provides some protection, he still expects Nick to use the highly granular contract as a means to control the labor process around each milestone. While Darius sees the review of elements as

preventing completely nonsensical requirements attached to each milestone, he is resigned to Nick exerting control over the product and process in ways that Fun Power would prefer to avoid. Darius sees this manifesting in ways that will ultimately not improve the product and will instead disrupt the labor process and slow development. The alternative is to turn down the project entirely, an extreme strategy Fun Power developers sometimes used to try to maintain control of the labor process.

Choosing Projects Carefully

While Fun Power occasionally had trouble finding new projects, the usual situation involved juggling several different games at once. This was a deliberate strategy on Mike's part:

> Mike: It's also different as a small company because we're usually working on 3 or 4 projects at a time. Unlike a big company like Chainsaw, where everyone's working on the same game, we usually have a few going at a time – which can be hard. But their payroll is about half a million and ours is going to be more like $50,000 for a month. So they have to go for the big projects. The small projects are easier to find, but they're less money. But it's less of a risk. We get paid by the publisher based on milestones. If a publisher doesn't pay on time and you only have one project. <he shrugs and shakes his head>
>
> A: You don't get paid?
>
> Mike: Right. Or if a publisher decides they don't want to release your project, that's a problem when you've only got one thing that you're working on. That is actually what happened with Castle Cleaners. But that turned out ok and we're – I don't want to say that we're porting it, but translating it to work on the DS and Wii and adding

> content that will take advantage of the features of those consoles so that it's fun to play.

While Mike acknowledges that big projects may be more lucrative, he emphasizes the bigger risk and the greater dependence on a single publisher with that type of arrangement. He emphasizes that total resource dependency on a single publisher (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) makes developers vulnerable, whereas taking on several small projects allows them breathing room when one publisher fails to pay or cancels a game. Mike sees this as a way to reduce overall dependency and, implicitly, increase control as well as stability.

While Fun Power occasionally had trouble finding new projects, developers were typically juggling several different projects. In practice, this did not protect Fun Power from financial precarity, because small publishers still could and did demand extra work in order to pay out. This often delayed production on other games which, consequently, delayed the payment on milestones for these projects, as well. Even when small publishers did not demand extra work, the time needed to complete multiple games sometimes required more person-hours than there were developers to give them. Despite this, Fun Power staff seemed hesitant when opportunities arose to take on a large, single-client project:

> Darius: SPH [Secret Playhouse Games] got the license for Muscle King [a popular cartoon from the 80s]…
>
> A: I was wondering if it was Galactic Emperors like Muscle King! <We both laugh>
>
> Darius: Yeah – it's Muscle King. They did an RFP a while ago for a Facebook game. It'd be turn-based – actually, it's a lot like the Magicians and Monsters game we did. We can't use the code because of legal stuff with Aneewii, but we have the expertise. And it's a million-dollar game and a three-year contract. The million dollars is for the

> first release and then we'd basically be on retainer for updates and maintaining the game. That would be enough to keep up going – and it'd be really nice to only be working on one game. Of course, it's also a little nerve-wracking because you have even less room to negotiate. If they want something done for a milestone, you don't have leeway because they're the only ones paying out. You have to get paid. So there's that.

Despite the difficulties Fun Power encountered with juggling multiple clients, Darius still shows some reluctance to take on only one game at a time. Though he seems wistful about the potential reduction in workload, he worries that an exclusive contract would give a publisher leverage to take control of decisions about how and when the work is done. Even when a lucrative option that would offer a lower workload presented itself, control over the labor process and resistance to dependence on a single entity were still significant factors in accepting or seeking out a project. While Mike mentions stability in as a factor in his assessment of how many projects to take on, Darius focuses exclusively on "room to negotiate." While some of this concern is no doubt rooted in problems that might arise if a single client failed to pay on time, it is also explicitly tied to resisting dependence and exerting control over the labor process.

This emphasis on resisting control was also evident in Mike's long-term focus on attaining independence from publishers and being able to self-publish games. The desire to eventually self-publish led to an emphasis on games where Fun Power would receive royalty payments, instead of simply doing work-for-hire where the budget for each game covered only the work done on that project. For instance, in talking to Darius about how it would be nice to get a royalty agreement for a project they were working on, Mike said, "Except that

Gameco doesn't do royalty agreements if it's not the developer's IP. Which is why we need to only do our own IP's if we keep working with publishers." Choosing projects that could potentially involve royalties was another way in which Fun Power developers sought to maintain greater control over the labor process.

Carefully choosing projects was not limited to the size of the project or its potential for royalties. Fun Power developers also developed a sense of which publishers were likely to respect their autonomy, not quibble about milestones, pay on time, and otherwise allow developers more creative control over the production process. For instance, Mike spoke about some projects Fun Power was doing with Goliath Games:

> Mike: I've heard things about them [Goliath Games] from other developers — and publishers that they're bad to deal with.
>
> A: Oh, really? Like how?
>
> Mike: That their production is poorly managed. Other developers have said they're the same way. And I've heard some stories from Gameco about them being bad to deal with. They have an internal development team that they do games with, too.
>
> A: Ohhh.
>
> Mike: But they're really bad about working with other developers. I mean, Gameco, Top Choice and Goliath Games — three completely different publishers to work with. If I had to take my pick, well, obviously, I'd take Gameco — but I'd take Top Choice over Goliath. At least Top Choice gave feedback. Gameco is great, though. They're always telling us, "You guys are the best." They've actually whittled the number of developers they work with down to three or four. The only issue with them is that they've been slow telling us what project they want us to work on next. We gave them like 10 different ideas and they're just taking forever to tell us what they want us to

> do. I mean, it's like, "C'mon! Just let us know!" Hell, I wouldn't mind if they tell us to do all 10!

Gameco was a good publisher because they, and especially Guy, the producer Fun Power worked with at Gameco, were content to relinquish most of the control over the labor process to the developers. They respected the Fun Power team's expertise in game development and trusted them to design and create good games without significant oversight. In contrast, Goliath and Top Choice insisted on giving more input about how the game should be produced and what it would look like. Amongst these, Mike still prefers Top Choice, which gave concrete feedback on what they liked and did not, over Goliath, which gave little guidance beforehand but took issue with creative decisions made by the Fun Power Team.

While Fun Power's financial state did not allow it to entirely reject projects from any of these developers, there was a clear order of preference that revolved around hands-off producers who trusted the developers' work. Fun Power workers strove to maintain good relationships with clients who were or had the potential to be good publishers – those who deferred to the Fun Power team on matters of labor process. For instance, on a royalty-only project with a publisher that had the potential to lead to additional work, Max, the art director, advocated for spending time on the project, despite the team being spread thin on other paying work:

> I just don't want it to get to the point where they feel like they're not getting what they want and give up on us. I mean, it's not like they're paying us, I know. And we told them it's not like you're paying us so we're going to have to do this when we have the time and the people available, but still I'd like to get all the levels greyed out. It's still a partnership and I think we should treat it like that.

Max is concerned about the relationship, in the long term. Even though this project was not currently funding any of the developers' salaries, it could potentially lead to other work. Maintaining a relationship with a client who allowed Fun Power to make decisions about the process and product was a long-term investment in retaining control of the labor process. Mike also showed willingness to offer compromises to publishers who were easy to work with:

> A: How have the other projects been going?
>
> Mike: Cog Castle is great. I don't know if I told you about this — we were behind on Cog Castle because of Steampunk Lab stuff <laughs> so I offered to do an iPad version for free in exchange for another month – and we would have all the versions - <he ticks off on his fingers> iPad, iPhone, PC, Mac, and Flash — come out at the same time. We won't get any money for it, but we get about a 40% royalty. And they were pretty happy with that. They really liked it.

Mike offered a compromise for Cog Castle — a game on which the producer was allowing a great deal of autonomy — because work on Steampunk Lab — a heavily micro-managed project — was delaying it. The compromise both kept a more laissez-faire (and therefore "good") producer happy and set up a royalty arrangement for Fun Power. No similar compromises were offered to the publisher of Steampunk Lab.

Fun Power developers collectively used in a number of strategies to retain control of the labor process and maintain relative autonomy and independence from publisher oversight. While some of these strategies also sought to ensure financial stability and timely payments, control over the labor process and freedom from oversight were top priorities. These negotiations incorporated notions of manhood and technical expertise implicit in the

image of a good developer. The notions of “good developer” and “good publisher” arose from collective identity work that undergirded negotiations with publishers (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). These negotiation strategies arose from and were driven by valued identities that developers sought to protect.

DISCUSSION

While most recent literature on the labor process focuses on the deskilling of work in blue collar and service jobs, conditions of modern, neoliberal, global capitalism have produced situations in some professional jobs where the labor process is contested. Within the games industry, publishers externalize risk by contracting out games to independent studios like Fun Power. While this subjects independent developers to considerable financial instability and precarity if a game is canceled or production moves more slowly than expected, it also gives them considerable control over the labor process. At the same time, publishers want to control as much of the labor process as possible to ensure they get a game good enough to please their customers without spending extra on quality and polish that fails to enhance profits.

In this chapter, I sought to answer the questions: How do game developers seek to resist publisher interference and maintain control of the labor process? How is this process driven by their identity investments? Developers engage in collective identity work about what makes a good developer. Good developers display high levels of technical expertise and are willing and able to devote a great deal of time to projects, beyond what is expected. Their technical talent is innate and their ability to devote a great deal of time to projects is what

makes them deserving. This image of developers also restricts the identity primarily to middle-class white men who have had enough access to technology to develop skills that *appear* innate (Chambliss 1989). Developers also engage in identity work concerning publishers and publisher representatives: relaying information from other industry professionals about how laissez-faire or hands-on a particular publisher tends to be, ridiculing publisher demands and knowledge in ways that pointed out the developers' own superior expertise, and deriding publisher representatives for making requests developers see as unnecessary or harmful to the quality of the game or the pace of development.

These notions of good developers and good publishers set the stage for the negotiations between Fun Power workers and publishers over the labor process. I have identified a number of strategies that the developers used to negotiate with publishers and to make sense of and reinforce their position in relation to publishers. First, developers saw themselves as possessing superior expertise because of their identities as good developers, including skills and experience in creating games, but also diffuse statuses that gave them more credibility as technical experts. They drew on this expertise to minimize or dismiss claims from publishers. Developers also used contracts or GDDs to justify using features that publishers disliked or to refuse to do additional work on a particular part of the game. Similarly, when negotiating contracts with publishers, developers actively sought to avoid detailed schedules or lists of features that the various games and milestones would include. Instead, developers negotiated for more general contracts so milestones could be adjusted and focus could be on making fun or good games, instead of just cranking out a pre-determined list of features. The developers also identified publishers and projects based on

the extent to which they allowed the Fun Power team primary control over creating the game. Projects with "good" publishers who allowed developers more control were more desirable than projects with publishers who wanted more input into the game development process. Likewise, games that were original ideas of the team were more desirable than games based on licensed properties (like a cartoon or board game).

All of these strategies were rooted in and reinforced gendered assumptions about who the developers were and their right to control over the labor process. While these negotiations implicated identity contests, they were inter-organizational ones aimed at preserving the status quo for developers, rather than intra-organizational contests that might have led to significant change at Fun Power. While some limited research has introduced the idea of gendered negotiations (Kolb and McGinn 2009; Kolb 2009), this previous research has focused primarily on how gendered organizations constrain negotiations by women. In this chapter, I have demonstrated that gendered identity investments informed and conditioned negotiations that primarily took place between groups of men. The notion that developers were entitled to make decisions about the labor process rested on an image of manly experts with the knowhow to easily control code and programs that others found bewildering. This depiction of their right to control and to resist being controlled by publishers undergirded the negotiation strategies that they used. This also manifested in the identity work they did with regard to publishers.

While these strategies arose out of my observations at Fun Power, negotiations over the labor process are present in a number of contexts beyond the games industry. As global competition has increased and capital has become increasingly mobile and detached from

sites of production, professional career trajectories look significantly different than they did thirty years ago (Williams, Miller and Kilanski 2012; Williams 2013). More professionals, particularly in knowledge-based and technical fields, find themselves in organizations where they work for a smaller company with a variable workforce that performs contract work for larger clients.

Given these arrangements, negotiations over the labor process between clients and contractors are likely to be widespread. For instance, a research organization contracting with a county parks and recreation office might negotiate over what kinds of questions will be asked on a survey, or a computer security firm might negotiate with a client over what kinds of encryption algorithms will best protect their information. One can easily imagine these negotiations involving experts citing their credentials to make a point or seeking to write-up contracts that give them as much autonomy as possible, while meeting resistance from clients. At the same time, the identity investments of workers within these organizations might be very different from what persisted at Fun Power or within the games industry. While still reflecting the patriarchal culture in which it existed, negotiation strategies within a female-dominated organization might be less likely to reflect and be grounded in the idea of a male ideal worker.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: GENDER AND IDENTITY REWARDS IN NEGOTIATED ORDERS

I began this project with an interest in how people who make video games relate to the often aggressively violent, misogynist content in AAA video games. Though I ended up studying people who made games with much less violent action and far less sexualized characters, I still found that manhood and manhood acts (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009) informed and conditioned the interactions that took place within this setting. Despite making games about cleaning castles instead of shooting enemies, I found that workers who make games invest heavily in their identities as game developers. These identities are not gender neutral but are heavily entwined with manhood.

Workers accept grueling hours and lower pay than in conventional software jobs in exchange for opportunities to validate these identities in an environment of masculine camaraderie. When game developers leave the industry, their exit accounts, particularly men's, affirm their continued connection to and investment in gaming and gamer identities. Finally, these (implicitly male) identities become resources that workers draw upon in negotiations with publishers over control of the labor process.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by providing a brief review of each of the preceding substantive chapters. I will then highlight the contributions my research makes to the sociological literature. First, I will demonstrate how my research refines our understanding of how identity rewards secure worker consent and enforce organizational control through the notion of identity wages. Next, I will show how my research enhances our understanding of the importance of organizational exit accounts and their role in

relinquishing or maintaining identity rewards. Finally, I will establish how my research offers an extension of negotiated order theory by demonstrating how negotiations around identity rewards are shaped by gender privilege and oppression.

CHAPTER RECAP

In chapter 2, I explored the question of why highly skilled workers accept lower wages or more grueling work schedules in the games industry than they might receive elsewhere in the software industry. As I showed, the answer lies in greater availability of a particular type of identity rewards, or identity wages, that capitalists offer and workers accept in lieu of higher pay. Within the games industry, major game companies are aware that workers seek out games work for psychological rewards, as well as economic ones, and tailor their recruitment pitches accordingly. Even at smaller companies like Fun Power, management cultivates an atmosphere of masculine camaraderie focused around gamer identity, such that the (predominantly male) workers are able to receive identity wages as men and as gamers. While women who work in games are able to secure identity wages as gamers – and even through manhood acts – these wages are less available. The identity of "gamer" is tied to manhood, meaning women have fewer resources with which to signify a gamer identity and are more likely to meet with challenges when they try to claim related identity wages. Similarly, though a female body does not disqualify women from engaging in manhood acts, their attempts to claim related identity wages through acting tough, strong, or exerting dominance or control is less likely to be accepted and will be perceived differently.

In short, attractive identity wages attracted skilled male workers at lower wages, but created barriers to women's full participation and inclusion in game development jobs.

In chapter 3, I further investigated gender differences in identity rewards and investments as they play out in workers' exit accounts. High uncertainty, externalization of risk by publishers, and financial precarity mean high turnover and inter-firm mobility within the games industry in general, and tech in particular (Vallas 2012; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012). A number of male developers at Fun Power sought employment elsewhere after the company faced a shortfall that led to unpaid and underpaid wages. The exit accounts for these departures emphasized the lack of wages and the related threat to independence or breadwinning. At the same time, they also emphasized the developers' continued investment in games and gamer identity. In contrast, women who left industry jobs cited family and childcare responsibilities, or sexual harassment. These accounts did not mention wages or function to preserve a connection to game culture.

In chapter 4, I examined how the gendered identity of "developer" functions as a resource in negotiations over the labor process. I identified a number of strategies that developers use to negotiate with publishers, including asserting technical expertise, citing prior agreements, protecting autonomy in contracts, and choosing projects carefully. All of these strategies sought to protect developer autonomy and control over the labor process within game development. These strategies were also grounded in ideas about an ideal developer (a man who had expert understanding of the game development process and the technology involved within it) and ideas of "good publishers" – those who allowed developers to maintain control of the labor process – and "bad publishers" – those who

sought to put considerable restrictions on developers' autonomy. Collective identity-work strategies, including defining and policing good developers, ridiculing publisher expertise and knowledge, and identifying good and bad publishers, undergirded negotiations with publishers.

Collectively, these chapters demonstrate how gendered identity investments govern the entrance into the games industry, the negotiation of work while there, and even developers' exit from industry jobs. Developers are attracted to work in the games industry, despite worse pay and hours, by opportunities to have developer identity affirmed. These opportunities arise in an atmosphere of masculine camaraderie that incorporates elements of a gendered gamer culture. This identity is more accessible to white men without childcare responsibility and who have had access to technology for long periods. Good developers have "natural" capability at art or programming and are willing and able to put in extra hours. When developers leave the industry, men mention their ongoing connection to gamer culture and emphasize the need for financial independence or to support dependents. Women mention the conflict between industry culture and work-family balance or the presence of sexual harassment in a male-dominated environment. Gendered identity investments shape participation in the games industry during all phases of employment.

IDENTITY WAGES AND WORKER CONSENT

Organizations attract members and secure their cooperation in part through identity rewards (Anteby 2008; Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016). Identity rewards are "what an organization offers to participants by way of opportunities to generate positive self-

regard" (Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016: 7). Even in organizations of work, identity rewards may accompany economic ones — particularly for skilled and privileged groups of workers. Management may deliberately provide opportunities for identity rewards as a form of control, as did employers within the games industry (Alvesson 2001; Alvesson and Wilmot 2002; Anteby 2008).

Further, contests arising over who receives identity rewards or what kinds of identity rewards are available to whom can lead to organizational change. For instance, while identity rewards may be used to secure cooperation from workers in unskilled or low-skilled jobs, if capitalists find it expedient to remove these rewards, workers who resist can be replaced (Schwalbe, McTague, and Parrotta 2016). In contrast, replacing highly skilled workers is time-consuming and costly, and their commitment is particularly crucial to a high-quality product (Cooper 2000; Anteby 2008; Gotsi et al. 2010; Mitchell and Meacham 2011). Thus, identity rewards are particularly effective for eliciting commitment from and control of knowledge workers, who are largely skilled enough to resist more direct and coercive means of managerial control.

Contests over identity rewards can also drive organizational change. As Schwalbe and his co-authors describe, policy changes at a Green Grocer, a large, national, organic grocery chain threatened the "green identities" of workers. Workers initially felt that working at Green Grocer was an expression of their environmental consciousness and support of organic and local farming. As the company moved away from supporting local farmers and programs that minimized food waste, workers found their identity rewards under threat. Gradually, they began to unionize. The company responded by harassing and firing pro-union workers

while offering a generous health plan that helped offset the loss of identity rewards with economic ones.

While research has focused on how identity rewards can be used as a means of managerial control or contests over them a driver of organizational change, less emphasis has been placed on how identity rewards function as compensation for work. The Green Grocer case hints at this. In addition, Anteby's (2008) study of an aeronautics plant showed that workers were partially compensated by demonstrating their skill and creativity through making take-home projects or "homers" with company materials. He concludes that control through identity rewards "generates affiliation with a collective to which managers need not belong" and is, therefore "closer in form to monetary incentive control than to commitment- or culture-based controls" (215). Similarly, Kolb's (2014) ethnography of domestic violence advocates and counselors found they received "moral wages" that allowed them to feel like good and compassionate people and helped compensate them for low paid and emotionally grueling work. While all jobs may offer some form of identity rewards, many fewer can entice workers to forgo better wages and working conditions in exchange for such rewards. My research expands on these ideas by establishing a general concept of identity wages to explain how identity rewards can constitute part of workers' compensation packages. My findings also identify processes through which managers offer and workers accept them as part of their compensation.

The game developers I observed and spoke with were attracted by identity rewards, or identity wages, so much so that they were willing to accept lower salaries than they might have found in other computer software or hardware jobs. These wages were not moral, but

did allow developers to enact valued identities through their work and in the workplace. Organizational higher-ups were aware of developers' identification with the work, and tailored recruitment pitches and organizational environments accordingly. Workers competed for jobs in the industry and emphasized the opportunities to collect identity wages when explaining their enjoyment of their jobs.

While my research focused on the games industry, offering and accepting identity wages can be seen in a variety of other settings. For instance, a number of journalists have raised questions about the exploitive nature of unpaid internships in industries such as fashion (e.g., Elliott 2010; Nat 2016). Young graduates in fields like fashion design take on internships with major brands that offer no pay and grueling hours in hopes that they might be rewarded with highly competitive paid positions. The internships offer experience – but also bragging rights and prestige associated with working for high profile companies such as Alexander McQueen and Harper's Bazaar. This works out beautifully for the fashion houses that rely heavily on unpaid intern labor and are, presumably, able to save enormously on labor costs as a result.

The concept of identity wages can also be applied to understanding the expansion of freelance journalism. Though exact numbers are elusive because of the decentralized nature of freelance work, the decline of print media and the rise of Internet news outlets is generally thought to have expanded the number of freelance writers (Alterman 2008). Online news sites often encourage submissions for free or offer very low rates to journalists but emphasize the amount of "exposure" or readers that the site has. While a number of journalists object to this situation, sites like the *Huffington Post* that run entirely on unpaid submissions remain in

business. Freelance writers who work for low or no wages are being compensated with identity wages. They can tell people they have published a piece at the *Atlantic* or the *Huffington Post* (e.g., Coates 2013). This forces other potential contributors to submit for free or accept very low wages.

These examples, along with the case of the games industry, reveal the role that negotiating worker consent through identity wages plays in reproducing inequality. By tailoring recruitment and work culture to allow for identity wages, capitalists can successfully elicit cooperation from workers for lower wages (or no wages) than their labor would bring elsewhere. At the same time, when workers accept lower wages or work only for identity wages, they diminish the economic bargaining power of other workers in the same industry. In addition, when workers accept identity wages in lieu of higher salaries, they push out less economically privileged workers who cannot rely on family resources to compensate for lower wages.

My research contributes to our understanding of identity-based management by offering a process through which managers and workers negotiate consent that hinges on identity-based compensation. Rather than shaping workers' identities to elicit identification with the organization or the work, as in much of the literature on identity regulation and identity-based management, managers offer identity wages to harness existing identities and offer workers opportunities to validate them through the work or in the workplace. The opportunities to collect identity wages may be so prized that workers compete for the privilege and feel lucky and grateful to do underpaid work making profits for other people.

GENDER, IDENTITY REWARDS, AND EXIT ACCOUNTS

Within modern organizations, particularly modern organizations of work, stable, long-term affiliation with a single organization is less common than in the past (Vallas 2012; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012; Williams 2013). Because identity rewards are often conditional on membership within an organization, leaving often means relinquishing those rewards. Often, those who leave are able to find similar rewards elsewhere, but willingly giving up membership associated with a valued identity can raise questions from others or a threaten a sense of consistency in the self-concept (Gecas 1991; Gecas and Burke 1995). Consequently, leaving requires an exit account. Exit accounts work to explain the transition from an old identity to a new one.

The literature on religious deconversion or deaffiliation has explored how people who leave a religious group or community make sense of the change in their identity (e.g., Bromley 1998). For instance, Davidman and Greil (2007) explore the accounts of former Orthodox Jews who have left the Haredi community or Judaism altogether. They find that those who have left struggle to find their way out because no script exists for leaving, but make sense of their changes in identity by emphasizing that they began questioning their way of life at an early age. Having left, they portray themselves as brave, strong individuals who found the courage to leave their old lives behind, reaping identity rewards for their break with Haredim.

Arendell's (1992, 1995) work on divorced fathers provides illustration of how people give exit accounts and make sense of identity transitions. Her exploration of divorced fathers' accounts of their relationships with their former wives and children reveals that these men

felt like being a father and husband was a crucial part of their manhood. The men perceived divorce and the accompanying change in child custody, living arrangements, and requirements of child support payments as threats to their manhood. At the same time, many of these men largely relinquished relationships with their children after the divorce. They re-framed this behavior as being manly because it was a way of resisting their wives' control over their relationships with their children. In other words, the men gave exit accounts that acknowledged their change in status as husbands and fathers, but sought to retain identity rewards as men who could not be controlled by others.

In the work and organizations literature, scholarship on exit accounts appears primarily within career studies. Career change narratives often draw on cultural images of manhood, as well as neoliberal scripts about brave individuals taking control of their destinies by shaping their own paths to meaningful work (Gergen 1992; Roper, Ganesh, and Inkson 2010; LaPointe and Heilmann 2014). Women who give accounts of career change refer to these same scripts, but often offer gendered reasons for switching from one field or career path to another, such as needing flexibility for childcare or lacking the appropriate "toughness" for the job (Grove 1992; LaPointe 2013). Regardless, most accounts attempt to create a coherent, consistent identity through explaining why the worker was poorly-suited to the previous career or is better-suited to the new one. No existing studies focus on workers who are changing career paths, but wish to maintain a connection to their former professional identity.

At the same time, such accounts are well within the scope of Scott and Lyman's (1968) original formulation. As they point out, "*every account is the manifestation of*

underlying negotiation of identities" (59). People use accounts to justify or excuse behavior associated with a particular account, but may also engage in what Scott and Lyman call "identity-switching" where they explain that they are actually inhabiting a different identity than the one for which they are being called to account. Developers who leave the games industry engage in a kind of identity-switching when called to account by explaining that they are not disillusioned former members of a subculture, but, instead, committed members who were forced to leave by circumstance. The literature on exit accounts may miss these kinds of identity-switching accounts because respondents intentionally distinguish themselves from those who are transitioning from one identity to another.

My research contributes to and expands the literature by examining how exit accounts can be used to maintain, rather than repudiate or relinquish, an organizational identity. Further, my research suggests this process is gendered, just as organizational identities are inescapably gendered. When a job offers identity wages as a major part of the compensation package, workers may be reluctant to relinquish these rewards, even if they choose – or are forced – to change organizational affiliations. In these cases, exit accounts may serve to reinforce the associated identity while justifying the reason for departure. These justifications often call on motives or obligations deriving from another identity held by the worker – such as parent, child, father, or student.

For instance, while one accountancy job may seem much like another, working as an accountant for a small, non-profit that offers home loans to recent immigrants may offer significant identity wages not available to an accountant working for a large, national banking chain. Switching from the first job to the second would require an account. Working

for a non-profit that helps immigrants with home loans signifies a certain moral identity and orientation towards social and economic justice. Working for a large, national bank does not – and may even undermine this identity.

An accountant who makes this switch and wishes to maintain his moral identity will certainly need to offer an account. For example, he might say that his wife became pregnant with twins and they needed a significantly higher income to support their prospective offspring. This account draws implicitly on vocabularies of motive attached to the accountant's other identities as "husband" and "prospective father." In contrast, if the accountant making this job switch is a married (heterosexual) woman who is pregnant with twins, the account may not be as readily accepted. People may ask her why her husband is not seeking a more lucrative job and why she is trading a job that may allow more flexible hours for a corporate job with potentially higher pressure and more demanding hours. These two people cannot use the same account to repair a moral identity that was supported by their former organizational affiliation because the account draws on vocabularies of motive attached to the person's status as a man or a woman.

As negotiated order theory has shown, organizations are patterns of actions and relationships based on shared understandings and affiliation. Joan Acker's (1990; 2006) theoretical contributions to organizational theory demonstrated that these patterns of action depend on and reinforce expectations about what kinds of people will fulfill different roles within these organizations – specifically, expectations about gender, race, age, and other identities tied to systems of privilege and oppression. As Schwalbe and his colleagues (2016) have demonstrated, affiliation with an organization bestows an identity, typically with

attendant identity rewards. When people leave an organization that bestows identity rewards, they are usually called upon to give an account for why they no longer want or need the attendant identity rewards. As the career studies literature shows, these accounts tend, unsurprisingly, to reflect gendered narratives for why the old job and identity was inappropriate or the new identity is more appropriate.

As my research demonstrates, exit accounts may also be used to maintain the identity associated with previous organizational affiliation. These accounts are still gendered because the organizational identities themselves are gendered. When organizational identities are tied to manhood acts, those who are more easily able to signify manhood will be better able to signify the desired identity than those with fewer resources available to do so. In addition, the loss of an organizational identity tied to manhood may be more distressing to men, for whom the identities overlap, than for women, for whom the identities are separate (Thoits 1983; 1991). In addition, the loss of a work-related identity for a woman may be less distressing than for a man, in that married women generally benefit less from these identities than men, particularly when they are primary childcarers (Thoits 1986; 1992). Consequently, women may be less invested in giving accounts that preserve such organizational identities, as well as having less ability to do so.

Gender is not the only system of oppression that shapes organizational inequality regimes and the distribution of identity rewards. Race, age, sexuality, and disability-status can affect access to identity rewards within organizations and, consequently, also shape access to resources that would allow workers to maintain their identities as they leave an organization.

This could apply in other organizational contexts and with other identities, as well. For instance, several highly publicized cases involving police mistreatment of Black professors demonstrate that whiteness is a considerable resource in signifying academic status (Phillips 2009; Rodriguez 2015; Hauser 2016). In addition, Black academics report that they are less likely to be viewed as authority figures by students and by colleagues (Chesler and Young 2007; Gutierrez y Muhs et al. 2012). Further, even highly qualified Black applicants who get positions over white applicants are often accused of being "affirmative action hires." If a white professor leaves a prestigious university and goes to teach at a less prestigious one, but wishes to maintain the identity of a serious, high-status academic, she might offer the account that she wanted to be closer to her ill and aging parents. A Black professor who makes the same move would be more likely to face skepticism (rooted in racism) if he said that his career was going well, but that he had moved to take care of his ill and senile parents.

My research contributes to knowledge about exit accounts and identities by demonstrating that those who leave one organization for another sometimes wish to maintain an identity related to their previous affiliation. Rather than accounting for a change in identity, accounts may explain why a member had to leave despite his or her ongoing affinity for the associated identity. Further, my research shows that the resources available to maintain these identities are not equally distributed. Those who are minorities in a particular type of organization will have more difficulty signifying a related identity once they give up their position, but may also be less invested in doing so.

NEGOTIATING GENDER REGIMES

Negotiated order theory arose out of the work of Anselm Strauss and his colleagues. Negotiated order holds that all social order is a result of negotiation, not fixed rules (Strauss 1978). Past negotiations become taken-for-granted assumptions or rules that may constrain present negotiations – a process called sedimentation (Busch 1982). The theory serves as a symbolic interactionist answer to other organizational theories that reify organizations and elide human actors. At the same time, a persistent critique of negotiated order theory has been its inattention to power and systems of inequality.

Very little work on negotiated order has explicitly considered how gender conditions and constrains negotiated orders. In the management literature on negotiation, Deborah Kolb and her co-authors have suggested that gender operates to structure negotiations. For instance, they point out that men's negotiations for paid family leave are constrained by conceptions of women as primary caretakers, as well as how women will be perceived differently when they negotiate for salary raises than men (Kolb and McGinn 2009; Kolb 2009). While a useful start, their work has been theoretical or relied on reviews of existing literature. In addition, their work focuses on how individuals negotiate various problems and obstacles within the workplace, rather than on meso-level negotiations between intra- or inter-organizational groups.

My work expands on this work by bringing data to bear on how gender shapes and constrains negotiations between inter-organizational groups. When groups with competing interests negotiate, they do so in particular structural contexts — such as a capitalist society or a sexist gender order (Strauss 1978). These contexts, however, are not mere backdrops or

stage setting. Those involved in negotiation do so from perspectives that are profoundly shaped by these contexts. This will, in turn, shape the negotiation strategies used by participants. Identities that confer power and privilege become both resources in larger negotiations and sites of negotiation themselves. Negotiations are not just about "who gets what" or "who gets to do what" in the immediate case but "what kind of people will get or get to do what." All negotiations have identity implications.

For instance, if a university's administration entertains implementing a standardized syllabus across all sections of a course taught by tenured faculty, the predominantly white faculty may invoke their status as intellectuals and experts to assert that they should be solely in control of how to develop a syllabus. While whiteness may never arise explicitly during negotiations over the syllabus, white professors tend to command more authority and respect than non-white professors (Chesler and Young 2007). In addition, they are perceived as being smarter and being more neutral than nonwhite faculty. Consequently, negotiations that present the faculty as experts implicitly reinforce ideas about whites as intellectuals and experts, even if the only intended aim of faculty is to preserve their autonomy and discretion over what they will teach. Struggles over organizational policies and practices have identity implications, even if these are unintended.

My research contributes to the literature on negotiated order, inequality and identities by demonstrating how privileged groups within organizations, such as men, draw on and use privileged identities during negotiations with other organizational actors. As Acker (1990; 2006) has demonstrated, organizations are not neutral in regard to power and inequality.

Rather, they are composed of patterns of joint action that are sustained by ideological beliefs in the greater worth, competence, and deservingness in certain social categories.

When groups within an organization are homogenous in terms of race or gender, this has implications for the strategies they use and the consequences of those strategies. Similarity creates an atmosphere of comfort and an assurance that colleagues will agree on their interests and work together more easily in formulating plans (Kanter 1977; Jackall 1988). The same ingroup shorthand and taken-for-granted understandings that smooth interaction reflect collective identity work and shared understandings among the group about who they are and what kinds of identity rewards they deserve. These understandings, in turn, shape the image the group presents to others, either within or outside the organization, when they negotiate to protect identity rewards.

EVALUATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

My research examined how game developers make sense of and maintain control over their work in the games industry. My analysis of the role of identity rewards and privileged identities in the negotiation of workplace processes contributes to our knowledge of identity rewards in the workplace. I demonstrated that identity wages help managers and owners attract highly skilled workers and secure their cooperation. Further, workers draw on valued identities in negotiations with other organizational actors and seek to preserve connections to these identities even as they depart an organization. Future research might usefully apply these insights to further expand our knowledge of the role of identity wages and valued identities in negotiated orders.

One limitation of my study is that my data come from the study of a single company. While I attended weekly game development meetings, development calls and meetings for several individual games, lunches, and voice recording sessions for games for three years, providing significant depth of data collection, I was not able to gain entry to another game development company, despite numerous attempts to do so. Comparisons with a different kind of development studio — for example, a large development company creating hardcore games —may have led to fruitful comparisons and insights into gender and identity processes as they unfold across different types of organizations.

Another limitation of my research is that I spoke with relatively few women involved in the industry. Only one woman worked at Fun Power during my observations and I was able to find only four other women who worked in the industry and were willing to be interviewed. Additional exploration of women's experiences in development and other highly-skilled, high-status, male-dominated industries might lead to a fuller picture of how gender and gendered identities constrain and inform negotiated orders within these industries.

A third limitation is that my analysis focused primarily on gender, rather than taking a more intersectional view of identity and inequality. The games industry is predominantly white, as well as predominantly male, and gamer culture is notoriously homophobic. Speaking to more non-white and openly gay or lesbian developers might have provided additional insights into how identity wages are paid out unequally and how negotiations shape the identity rewards available to different groups within a negotiated order.

Future research could address and expand on some of the issues raised above. For instance, future studies might compare how identity wages are negotiated in larger, more

stable organizations as compared to smaller, less financially secure ones. Subsequent studies might also examine how identity rewards shape negotiation processes within female-dominated or gender-balanced contexts. Another fruitful avenue for future research might be the exploration of negotiated orders and identity processes as they pertain to race and sexual identity. Research on these topics could help further our understanding of how the negotiation of identity rewards is implicated in the reproduction of inequality.

In this project, I have examined how gendered identity rewards are implicated in negotiations over workers' entry into, exit from, and control of the labor process within a highly-skilled, male-dominated industry. My work contributes to sociological knowledge about how collective identity work and identity rewards shape and reproduce inequality within negotiated orders. When employers offer identity wages to attract highly-skilled, privileged workers, this both allows capitalists to offer fewer material benefits to workers and creates barriers to the inclusion and participation of workers who are less able to access these identity wages. The overlap of privileged identities with worker identities are reproduced in the collective identity work and identity contests workers engage in to secure or protect identity rewards. Even when privileged workers leave their jobs, they give accounts that seek to preserve their identity, despite their departure. Understandably, less privileged workers feel less commitment to these identities and are more willing to relinquish them and less able to retain them.

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