Dealing with Reality: Market Demands, Artistic Integrity, and Identity Work in Reality Television Production

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Abstract

Cultural industry workers at times compromise the values and tastes that are important parts of their artistic identities to accommodate commercial demands. I argue that workers resolve frustrations that arise from such compromises through identity work, individuals' active construction of their identities in social contexts. Using ethnographic data from fieldwork at a reality television production company, I describe two identity work strategies, distancing and evaluative tweaking, that workers use to maintain their artistic integrity despite producing work that does not meet their standards of quality. The manner through which these strategies emerged during micro social interaction differed between managers and non-managers. Managers used distancing and evaluative tweaking to simultaneously do identity work and regulate their employees' identities when justifying decisions that threatened shared values and tastes. On the other hand, employees distanced themselves from managers while venting to colleagues about managers' decisions that conflicted with their idiosyncratic values and tastes. These dynamics are illustrated through a setting that has received insufficient ethnographic attention, reality television production. Some reality television workers prefer to portray "real" and "authentic" situations. These workers employ identity work strategies to maintain artistic integrity when distorting reality to create the drama and conflict they consider marketable.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the growth of cultural and creative industries, particularly in broadcasting and audio-visual media, has expanded artistic employment in the US and other developed countries (Menger, 2006). Consequently, there has been an increasing interest in analyzing work and labor in these industries. Scholars writing through a critical lens have discussed the precariousness of maintaining

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employment (Gill and Pratt, 2008) and challenges facing labor unions in cultural industries (Bonacich, 2005). Others have conducted empirical research to describe how cultural industry workers coordinate their ideas and activities (Bechky, 2006; Long Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010), and how workers advance or gain prominence in their careers (Bielby and Bielby, 1999; Jones, 2002, 2010). However, empirical research about how these workers feel about or subjectively experience their jobs is rare.

Hesmondalgh and Baker (2010) have begun to fill this gap, using qualitative data to analyze workers' emotional responses to their working conditions in three cultural industries: television, recording, and magazines. They find that while some valued the freedom and flexibility of their work, others were troubled by low wages and job insecurity. Furthermore, workers felt highly ambivalent about participating in the networking and socializing necessary for career development. In a related article, Hesmondalgh and Baker (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of workers at a television talent show. They argue that these workers undergo a great amount of emotional strain, dealing with contestants and maintaining good working relations with other producers. While these pieces contribute valuable information towards understanding workers' subjective experiences, they focus primarily on how workers respond to labor conditions, only tangentially engaging with issues of creativity and self-expression.

Creativity, among other non-pecuniary benefits, is a central feature drawing workers to seek employment in cultural industries (Lee, 2008; McRobbie, 2002; Neff et al., 2005). In the case of television production, Ursell notes that for freelance

workers in the UK "expressions of pleasure, pride and possession most often attach to worker contributions to content, to the ideational, visual and/or aural qualities, of the piece being produced; their pleasure derives from the scope they are finding for aesthetic self-expression" (2000: 819). However, creative desires are not always realized because of pragmatic concerns such as budgets, maintaining efficiency, and responding to market demands. Ethnographic research describing day-to-day work in various fields from live music (Grazian, 2003) to television production (Gitlin, 1983) has found that workers compromise their creative desires in response to instrumental demands. Others describe how managerial practices constrain creativity and aesthetic innovation (Born, 2002, 2004; Dover, 2001). However, few empirical studies have described how workers negotiate the tension between commerce and their own creative fulfillment.[1]

Some studies have described how individual workers deal with the tension between creativity and commerce through their career path choices. These studies often characterize career path choices as a tradeoff between financial stability and creative satisfaction. According to Becker (1963), dance musicians choose between a commercial career, which offers stability and mobility, and becoming a "jazzman," which offers artistic integrity.[2] Analyzing the British television industry, Paterson

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[1] Some authors have analyzed how workers respond collectively as a professional community to the impact of commercialization on their craft (Dover, 2001), but not how workers deal with their own creative frustrations.

[2] Some workers may consider commercial employment both financially and artistically fulfilling. Faulkner (1971) uses the case of musicians working Los Angeles recording studios to argue that workers do not necessarily believe that they are sacrificing artistic integrity when "going commercial." He found that string players often came from orchestral backgrounds and viewed commercial work as a tradeoff, more financially but less artistically fulfilling. On the other hand, brass and

(2001) found that workers tended to find short term and unstable jobs more creatively fulfilling. Workers' career histories revealed that in tight labor markets individuals took less creatively fulfilling jobs that were long term and more stable.

Other researchers have argued that individuals and companies cope with commercial constraints by attempting to build a positive reputation and seniority, which are associated with more creative control. Zoellner (2010) describes how independent documentary production companies attempt to gain more creative freedom by enhancing their prestige and building relationships with television network representatives who commission their work. Faulkner (2003) argues that Hollywood film composers attempt to build contacts with more established composers and filmmakers in order to find jobs that are more artistically fulfilling.

Cultural industry workers, however, are not only confronted with tensions between creativity and commerce when making career path choices. They also cannot resolve such tensions completely by building networks and reputations. Rather, workers must deal with such tensions in their everyday work. Particularly, creative tensions arise in everyday contexts when cultural industry workers want the products of their labor to reflect their personal identities, yet are unable to create the products they desire due to pragmatic constraints. Workers may negotiate these tensions by doing identity work, finding ways to actively construct

wind players often came from jazz backgrounds and considered commercial studio work to be an improvement both artistically and financially.

their identities in a manner that preserves a positive understanding of who they are as creative people.[3]

In general, scholars have referred to identity work as individuals' active construction of their identities in social contexts (Pratt et al., 2006). The concept rests on an understanding that identities are not static and fixed, but rather are multiple, contextual, and shifting. It assumes that identities are not simply imputed onto individuals according to their social roles. Rather, individuals use a range of strategies to actively create, present, and sustain identities that are coherent and positively valued. Such strategies involve individuals' mental activities, how people form an understanding of the self (Alvesson et al., 2008). And they may include physical or interactional activities, such as "(a) procurement and arrangement of physical settings and props; (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (c) selective association with other individuals and groups; and (d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identities" (Snow and Anderson, 1987).

The specific dilemmas that instigate identity work among cultural industry workers vary by context. For example, Elsbach (2009) describes how toy car designers must create products that are highly standardized and stylistically similar.

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[3] Rather than investigating how commerce causes an identity conflict, one may alternatively focus on whether it causes a lack of engagement, investment, or enjoyment in the labor process. Of course, engagement and identification may be linked: workers may become disengaged because they refuse to invest effort in a product that does not reflect their identity. However, they may also find the creative process stimulating and interesting, yet refuse to attach their name to the product of their labor. Or they might find the working experience boring and repetitive, but have no particular distaste for the product. Thus, I keep identity and engagement analytically separate, and focus on the former issue.

Their dilemma is the inability to express their individualities and be perceived as distinctive. The designers remedy this situation by focusing on their own and recognizing other designers' "signature styles," that is the unadvertised and unofficially recognized stylistic variations that appear in the details of their designs.

However, perhaps the most common dilemma facing cultural industry workers is the inability to create products that meet their artistic standards of quality. Workers have particular artistic values and tastes, which reflect their moral or aesthetic ideals and are important parts of their artistic identities. Creating a product that meets these values and tastes gives workers a positive sense of who they are and what they stand for as artists. Previous authors have described how workers construct identities in response to creating work that does not reflect their artistic values and tastes. According to Faulkner (1983), Hollywood film composers are socialized to believe that dealing with compromise is part and parcel of who they are as professionals. Composers trade stories with each other about their experiences with the filmmakers who employ them. Trading "war stories" helps them learn to live with compromise and find ways to successfully work with filmmakers who do not understand music and prevent them from creating aesthetically satisfying compositions. Becker (1963) describes how dance hall musicians develop an understanding of themselves as separate from their "square" audiences, who force them to play music they dislike. Musicians foster this divide by distancing themselves from their clients physically (e.g. staying on stage rather than mingling, avoiding eye contact) and socially (e.g. use of slang, consuming avant garde culture, only socializing with other performers).

Faulkner and Becker characterize employers' demands as the primary source of workers' creative frustrations, implying that workers and employers often have very little in common. However, the relationship workers have with their employers varies by context. While Faulkner and Becker focus on freelancers, many cultural industry workers work in organizations where relationships are more stable and co-workers and employers share a common history and culture.

Unlike Faulkner and Becker, Gotsi et al. (2010) use the concept of identity regulation to emphasize how managers help their staff overcome tensions between art and commerce, rather than cause such tensions. Identity regulation refers to the range of strategies managers use to direct and influence their employees' identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Specifically, Gotsi et al. conducted an ethnographic study of five leading product design firms and identified two specific types of identity regulation. The first type, identity differentiation, involved separating roles associated with conflicting identities (e.g. temporally through different project phases, spatially with different work spaces). The other type, identity integration, guided workers towards embracing disparate roles as synergistic (e.g. mentoring and selection of people who are able to balance creative and commercial constraints). Although Gotsi et al. describe particular managerial practices, material and institutional arrangements, and efforts at socialization, their reliance on interviews rather than participant observation led them to overlook the interactional strategies managers may use when regulating their staff members' identities.

Previous research has certainly acknowledged that cultural industry workers make sense of their work via interactions with peers and supervisors. Nevertheless, the existing literature has not paid sufficient attention to the particular interactional strategies workers use to maintain artistic integrity when commercial demands prevent them from producing work that reflects their values and tastes. Moreover, existing research has not clearly articulated how workers of different status resolve such frustrations. The literature has particularly overlooked managers and employers' subjectivities, focusing instead on employees' subjective responses to their superiors. They thus do not acknowledge that non-managers and managers may share some common frustrations and negotiate them collectively.

After a brief summary of existing research on reality television and a section introducing my fieldsite and methods, I begin to address my overarching research question: How do cultural industry workers maintain their artistic identities despite compromising their values and tastes to accommodate the commercial demands they must face to do their work and keep their jobs? Since particular sources of tension between art and commerce vary by context, in the following two sections I describe the particular commercial demands and artistic values and tastes most salient to workers at my fieldsite, a reality television production company. Next, I acknowledge that creativity and commercial demands are not always conflicting. I argue that workers draw on instances in which their artistic values and tastes are fulfilled to construct identities as workers with artistic integrity. In the following section, I discuss the central dilemma: how workers maintain this artistic integrity despite having to make artistic compromises. I introduce two

identity work strategies, distancing and evaluative tweaking, as methods individuals use to resolve this problem. Finally, I describe how workers use these strategies in their micro social interactions. Particularly, I argue that the situations in which workers use these strategies, which strategies they use, and whether they are used to deal with compromises in shared or idiosyncratic values differs by workers' status as manager or non-manager.

2. The case of reality television

Reality television programs generate some of the highest viewership ratings on television. Over the past decade, reality television shows have increased dramatically in number and variety. Sub-genres include the gamedoc or competition (*Survivor*, *American Idol*), dating (*The Bachelor*, *I Love New York*), makeover (*What Not to Wear*, *Extreme Makeover*), docusoap (*The Real World*, *Jersey Shore*), and variations presenting celebrities as "ordinary" or in unscripted contexts (*Dancing with the Stars*, *The Osbournes*).

Ouellette and Murray describe reality television as "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules or certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real" (2009: 3). Television news, documentaries, and talk shows, also claim to represent reality. However, reality television production presents new dilemmas unseen in these previous forms. Unlike news or traditional documentary, reality television is more overtly focused on entertainment and commercial success than on educating or informing the public. Furthermore, unlike talk shows, reality television film is

often heavily edited and stylized. Such extensive post-production gives producers a greater degree of power to manipulate images of reality than in live programs.

Previous scholars have argued that audiences, producers, and contestants alike do not perceive reality television as purely real. Corner (2002) describes reality television as part of a "postdocumentary culture" in which reality is performed and artifice is openly displayed. Some authors suggest that both producers and audiences find pleasure in manipulating or decoding the fictive elements of reality television as a form of textual play (Lewis, 2004; Sconce, 2004). However, empirical studies of audiences, producers, and contestants are rare. Researching British and Swedish audiences, Hill (2005, 2007) found that most viewers generally expect reality television programs to be artificial, and critically engage in judging their truth claims. Audiences actively search for authentic moments when viewing reality programs, implying that despite the possibility that fictive elements bring them pleasure, they continue to value authenticity (Hill, 2005; Jones, 2003).

Sociologists have conducted qualitative studies of talk show (Gamson, 1998; Grindstaff, 2002) and television news production (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979). Ethnographers have also described documentary production (Dornfeld, 1998; Elliott, 1972; Silverstone, 1985).[4] However, few have researched reality television production (see Montemurro, 2008). Existing reality television studies are primarily interview based and often focus on ordinary people as participants rather

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[4] These studies of talk shows, news, and documentary are primarily concerned with the impact of production processes and workers' values and tastes on textual outcomes, and the relative influence different parties have in shaping the text.

than on the professionals who work with them (Andrejevic, 2004; Aslama, 2009; Roscoe, 2004; Shufeldt and Gale, 2007; Syvertsen, 2001). Some scholars have begun to investigate how producers subjectively respond to labor conditions in reality television (Mayer, 2009) and television talent shows (Hesmondalgh and Baker, 2008). But empirical research has not focused on how reality television producers feel about the product of their labor. Particularly, despite academic and popular interest in the reality or authenticity of reality television programs, we know little about how producers feel about their role in constructing images of reality.

Empirical research investigating documentary producers' values finds that authenticity and realism are central criteria practitioners use to evaluate their work. Representing reality truthfully is a source of pride and satisfaction for documentarians (Dover, 2001; Zoellner, 2010). However, it is unclear whether reality television producers hold similar attitudes toward authenticity. I begin to fill this gap by focusing on one production company in the United States, which I call Sunshine Productions.[5] Specifically, I describe how Sunshine employees, like documentarians, deeply value authenticity. However, they must at times compromise their ideal of creating "real" reality television in order to remain commercially viable and appeal to market demands.

3. Field site and data

I conducted fieldwork at Sunshine Productions from February 2009 until February 2010. Sunshine has produced a number of successful reality television series, mostly for cable networks. Although the number of workers at Sunshine

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[5] I also use pseudonyms for Sunshine Productions' workers and television shows.

fluctuated while I was at the company, there were about 20 workers during most of my time in the field.[6] I spent time with all workers and observed a variety of activities, including planning meetings, celebratory meals and parties, filming, and post-production of shows in progress. Some of my time was spent with producers. Producers organize, schedule, and direct the filming and editing of television shows. They are in charge of writing scripts, determining roughly what footage should be included in each episode and the order in which the footage will appear.

Much of my time was spent observing editors. Editors work off producers' scripts, focusing on the details of how to cut scenes together, transitioning between scenes, and adding video effects and music. Producers and editors work collaboratively, giving each other opinions and feedback. Some producers provide editors with detailed scripts. In these cases, the editor is more of a technician. In other cases, editors work more freely and decide what raw footage to use, either independently or with a producer.

The majority of my time was spent with the development team, which is responsible for creating new television show ideas and pitching them to networks. David, a founding partner of Sunshine, leads the development team. Thomas, another founding partner, and Jerry, director of programming, are also heavily involved in development efforts. Kevin, a young development associate, assists the

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[6] It is difficult to provide an exact count of Sunshine's workforce. Many employees work contractually and workers are constantly coming and going, although Sunshine typically re-hires the same contractual workers. Furthermore, television production is a volatile business. Towards the end of my time in the field, the company had not been commissioned to produce any major projects for several months. This was an unusually difficult time, during which the company was forced to reduce its workforce to four full-time staff members. However, shortly after that, the company picked up a new project that required them to rehire.

others. I learned about various aspects of development, but creating sizzle reels accounts for much of the team's time and effort. Sizzle reels are short sales tapes, lasting approximately five minutes. The company uses them as part of sales pitches to television networks. The sizzle reels are highly stylized and eye-catching. They focus on the main characters, premise, and feeling of the proposed series. While creating a sizzle reel, the development team must decide on these defining features of the show. In creating these tapes, development members must work with film crew and editors in the same capacity as the producers described above.

For most of the year, I visited the office once a week, with each visit lasting approximately two hours. During the summer, my visits were more sporadic.[7] However, when I did visit over the summer, I often went for several consecutive days at a time and stayed for the full workday. While most observations were conducted at the office, I went with workers on several video shoots in various locations. Most shoots were over seven hours long. One shoot I observed took place over three days and involved traveling four hours each way by car with two Sunshine workers. During those three days, the two workers and I spent most of our waking hours together.

Most of the time, my role was simply an observer, shadowing individuals or sitting with groups as they worked. I attempted to make myself useful to staff when possible. I often assisted during video shoots, for example, by helping to set up, carry equipment, buy coffee, and clean the set. Employees were aware that I was conducting research that might be published as an academic book or journal article.

[7] I did not visit for approximately six weeks during April and May. I also did not visit for approximately three weeks between July and August.

They often treated me as an intern learning about their profession and would occasionally ask me about the status of my research and studies.

When I first arrived, I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with workers concerning their career paths, feelings about their work, and opinions about reality television. I also later conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with six of the same people in order to ask them about specific events I witnessed in the field and background information about projects I was observing. Both types of interviews varied between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours, with most lasting approximately 30 minutes. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by either a hired transcriber or me.

Beyond these interviews, on most visits I asked workers to explain technical aspects as well as their thoughts and feelings about the work I was observing. These questions were impromptu and informal. Workers also updated me about things that happened while I was away from the office and informed me about future plans. I often recorded these informal questions. With their consent, I also sometimes recorded informal conversations between employees. I personally transcribed all of these informal questions and conversations.

Participant observation and interview are suitable methods for analyzing workers' micro interactions and understanding their subjective experiences. However, accessing candid opinions and witnessing conversations that ordinarily occur behind closed doors requires a high level of trust and rapport. The entertainment industry has a particular reputation among ethnographers for being difficult to penetrate. Previous ethnographers studying the entertainment industry

have described challenges in gaining access to field sites and observing backstage conversations (Grindstaff, 2002; Zafirau, 2008). On the other hand, I gained access relatively easily through a personal contact. A colleague in my department was friends with Katie, a post-production supervisor at Sunshine. Katie had also been an invited speaker at my university. She thus had some familiarity with academic research and my department in particular. After explaining to her that I was interested in observing daily work at Sunshine, she secured approval for me from the company's owners.

Almost all of the employees accepted me warmly upon my arrival and continued to be friendly and open throughout my time at the company. They openly shared thoughts and frustrations about their work. As I spent more time with them, I was increasingly accepted as a member of their group. The day after returning from the three-day shoot mentioned above, Jerry, one of the workers on the trip, greeted me enthusiastically. Upon seeing me, he jostled my shoulders and exclaimed with a big smile, "Hey, how you doin'?! Team!" While the entertainment industry has a reputation for being secretive, I never had any problems accessing private conversations with workers of any status. Good ideas for new television shows are highly guarded in Sunshine's development team, but ideas also quickly expire. I let workers know that it would take over a year for me to publish any information, so they were ultimately not concerned about my leaking their ideas.

Sunshine Productions is a particularly suitable case to investigate tensions between creativity and commerce, as well as relations between managers and staff, because it serves as an "extreme case" (Eisenhardt, 1989). Extreme cases facilitate

building theory in new topic areas because the dynamics under investigation are highly salient. High fluctuations in the company's commercial success, coupled with a strong commitment to artistic values among workers, make tensions between creativity and commerce particularly visible at Sunshine. Furthermore, managers work closely with staff on projects in which these tensions are highly salient, such as sizzle reel production, facilitating analyses of how managers and staff respond interactionally to such tensions.

As is typical of ethnographic research, the focus of the paper was established inductively through an iterative process between visiting the field and writing fieldnotes. After writing each set of fieldnotes or transcribing an interview, I evaluated the document for prominent themes. Although I remained open to emerging themes throughout the fieldwork, this frequent analysis helped focus my observations. Data analysis after leaving the field involved reading and re-reading the data several times, thinking about and refining prominent themes. These themes served as preliminary codes during a more systematic analysis of all fieldnotes and interviews using Atlas TI, which I used to help clarify conceptual categories, uncover any patterns within and between categories, and search for disconfirming evidence.

4. Selling television shows

A variety of pragmatic concerns shape work in the cultural industries, such as working within the limitations of available materials and resources or maintaining civil and efficient relations among coworkers. However, appealing to a mass market and remaining commercially viable are particularly salient concerns

for many culture-making organizations. Commercial success is certainly an

important concern in reality television production. In order for production

companies to stay in business, networks must pay them to produce television

programs. Workers must craft shows in ways they believe will maximize success in

the product market.

Previous authors have noted that because of the uncertainty of cultural

markets, products are made specifically to please cultural gatekeepers (Hirsch,

1972). The development team at Sunshine Productions creates new show ideas and

pitches these to gatekeepers, usually television networks. David, a company partner

who leads the development team, discusses how his efforts are focused on appealing

to such gatekeepers:

> Well, I think that every single shot is based on will it have an impact on the
> buyer. Will it make – every single thing is based on is the buyer going to look at
> it and think, "Cool, I like that." It has nothing to do with my emotions or
> anybody's emotions. It has everything to do with is the buyer going to sit there
> and have a reaction to it, because otherwise you're wasting your time
> (Interview).[8]

Sunshine employees believe that heightened drama and larger-than-life

characters are appealing to buyers. According to Katie, post-production supervisor:

> I do know that *overall* networks do want to see the same thing. They want to see
> a good story. They always like to have a good character…. Now again, you know,
> it's reality TV, so the more controversial, the more talked about, the better. The
> networks *love* that (Interview).

David echoes Katie's sentiments when describing a show in development that he

believes will please buyers: "The [show] has *outstanding* personalities that you can't

take your eyes off of, a lot of action, a lot of stuff going on, and good emotion, you

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[8] All quotes in this paper are edited. False starts and excessive filler ("um", "you
know", etc.) have been eliminated.

know, really powerful emotion… lots of tears and good stuff going on" (Interview). According to Kate and David, reality television with "controversial" and "outstanding," rather than ordinary or everyday, characters and stories will be most successful in the market.[9]

Ordinary life does not always involve tension or conflict. And even though producers attempt to cast the most eccentric people they can find, ordinary people are not always exciting or dramatic. Therefore, producers and editors often must manipulate situations and people to heighten drama and excitement. As with talk show guests (Grindstaff, 2002), ordinary people in reality television are coached on set to give larger-than-life performances. However, editing and scripting are equally important since these allow producers to create stories with interesting plot lines. Larry, an editor, explained:

> [W]hen you get into an edit room you're basically sorting through everything trying to like make a story happen out of a wealth of footage. You know, so it's like I'm trying to make things happen. A lot of times, you know, forcing things to happen [that] maybe didn't happen naturally so it feels like it still has a natural story arc… So normally, I would start with a blank script and I would just start going through and editing and then I'd put my music in and my pictures and make it all feel like it, you know, make it entertaining is the bottom line, so people will watch it (Interview).

The desire to achieve commercial success clearly shapes Sunshine's work. One prominent way the company tries to achieve success is by manipulating reality to appeal to audiences and gatekeepers.

5. Workers' artistic identities at Sunshine Productions

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[9] Documentary producers similarly emphasize the importance of looking for "headline grabbing" and "extreme" ideas, stories, and characters to remain commercially competitive (Zoellner, 2010).

Despite creating products that do not meet or even contradict their artistic standards of judgment, cultural industry workers may still retain the values and tastes that they compromise as central parts of their artistic identities. Even though market demands compel them to manipulate reality, workers at Sunshine value making reality television in a manner they believe is authentic and "real." For most workers at Sunshine, telling "true stories" is a central part of who they are as cultural producers. According to Paula, a producer:

> I don't really believe in manufacturing stories. I figure it's our job to tell the story that happened. So I try to remain pretty faithful to how things really are. I'm not really interested in manipulating things to make them look different (Interview).

According to Paula, her role as a producer involves staying "faithful" to stories, as opposed to "manufacturing" them. Paula's response is representative of most Sunshine workers, distinguishing their particular standard of authenticity as a defining part of themselves and their work.

Creating "real" reality television is not only an individual preference, but also reflects a shared set of values and tastes that is an important part of Sunshine's organizational culture. Sunshine workers associate creating "real" reality television with their company in particular. Jean, a producer, explains: "There is a lot of *bad* reality TV out there that is definitely staged, but I do think that this company tries very hard to portray the true stories of these people" (Interview). Jean and other Sunshine workers feel this is unusual:

> I don't think that's the case everywhere. I mean you watch some of the silly realty shows on TV and they're, you know, you can tell that they are either

staged or they're just trying to get, ratings. [Laughs] Shock value…. I think we're just trying to portray reality television (Interview).[10]

Previous authors have argued that common standards of authenticity help documentary makers shape a shared identity that unites them as a professional group (Dover, 2001; Zoellner, 2010). However, Sunshine workers believe that valuing authenticity is particular to their organizational culture rather than something shared with the larger reality television professional community.[11]

When Sunshine workers evaluate the "reality" of reality television, they often focus on whether or not its representations are truthful or sincere. Specifically, they consider reality television to be more truthful and thus "real" when it excludes or minimizes acting, scripting, editing, casting, and other manipulations of production and mediation that affect how people or situations are represented.[12] They alternatively or simultaneously evaluate reality television according to how well it matches an idealized image of reality; that is, their expectations or beliefs about how people or situations ought to look and sound. At Sunshine, this idealized image is often defined in opposition to "sensational television," which features conflict and presents subjects in a manner they consider undignified and thus not representative

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[10] Whether or not other production companies *actually* use authenticity as a key standard to judge the quality of their work, and how other companies define "real" or "authentic," are questions beyond the spoke of my research, since I rely on data from only one company.

[11] Dover (2001) discusses how many documentary producers demonize colleagues who make docusoaps, a subgenre sometimes categorized as reality television and other times as documentary, which follows the lives of ordinary people like traditional documentary but emphasizes light entertainment. Part of documentary makers' distaste for docusoaps stems from accusations that people featured on them perform for the camera rather than display their real selves. Still, authenticity is a value that documentary makers associate with their profession as a whole.

[12] Hill (2005; 2007) finds that reality television audiences use similar standards.

of reality. Carl, an editor, contrasts an admirable show, *Oprah*, with sensational

reality television, which he dislikes:

> *Oprah* or whatever talk show, the pacing is different. You let people talk and tell
> their story. More and more of what I see on the reality shows is just conflict
> driven. It's just trash, people yelling at each other, people in fake scenarios
> (Interview).

However, what counts as "real" is socially constructed. Thus, when people evaluate

reality television's authenticity or realism, they may pick and choose specific

criteria. Although Sunshine workers draw on some vague standards, the degree to

which a reality television program is understood as "real" depends on the situation

and individual making the judgment.

Sunshine workers might associate themselves with "real" reality television in

order to gain status and distinction. Previous scholars have argued that authenticity

generally confers prestige (Grazian, 2003; Fine, 2003). Furthermore, people often

associate conflict and sensationalism with "trashy" or lower-class entertainment

(Grindstaff, 2002). Dissociation from "fake" reality television shows may thus

represent a tacit class judgment and be desirable as a form of class distinction

(Bourdieu, 1984). However, the desire to present people with respect and dignity is

an ethical concern for some Sunshine workers as well. When I was on location

filming the sizzle reel for *Riders*, a show about a traveling carnival company, Kevin,

junior development associate, was reluctant to focus on the carnival workers' dirty,

ramshackle living quarters. When I asked Kevin why he felt this way he responded

gravely, "Well, that's not really the truth," explaining that he did not want to

perpetuate negative stereotypes about carnival workers.

6. Constructing artistic identities when values and tastes are fulfilled

Addressing pragmatic concerns like commercial viability does not necessarily conflict with satisfying cultural industry workers' values and tastes. For example, visually beautiful and technically well-crafted reality television appeals to both production company workers and network executives. At Sunshine Productions, the desire not to manipulate can sometimes also be satisfied at the same time as market demands. One early morning, I accompanied Jerry, director of programming, and Kevin, development associate, on a four-hour long car ride, traveling out of state to shoot part of the sizzle reel for *Riders*. In the car, as we drove through rolling green hills, Jerry and Kevin casually discussed their visions and plans for the shoot. Jerry and Kevin reminded each other that in order to create a coherent story and capture marketable drama they should impose, perhaps by "staging" scenes and pushing characters to emote. However, they decided to wait and see if they had "good raw material" before staging drama. At the end of the three-day long trip, Jerry and Kevin indeed allowed the story to unfold without staging. Drama was captured naturally when a battery exploded. One of the characters got acid in his eyes and was sent away in an ambulance, returning to work the next day with a clean bill of health. In this case, Jerry and Kevin were able to accommodate both the demand for the dramatic and the desire not to impose by waiting to see if they had dramatic material before having to stage it.

Cultural industry workers can use projects that fulfill their values and tastes as examples of who they are as artists and evidence that they are who they claim to be. Individual workers may draw on such examples to construct mental understandings of themselves. However, they also do identity work interactionally

by discussing likes and dislikes while working with colleagues. One morning I was sitting with Kevin and Larry, an editor, while editing the *Riders* sizzle reel:

> Larry continues to work. After a moment of silence, Larry changes the subject. With his eyes still on his monitors and mouse in hand he says nonchalantly, "I really like a show like this because it's really based on reality."
> "Because it's not manipulative," Kevin, leaning back in his chair, says matter-of-factly.
> "This is the best stuff to edit," Larry continues. "You just let it unfold... I'm interested in the everyday person, and that's what this show allows me to get to if you can get there. You know what I mean?" (Fieldnotes).

As this conversation illustrates, cultural industry workers are sometimes able to express their artistic values and tastes through the products they create. They draw on these instances to do identity work by actively constructing positive identities as cultural producers with artistic integrity.

7. Maintaining integrity when faced with artistic compromises

On other occasions, cultural industry workers must compromise their values and tastes in response to pragmatic concerns such as market demands. At Sunshine Productions, producers and editors often must manipulate situations or individuals to seem more exciting or dramatic, despite their taste for the authentic and preference not to manipulate. These instances challenge workers' definitions of who they are as cultural producers. Workers may rationalize such compromises in order to maintain their artistic identities. Two such identity work strategies emerged during interviews with individual workers: distancing and evaluative tweaking.

Workers can distance themselves from disliked products by framing those products as separate from the self. For example, workers may distance themselves

by defining products as flukes, temporary or not representative of their ordinary

products and proceedings. According to Larry, an editor:

> [Sometimes] we'll make it look, camp it up a little bit, where we'll make
> somebody look like a little more of an ogre than the guy might have been. Or
> make the girl look a little more mean than they might have been. Just to create
> the drama, cause that's what people want. You know what I mean? People want
> to see stuff that's like a little more over the top... But on average I think we do
> it... a lot of the shows were, the ones we started with here were more doc-like
> very documen-more documentarish... So it's more their account of what's going
> on. So there wasn't a lot of fakery in that kind of stuff (Interview).

Although Larry acknowledges that he does "create the drama" to satisfy market

demands, he emphasizes that most previous Sunshine projects do not include "a lot

of fakery." He justifies occasional compromises in what he perceives to be

authenticity by rationalizing these cases as abnormal and not representative of the

type of television he helps create.

Workers may also blame others for undesirable decisions or outcomes. At

Sunshine, workers often distance themselves from instances of manufactured drama

by associating such cases with actors external to the organization, such as particular

clients, or an abstract "audience" or "market." According to Jerry, director of

programming:

> I may not agree or feel that it's in my aesthetic interest, but you can't always
> have that. It's a very rare experience where you're being paid to do whatever
> you want, on your own aesthetic whims. You're in a business and there's people
> paying you to deliver certain successes (Interview).

Jerry rationalizes compromising values and tastes as necessary given the demands

clients place on him. As indicated in earlier sections, workers believe that a

particular style of reality television is most commercially viable, particularly

television with heightened drama and conflict. However, workers can reason that

they only produce such television because others demand it from them—that

manufacturing drama is necessary due to their roles as employees and salespeople

but is not a reflection of their artistic identities.[13]

Besides distancing, workers can also maintain their artistic identities

through evaluative tweaking. Since values and tastes are subjective, workers may

tweak the artistic standards by which they judge their work. In the case of Sunshine

Productions, employees value "real" and "not manipulated" reality television. But

the meaning of "real" is not completely consistent or precisely defined in workers'

ordinary discourse. What workers consider real or authentic may slightly shift from

moment to moment. Carl describes a Sunshine show he edited in which ordinary

people were forced into situations set up by producers. Still, he defends the show's

reality:

> [The producers] would come up with a crazy scenario… that's really kind of
> contrived and they added a lot of elements to it, but it was real… you'd go
> through all these hoops and it would be kind of gimmicky, up until the end of the
> show… seeing the shock and joy in the woman's face, and that was a real
> moment, even though it was contrived and set up, it still had a great payoff. It
> never failed to impress me, what happened at the end of that show (Interview).

Despite the show's conflicting with the ideal of no manipulation, Carl positions the

show as "real" by redefining this standard with respect to the genuineness of the

woman's expression, rather than the production techniques used earlier in the

show.

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[13] Dover (2001) and Zoellner (2010) have found that documentary producers
distance themselves from commissioning editors at television networks who force
them to compromise their tastes for economic imperatives. However, these authors
frame such distancing as evidence of critical reflexivity and resistance, rather than a
strategy workers use to maintain artistic integrity when they make creative
compromises.

In another example of evaluative tweaking, David, director of development, describes a meeting scene in the sizzle reel for *Flower Queen*, a show about floral designers. In the scene, Jennifer, the design company's owner meets with two of her designers to plan an elaborate wedding centerpiece that the bride had supposedly asked for at the last minute. In fact, the bride had not asked for the centerpiece:

> I said what we're gonna do is give this bride something she didn't ask for and give her the centerpiece of her dreams, but I need everything else to be as real as possible. I didn't want them to plan it out too much. I didn't want Jennifer to have too many conversations with [the designers] about it. I wanted to catch them as off guard as possible. So, while that meeting was quote unquote staged, some of the elements in that meeting were real. They had generally not designed it yet at that point... everything else that happened in that, in terms of trying to get it built and getting it into the wedding that day, all of that was real. I didn't— we didn't really manufacture any of that (Interview).

Despite staging the meeting scene and pretending that the bride had requested the centerpiece, David positions the situation as acceptable since he did not stage the centerpiece's actual design and construction.

Individuals use both distancing and evaluative tweaking as identity work strategies, reflecting their recognition that sometimes they must make compromises while in other cases they produce work that meets their artistic standards. These strategies may seem like contradicting methods of rationalization: distancing frames disliked products as separate from the self, while evaluative tweaking associates products with the self by re-framing compromises as reflecting one's values and tastes. However, Sunshine workers use both strategies for the same reason, to preserve their identities as workers who value authentic reality television.

8. Managers' use of talk as identity work and identity regulation

Interview data reveal that distancing and evaluative tweaking are identity work strategies that workers have at their immediate disposal to preserve artistic integrity. Workers of all positions and statuses readily deployed these strategies when issues related to artistic compromise arose during interviews. However, interviews do not necessarily reflect how subjects behave or what they say in their day-to-day interactions. Ordinary verbal interaction is a key means through which people do identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987). When do distancing and evaluative tweaking emerge as talk in ordinary social interaction? According to Fine, creative constraints in the workplace are often "taken for granted and treated as merely a reality of the occupation" (1996a: 183). Indeed, artistic constraint does not dominate ordinary conversation at Sunshine Productions, suggesting that workers do not feel the need to constantly and openly defend their identities against compromises. Rather, distancing and evaluative tweaking emerge verbally during micro interaction when situations lead workers to explicitly articulate their compromises, and/ or when workers consider compromises to be particularly egregious or frustrating.

Workers' role and status in the organization shapes when and why they use identity work strategies interactionally to preserve artistic integrity. Managers at Sunshine are experienced program makers with both creative roles and business responsibilities. They are more directly responsible for the financial well being of projects and the organization as a whole than their subordinates. They are also the workers who most often communicate with agents and network buyers, and thus have the most knowledge of what courses of action might garner commercial

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success. Finally, their status gives them both the power and responsibility to provide the overall vision and detailed direction on projects. Thus, unlike their subordinates, Sunshine managers are placed in situations where they must verbally direct others into actions that appeal to market demands but may compromise artistic integrity. They initiate verbal identity work when market demands compel them to present their staff with new courses of action that compromise the group's common desire to make "real" reality television.

Such managerial efforts are apparent in the following example. The interaction takes place the morning after David, director of development, met with the company's agent and got his feedback on the *Riders* sizzle reel.[14] Larry, an editor, and Kevin, junior development associate, had been working on the sizzle reel with David for several months. David meets with Larry and Kevin in Larry's office to debrief the two on the agent's feedback.

Larry's office is small and windowless, but light from a single lamp reflects on the peach colored walls, giving the room a warm, cozy glow. Larry sits at his desk, on top of which are two computer monitors and a laptop, as well as miscellaneous papers and a few knickknacks. Kevin and I sit on a small, blue IKEA loveseat. We are all turned to face David, who is sitting behind a large wooden desk beside the loveseat. David is loud, agitated, and animated, looking at each of us alternately as he speaks. He says the agent wants more images of danger and drama in the sizzle reel, images that would have been impossible to capture during our short time

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[14] Agents act as a liaison between the production company and network buyers. They help the company find appropriate buyers for pitches. Because agents frequently communicate with television networks, they provide companies with valuable feedback concerning the marketability of new television show ideas.

filming for the video. Both Larry and Kevin listen attentively with serious

expressions, their eyes glued on David, as he vents about how the agent's requests

would require them to manufacture reality:

> David: They're totally about… if you have to manufacture it, manufacture it and
> that pisses me off…. How can you possibly go in and show people what's real
> when you're asking them to not be real?!

Larry and Kevin share David's sentiment:

> Larry: [Calmly, slightly shell-shocked] I- I- I'm dumbfounded [Kevin
> simultaneously: I'm dumbfounded] too. Because really what they're asking for is
> scripted.
> David: … They're asking you, you know, can you forget to chain down the—
> Kevin: [Chuckling sarcastically] ride and set a child on it?
> David: It's like seriously. It's ridiculous… literally they think the hottest talent
> on television right now is the fat woman on the *Repo* show on truTV.[15]

Following David's lead, Larry and Kevin rhetorically distance themselves from

"scripting" and "manufacture," setting a boundary between themselves and the

agent, who they demonize as not sharing their tastes. David associates the agent

with manufactured sensationalism: "the fat woman on the *Repo* show." In

distancing themselves from such manufactured television, they retain their

identities as workers who value what is "real" and authentic.

Despite affirming his artistic identity through distancing, and prompting his

employees to do the same, David must respond to the agent's credible advice. The

company has no television shows in production. They are not bringing in a steady

income. David thus abruptly changes the focus of the conversation:

> David: And it doesn't matter if they tell her to act wacko or not. To the viewer,
> she's wacky. Totally compelling. So, you know what? We're gonna sell this

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[15] *Operation Repo* is a reality television program about car repossessions broadcast
on truTV, a cable television network.

show, because I believe in this show and, um, we know we have an outstanding environment that nobody else has—
Kevin: is tapped into, yep—
David: And nobody else will get this. [David slaps the desk with his palm definitively]… So the best thing to do right now would be to string out the most… don't censor ourselves. Go through, find the most outrageous bytes we have…. They just need five or six minutes of like oh my god are you kidding me.
Kevin: [Sincere and nonchalant] Yeah. Ok.

Although he encourages his employees to make the video as "outrageous" as possible, David also maintains his identity as someone who values authentic reality television by subtly distancing himself from "the viewer," who he infers is responsible for their need to create "wacky" television. David's rhetoric signals to Kevin that their actions are appropriate and he accepts David's plan of action.

Although Kevin is ready to proceed, Larry continues to be upset:

Larry: The hard part for me is if that's what they want it to wind up being, it doesn't, morally to me, making them look like a bunch of assholes doesn't feel right.

Attempting to comfort Larry, David initially cannot find his words, suggesting that it is difficult for him to justify making an inauthentic and sensationalist sizzle reel. But then he employs a rhetorical strategy, distancing their making a sensationalist sizzle reel by defining it as abnormal and temporary:

David: But, you know, I do think this. I do think… that if you… if you, um, in the course of once you get the series sold, and in the course of the series, the segment about, the drama you can build [naturally] about getting the [rides] built would stand—
Kevin: Mm hmm [agreeing]
Larry: Right-
David: and the overall arching of the series, you wouldn't have to be quite that outrageous.
Larry: Right.
Kevin: No, you wouldn't, not at all.

Larry and Kevin are evidently convinced by David's rhetoric. Despite endorsing a

course of action that requires them to violate their artistic values and tastes, David

maintains his and his employee's identities as authentic reality television makers.

David's actions reflect, in part, his desire to ensure efficient production.

When I interviewed David a few weeks after his meeting with Larry and Kevin, I

noted that Larry seemed particularly upset and asked whether he was trying to

alleviate Larry's frustrations:

> I wanted him to understand that I was as frustrated by it as he was likely to be,
> because I think he did feel better after he saw I was frustrated, and that was
> really genuine… was I trying to make him feel better? Yes. I was trying to
> motivate him to be involved. The worst thing in the world is having an editor
> who's not involved, who's just pushing buttons. That will never work. You have
> to get that editor to be invested in the process so that they can bring their own
> vision to it. And what ended up on that screen is a lot of – visions – editing
> techniques, shady graphics, that's all Larry's skills. So I needed him to be as
> energetically and creatively involved as possible. I wanted him to know I was as
> pissed off about having to do this as he was (Interview).

Managers are sensitive to their staff members' feelings, and attempt to stimulate

investment in creative work when they feel morale is low or might be in danger.

When work is not a reflection of their values and tastes, workers may complete their

tasks less enthusiastically and perhaps less effectively. David's attempts to regulate

his employees' artistic identities reflect these concerns.

However, David's actions were simultaneously a form of self-management,

an attempt to maintain his own artistic identity. David was genuinely upset about

manufacturing conflict for the *Riders* sizzle reel:

> I hate fake. It's not real. It's not reality. I understand the need to sell a series. I
> do. I certainly do. I wouldn't want to not sell a series but… I just hate fake. I'll
> put that on my tombstone. I hate fake (Interview).

David clearly felt the need to appeal to commercial demands, even when they conflicted strongly with his personal values and tastes. Although he attempted to stimulate investment and enthusiasm among his employees, because David shared his employee's values and tastes, his speech simultaneously served to alleviate his own frustrations.

During the above-described meeting, David and his employees were noticeably upset and agitated. However, managers do not only rationalize compromises when alleviating their employees' or venting their own frustrations. Rather, when no one is overtly frustrated, managers still do such identity work when suggesting actions that compromise artistic integrity. After completing the sizzle reel for *Flower Queen*, a show about floral designers, the team went out for lunch at a local casual restaurant to celebrate. During lunch, David said that if *Flower Queen* became a show, he would have to manufacture drama because Jennifer, the main character, was too controlling and nervous about showing any flaws. He mentioned an episode of *Ace of Cakes*, a reality show following the day-to-day activities of a bakery, in which he believed producers staged a scene with the bakers conducting a "mouse séance" to deal with a mouse infestation. David said that while he would stage such a scene at Jennifer's design company, he added that actually creating problems, such as a real mouse infestation, would just be "wrong." David tweaks his definition of what is acceptable in terms of manufacture. Rather than manipulation of reality being globally wrong, he defines a particular type of manufacture as wrong instead, creating problems for the specific person they are filming. No one was evidently uncomfortable before, during, or after David spoke.

The atmosphere at lunch was relaxed and celebratory. Managers thus engage in identity talk not only when their staff members are overtly frustrated, but also to quell *potential* frustrations when advocating courses of action that might compromise their shared values and tastes.

9. Non-managers' distancing through venting

Staff members sometimes join their managers in distancing and evaluative tweaking when managers initiate such identity work to negotiate compromising shared values and tastes in favor of marketability. However, managers and employees do not have equal roles nor do they hold equal power. The ability to express one's artistic identity varies by an individual's level of authority within an organization. Fine (1992) finds that in the restaurant world, chefs and sous chefs have more authority in making aesthetic decisions than the cooks who they supervise. Similarly, at Sunshine Productions the director of development and executive producers have more authority to make choices than development associates, production assistants, and editors. Non-managers have to deal not only with artistic compromises induced by appealing to the product market, but also with creative differences between themselves and their superiors.

Previous research has found that, through talking with one another, cultural industry workers distance themselves from managers and employers who direct them towards work that conflicts with their artistic values and tastes (Faulkner, 1983). Sunshine employees distance themselves from managers during micro social interaction when *venting* frustrations to colleagues about creative differences with their managers. Through venting, they maintain their idiosyncratic artistic

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identities by defining their values and tastes as separate from those of their superiors.

One day Kevin, junior development associate, and Larry, an editor, were editing the *Riders* sizzle reel together. They approached a section of the video with a narrator reading a voiceover (VO) line introducing Herbert, one of the show's main characters. David, Sunshine's mustached director of development, had written the voiceover line.

> Kevin: … then we get into that stupid Herbert line right after that?
> Larry: Yes. I'm not sure if [David] wants to try the other thing, but…
> Kevin: What's your thought on that?
> Larry: … I would write less VO… But the mustache is gonna want, you know.
> Kevin: [Breathes out in exaggerated exasperation] The mustache (Fieldnotes).

Kevin and Larry distance themselves from the "stupid" line that David wrote. Both would prefer to introduce Herbert's character with less narrated voiceover. However, knowing that David is unlikely to change the voiceover, they vent and sarcastically refer to David as "the mustache." As this exchange illustrates, workers vent frustrations to each other that grow from idiosyncratic differences in artistic values and tastes between themselves and their superiors.

However, workers' frustrations do stem not only from differing aesthetic opinions, but also from the perception that managers have prioritized marketability over artistic integrity. Todd, a minor celebrity, was the star and an executive producer of a Sunshine show in which he helped ordinary people confront their past mistakes. Todd himself had once been the subject of a minor scandal. He was publically accused of cheating on his wife. Todd's confronting his own scandal would be the springboard for the series. Jim, an editor, was working on the pilot

episode of the show. I sat with Jim one day in his office as he worked. Todd came in and out several times to give notes and directions. After discussing a section of the episode describing his indiscretions, Todd left the room. Jim began working on the segment, opening some computer images of newspaper clippings and headlines referencing Todd's affair. He muttered to me:

> Jim: *So* highly embarrassing for him.
> Junhow: What?
> Jim: Um, [in a staged whisper] he's selling out! [Chuckles sarcastically]. You know kind of his story right? (Fieldnotes)

Jim distances himself from Todd's decision to use his personal life to promote the show. Over the following weeks, Jim grew increasingly negative toward the project. After Larry, another editor, told me that Jim had vented about the show to him, I asked Jim directly whether he was enjoying the project. "No," he responded. "Because there's no direction?" I asked. "That, and I don't necessarily believe in the concept of the show. And that makes it really hard to be real gung ho about it."

These examples illustrate how during interactions with peers workers are at times critical of and distance themselves from their managers. However, the values and tastes that workers criticize their superiors for embracing are idiosyncratic rather than shared. I never observed employees criticizing Sunshine's managers for compromising the company's shared taste for "real" reality television. The identity work that Sunshine managers do when interacting with their staff helps them present themselves as producers who deeply value authenticity in the same manner as everyone else in the organization. Managers' identity work helps workers maintain a collective artistic identity around shared values despite market demands. On the other hand, distancing themselves from their managers helps workers

maintain their idiosyncratic artistic identities despite having to follow their managers' creative vision, including when they believe their manager is prioritizing commercial success over artistic integrity.

10. Conclusion

Workers in the cultural industries care deeply about satisfying commercial demands as well as expressing the artistic values and aesthetic tastes that are important parts of their identities. However, appealing to commercial demands sometimes requires workers to create products that do not meet their artistic standards. This fundamental tension raises an important question: How do cultural industry workers maintain their artistic identities despite compromising their values and tastes to accommodate commercial demands? I have argued that workers maintain artistic integrity by actively constructing their identities through identity work. I have described two identity work strategies, distancing and evaluative tweaking, and argued that workers in managerial and non-managerial roles use these strategies differently during social interaction. Particularly, Sunshine managers often initiate identity work while justifying decisions that threaten shared values, while employees often do identity work to distance themselves from superiors whose directions conflict with their idiosyncratic values.

Previous research investigating tensions between creativity and commerce often ignores managers' subjectivities and implies that managers and employees have little in common. I have argued that mangers are not only interested in pragmatic concerns like selling products, balancing budgets, and maintaining organizational efficiency. They, like their employees, are also concerned about

maintaining artistic integrity. Managers and employees certainly hold idiosyncratic and conflicting artistic values and tastes. However, they may also share common artistic values and tastes, and negotiate the frustrations of making creative compromises collectively.

Managers' and workers' identity work has implications for managerial power. Extending previous authors' claims that managerial authority in the cultural industries does not rely on strict Taylorist strategies of control (Smith and McKinlay, 2009a), I argue that managerial power rests on their ability to demonstrate understanding and involvement in the creative process. In some cases, idiosyncratic differences in artistic values and tastes spur workers to distance themselves from their managers and paint superiors as lacking taste or artistic integrity, weakening workers' respect for their managers. However, when managers present the same values and tastes that employees hold dear as important parts of their own artistic identities, they demonstrate to their employees that they have artistic integrity. Through identity work around shared values, managers re-direct hostility employees may harbor away from them and towards people outside the organization. Thus Sunshine's managers imply that while they are responsible for directing projects, they are not ultimately to blame for compromising authenticity.

This analysis has described how workers maintain artistic integrity by preserving the standards that they must compromise as part of their artistic identities. However, identities can also shift and evolve as workers actively construct them in response to external pressures. Particularly, workers may shift to

focus on different artistic standards to represent who they are as artists. Faulkner (1971) and Becker (1963) suggest that some musicians deal with artistic compromise by taking pride in their technical instrumental skills rather than the quality or style of the music performed. Zoellner (2010) argues that documentary makers have developed values and tastes to evaluate the quality of their work that align with broadcasters' commercial demands. Similarly, at Sunshine Productions authenticity may become a less significant part of constructing workers' artistic identities, and workers may focus on other standards to distinguish their creative work and give them a sense of artistic integrity. However, during my time at Sunshine authenticity remained a prominent part of workers' artistic identities. Thus, I do not speculate about why one set of standards might wane and other standards might become more prominent parts of how workers define themselves as artists. Future research might further investigate the circumstances under which workers' artistic identities shift.

Workers in various fields of cultural production may feel pressure to compromise their artistic values and tastes in order to generate profit or satisfy their customers and employers. This pressure may be particularly strong in television and other cultural industries that produce commercial products for mass consumption. Much existing sociological literature about the mass media industries has argued that due to high financial risk and uncertainty, workers' actions and decisions are often pragmatic and instrumental, aiming to satisfy market demands and maximize efficiency (Bielby and Bielby, 1994; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987; Hirsch, 1972; Peterson and Anand, 2004; Ryan and Peterson, 1982). However,

workers in smaller scale or less "industrialized" forms of cultural production, such as theater, handicrafts, or fine arts, are also subject to financial constraints and client demands. Fine (1992), for example, describes how various pragmatic constraints limit the extent to which restaurant kitchen workers may express their aesthetic tastes. Workers may thus use similar identity work tactics in these settings.

Still, it is not my intention to mask what is distinctive about particular production contexts.[16] Rather, I argue that although tensions between creativity and commerce may be found in various fields of cultural production, the manner in which these tensions are resolved is highly context dependent. Particularly, while previous scholars have focused on how cultural industry workers blame their employers for artistic compromises, at Sunshine Productions workers sympathized with their employers over compromising shared values and tastes. Such sympathy between employees and managers is likely in other small organizations where managers work closely and maintain stable relationships with their creative staff to create cultural products for mass markets. However, future research should further investigate whether, how, and why the strategies through which workers rationalize

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[16] There has been a great deal of scholarly disagreement over how to group together various fields of cultural production, and whether analysis in one field may be generalized to others. Some scholars group scientifically or technologically creative industries with artistically creative industries (Smith and McKinlay, 2009b). However, the majority defines "cultural" or "creative industries" as those that focus on artistic creativity. Most definitions include television, film, radio, new media, print publishing, music recording and performance, and other mass media. Hesmondalgh (2007) considers theater and fine art "peripheral" since these fields are not subject to the same industrial methods of mass production as industries like television, film, and recording. Caves (2000), on the other hand, includes opera, painting, and other fine arts in his definition.

their creative compromises varies between different organizations or fields of

cultural production.

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