FUNNY BUSINESS

FUNNY BUSINESS: EXPLORING INEQUALITY IN STAND-UP COMEDY WORK

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Dedicated to those who work hard everyday

to challenge inequality

ABSTRACT

Much of what we know about workplace inequality, we know from studies on work in industrial and information-based economies. There has been less interrogation into how processes of inequality are formed and sustained in creative work and cultural industries. Given the growing trend away from traditional work rooted in formal organizations and toward cultural industries, how can we understand the relationship between work and inequality in non-standard, creative labour? To answer this question I explore the world of stand-up comedy by drawing on 25 semi-structured interviews with stand-up comedians and over one hundred hours of observational data.

My analysis reveals that comedy work is organized around the image of an 'ideal worker,' an ideal maintained by intersubjective mechanisms of rule: diversity logics, compulsory networking, and creative license. The existence of the 'ideal worker' influences how, when, and under what conditions work happens in stand-up comedy for those who fall outside of that ideal. Specifically, workers' social locations shape how they self-manage, marginalized workers must self-regulate in relation to the work (like everyone else) *and* the 'ideal worker.' Finally, the analysis reveals that workers in stand-up comedy use various strategies to negotiate consent and resistance in their work arrangements in terms of where and under what circumstances they work. Overall, this research highlights how the micro politics of capital are informed by larger power relations that sustain inequality in cultural work settings. Specifically, this work demonstrates the need to address how 'ideal workers' are maintained in cultural work, as

well as how social location shapes processes of self-management and strategic

engagement within unequal work environments.

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<u>Introduction</u>

1.1 A Project is Born

This dissertation brings two of my long-time interests together: social inequality and comedy. As a child of the 90s I eagerly awaited Thursday nights when I had the chance to watch *Seinfeld* and felt especially enamoured by the opening scenes featuring clips of Jerry himself engaging in his stand-up comedy routine. Growing up in a small Northern Ontario town I had few opportunities to attend live comedy shows. This changed when I moved to Ottawa, Ontario to begin my undergraduate education. While in Ottawa, I regularly attended live comedy shows in theatres and pubs. During this time I was also consuming plenty of sociology and women's studies courses as I refined my double major.

I was lucky enough to be raised by a proud and active Feminist Mom and a sociology professor for a Dad so it is safe to say that critical conversations around the dinner table were the norm. Thus, I always squirmed in my seat at a comedy show when the content would heavily rely on jokes lined with racism, sexism, and other discriminatory tropes. It was not just that these kinds of jokes did not make me laugh but they also made me uncomfortable. In connection with my upbringing, my post-secondary education was increasingly offering me a language to understand the pervasiveness of these "jokes" and my personal discomfort.

Not only was the comedy material problematic but on several occasions, I caught myself pondering the reason for the predominately white, male line-up. It was not uncommon to see exclusively white men, with the exception of an occasional single anomaly. This provoked several questions for me: In a culture that was continuing to see women break into previously male dominated lines of work, why was it difficult to find female comedians performing? Why were comedians with such blatantly discriminatory material continuing to be booked given an increase in public criticisms about racist, misogynist and homophobic dialogue?

These questions continued to bother me throughout my undergraduate and Masters studies. I consumed many popular culture articles and essays related to the "gender problem" in comedy. There appeared to be a mix of messages with some arguing that asking whether women were funny had become a boring question since they so obviously were, while others discussed continued barriers and challenges experienced by women in comedy. In the spring of 2011, I was finishing up my first year of Doctoral studies when the movie *Bridesmaids* was released. *Bridesmaids* got relatively good reviews and was praised for being a movie written by and starring women. Despite the good reviews, I was interested in the degree to which these reviews were laced with language that conveyed surprise. Essentially, many of the reviews were starting with the premise that the movie would not be very funny which was why it was so unique to be able to write that the movie was entertaining. Further, several reviews mentioned that even men could enjoy this movie, again implying shock that this kind of comedy crossed gender lines so that *even* men found something that women wrote to be enjoyable. This

moment in time corresponded to my struggle in refining my dissertation proposal involving another topic entirely that was increasingly escaping my interests. Alas, a project was born. I spent the next few years in pubs, theatres, coffee shops, and dingy basements watching comedy and talking to comedians about their experiences at work.

1.2 Research Puzzle

In 1884, Richard Grant White, widely considered to be the most powerful cultural critic of the 19th Century, declared that a sense of humour is "the rarest of qualities in a woman" (Cited in Walker 1988). While it has been over a hundred years since his claim, during which time a lot has changed for the status of women in society, this understanding continues to haunt women who work in comedy. Indeed, in 2007 *Vanity Fair* published an article entitled "Why Women Aren't Funny," wherein the author suggests that men have been forced to develop a sense of humour in order to attract female mates. While these narratives are rooted in baseless sexism they are incredibly pervasive and we know that dominant narratives and expectations related to gender shape and constrain women's experiences in work. That is to say that regardless of how these messages are socially constructed or disseminated they present real consequences for women who want to be taken seriously as comedians. In addition to the "gender problem" in comedy, comedy has also been a domain dominated by white, heterosexual men, revealing a broader "diversity problem." With these narratives in mind, I explore the persistence of inequality for women, non-white, and/or non-heterosexual groups in stand-up comedy work.

As sociologists, we know that inequality is created and perpetuated through work (Acker 1990; Clawson 1999; Cohen and Huffman 2003; Kanter 1977; Tomaskovic – Devey and Skaggs 2002; England 2010). Workplace inequalities are the result of intersecting forms of discrimination wherein processes of inequity and exclusion mutually reinforce and sustain each other (Acker 2006; McCall 2005; Crenshaw 1989). The rich and capacious literature in social inequality and work has effectively shown that broader structures of classism, sexism, homophobia, and racism permeate the organization of work in our society. Those occupying privileged social locations benefit from this arrangement while those who do not, are forced to establish themselves in relation to this hierarchy. Yet, much of what we know about workplace inequality, we know from studies on work in industrial and information-based economies that are rooted in formal organizations.

The economy is changing. There is a growing trend away from traditional work rooted in formal organizations towards precarious, project-based work (Kalleberg 2009; Krahn, Hughes and Lowe 2015; Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford 2003). An increase of jobs in creative work and cultural industries, that is the production of 'aesthetic' or 'symbolic' goods and services, is a major component of this shift. Given that these work settings offer a very different context than traditional forms of work, it is worth exploring how inequality is created, maintained, and resisted in the absence of formal organizations. The inequality present in stand-up comedy provides an entry into my analysis of how we can understand the relationship between work and inequality in non-standard, creative labour. This research applies Acker's (1990) concept of the "ideal

worker," usually referring to male workers whose life allows for a full time and long-term commitment to work while women in their lives take care of personal responsibilities, to creative work. Specifically this research explores how "ideal workers," (Acker 1990) are maintained in creative work, how workers outside of that ideal manage themselves in relation to the ideal, and finally how workers outside of that ideal comply with and also resist the workplace culture. In the case of comedy, it is women and other minorities who fall outside of the ideal. This construction is largely a reflection of the overall narratives in our society about who is and who is not considered and expected to be funny. While these narratives explicitly state that women are not funny, they also present white heterosexual men as funny, implying that non-white and non-heterosexual men are also not funny. Put simply, our culture cultivates a frame to understand white, heterosexual men as comedians but we do not have a culturally derived frame to understand women, people of colour, and queer people as funny. Thus, comedians who fall outside of the ideal and are not expected to be funny have different experiences and considerations when it comes to working in comedy.

It is important for us to understand more about how creative work is organized because it is a growing sector of the economy in this post-industrial era. Indeed, some predict that "the creative economy will be the dominant economic form in the twenty-first century" (Howkins 2001:ix). Further, inequality has been understudied when it comes to creative work (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015). This is largely because many jobs in cultural industries are not taken seriously as arenas of work. Instead, they are seen as 'hobbies' or 'leisurely pastimes'. Additionally, creativity is often thought of as a solitary

process that offers autonomy to workers, undermining associations to structural and systemic discrimination (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Also, creative work tends to straddle the good job/bad job divide (Kalleberg 2011). On the one hand creative work often meets the good jobs criteria by having plenty of intrinsic rewards but it also satisfies the criteria of the bad jobs by having few extrinsic rewards. Thus, further research is needed to understand how processes of inequality unfold in creative labour markets.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate the importance of interrogating patterns of inequality in creative work. Specifically, I argue that the social location of comedians is central to how they organize their work and how the industry responds to them. These findings suggest that despite not being rooted in traditional workplace organizations, modes of inequality continue to emerge and persist in creative work, albeit differently. These findings also highlight the need not only to explore the intersubjective conditions of work in precarious labour markets, but also to consider how workers themselves are reacting to these environments.

The findings emerge from my analysis of interviews that were conducted with 25 comedians representing a variety of social locations and experiences. In addition to these interviews, I gathered data from over a hundred hours of observation at 30 comedy shows. Overall, my data show that historical narratives around comedy and neo-liberal ideologies surrounding creative work conspire to advantage white, heterosexual, male comedians while creating barriers and more onerous working conditions for those who fall outside of that norm through one or multiple identity markers.

Using sociological insights grounded in the traditional sociology of work literature in conjunction with research on creative work and cultural industries, my research makes clear that social inequality continues to exist in creative work and that these processes deserve further investigation. Ultimately, I argue throughout this dissertation that (1) in the absence of formal organizational structures, an "ideal worker" is constructed and embodied, (2) while self-regulation is common in creative industries, workers who fall outside of the "ideal worker" must self-regulate in relation to the work *and* to the "ideal worker", (3) marginalized workers use various strategies to comply and resist their work arrangements but these strategies do little to disrupt the mainstream organization of stand-up comedy work. These findings show how these processes are interrelated and sustain inequality in comedy work. Thus, this research contributes to the body of sociological scholarship that seeks to better understand the relationship between work and inequality. First, I demonstrate the enduring utility of the "ideal worker" concept by applying this concept to novel creative work contexts. Second, I advocate for research on creative work to consider how social locations impact self-regulation. Last, I depict the negotiations of compliance and resistance for marginalized comedians, highlighting the necessity of non-mainstream spaces for marginalized comedians while simultaneously acknowledging that they do little to disrupt and unsettle the inequality in mainstream comedy spaces. Importantly, I look to understand all of these processes of workplace inequality from a lens of intersectionality, specifically focusing on gender, race, and sexuality.

1.3 Sociological Approaches to Inequality and Work

This project is largely informed by the body of research in the sociology of work and inequality that emerged out of feminist studies. Specifically I am bringing insights from inequality research on traditional workplaces and organization to bear on literature about creative work and cultural industries. Much of the research in work and inequality reflects an examination of traditional work settings rooted in bureaucratic, formalized organizational contexts. With this in mind, it is not obvious that these theories and concepts can seamlessly apply to different labour contexts. That said, there is a risk of "reinventing the wheel" or "throwing out the baby with the bath water" if we were to ignore the rich scholarship already available. Taking this into account my research considers Joan Acker's (1990) concept of the "ideal worker" as it applies to creative work. Additionally, I consider theories about self-regulation in work (Banks 2007; Gill 2010) and theories that explore the intersections of compliance and resistance (Buroway 1979) in traditional hierarchical workplaces.

Throughout the first analytical chapter I draw heavily on Joan Acker's (1990) concept of the "ideal worker" which made a significant contribution to the sociology of work literature. Before Acker, several feminist scholars documented the problems associated with male dominated workplaces and the concentration of male–power in economic organizations (Kanter 1977). Despite the attention to gender inequality, Acker (1990) argues that previous scholars limited their analyses of the prevailing organizational structure to associations between masculinity and organizational power. Acker argues that this was largely related to the premise applied to organizational theory

that organizations are gender-neutral and asexual. Thus, examples of gender based inequity, such as sexual harassment, are reduced to being acts of deviance and control by a single actor rather than being a part of the organizational structure itself.

Acker critiques two important publications in the area of gender and work to show the prominence of considering organizations as neutral. First, she shows that despite offering some ground-breaking analyses Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) study of organizations show that gender differences are related to structure rather than individuals. Yet, throughout her writing Kanter considers structure and gender as separate entities rather than considering structures themselves as being gendered. Similarly, following the lead of other "dual-systems" theorists (Hartmann 1976) Ulla Ressner (1987) argues that organizations are made up of bureaucracy and patriarchy. Again, this serves to separate these systems as working along-side one another rather than considering bureaucracies to be embedded with patriarchy.

It is within this context that Acker introduces the concept of the "ideal worker" to show that while jobs and organizations are veiled as gender neutral, they are organized in a way that favours male bodies and their associated lifestyles. Acker's theory provides scholars with a much-needed analysis of how organizational structures and the components of those structures make use of job evaluations, organizational hierarchies, documents, and contracts to rationalize the logic of the workplace culture and structure. That said, Acker's conceptualization of the "ideal worker" is based upon a traditional work context with a specific organizational framework.

That said, many creative work industries are not rooted to traditional organizational structures and traditional methods of evaluation. Stand-up comedy in particular is not an industry with a centralized organization or governing documents yet it continues to be dominated by a particular demographic. Knowing that there is a dominance of white, heterosexual, male workers in stand-up comedy I consider the concept of "ideal worker" as a potential explanation. My findings show that despite the absence of a formal organization there continues to be an "ideal worker" that is deeply embedded in the work context of stand-up comedy through intersubjective mechanisms of rule. In turn, workers who fall outside of this ideal must manage themselves and their strategies around work in response to this ideal.

1.4 Approaches to Inequality and Creative Work

With the largescale changes in work, scholarship that explores the creative and cultural industries is growing. Broadly speaking, this literature can be divided into research that is optimistic about the potential of non-standard creative work contexts (Florida 2002; Howkins 2001; Smith 1998) and literature that has flagged it as a new arena for perpetuating workplace inequality (Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). For many scholars, non-traditional creative work provides new opportunities for celebrating diversity and creating space for creative workers regardless of their race, gender, and sexuality giving way to the dominant narrative that these jobs are neutral and open to anyone (Florida 2002). Other scholars are less optimistic, arguing instead that the focus

on creativity and the non-traditional elements of these work settings displaces questions

about how inequality operates in creative industries (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015).

    The more optimistic theorists argue that creativity necessitates autonomy which

allows workers to break free of rigid hierarchies and top-down management styles that

characterize so much of the industrial working world (Florida 2002; Howkins 2001;

Smith 1998). Further, work in cultural industries privileges creativity above all else and

therefore these work contexts are less vulnerable to the forms of social inequality

commonly found in traditional workplace settings (Florida 2002). In contrast, others are

critical of the claims heralding creative work as the autonomous paradise it is believed to

be. Instead, critics argue that creative work is often precarious, exploitative, alienating,

and poorly rewarded (Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). Indeed, work in the

creative economy thrives on neo-liberal narratives which place the responsibility of

success and failure on individuals themselves. Moreover, the neo-liberal ideology in

cultural industries fosters competitive work environments rather than collegial,

autonomous ones. Thus, workers in cultural industries often end up depending on

meritocratic narratives, not because it is imposed on them through power and coercion

but because they have internalized the ideology that suggests that working hard and being

exploited (by themselves or others) will eventually lead to future paid work that is both

rewarding and secure (Banks, 2007; Gill 2010; Ross 2000).

    Others have written about the prominence of self-regulation or governmentality

when it comes to creative work. Building on the work of Foucault (1988), Mark Banks

(2007) uses governmentality theory to show how people are trained to accept and

reproduce the conditions of their own subordination while working in cultural industries. Indeed, despite the supposed opportunity for greater autonomy, neo-liberal narratives encourage a self-regulation that mirrors if not exceeds the expectations that are placed on workers through management. I explore self-regulation as it applies to comedians and find that the concept of self-regulation needs to be understood as being pre-embedded with regulatory narratives related to identity dynamics in a society that carefully polices displays of gender, race, and sexuality.

My own research provides support for the critical stream of this literature. In doing so, I take up Acker's (2006) call to be diligent in "looking at specific organizations and the local, ongoing practical activities of organizing work that, at the same time, reproduce complex inequalities" (p.442). My research takes this on by exploring how social inequality is built, maintained, and resisted in the creative labour context of stand-up comedy. I argue that stand-up comedy offers a particularly interesting case to study complex forms of inequality within the creative economy because stand-up comedy has traditionally been dominated by straight, white, cis-gender males. Furthermore, explicit misogynistic, racist, homophobic and other discriminatory content is ubiquitous. Yet at the same time, there are women, people of colour, and/or queer people who are engaging in this work. Therefore, this dissertation explores how women and other marginalized workers engage with stand-up comedy work to carve out their spaces within. Additionally, the findings in this dissertation allow us to better understand how social inequality is maintained and challenged in creative work contexts. In so doing, this

research adds important layers to the complex debates about the economic opportunities and emancipatory potential of creative work.

1.5 Dissertation Overview

This study heeds the call for more empirical research interrogating inequality in creative work (see Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; McRobbie 2002; Pratt 2007). It offers an empirical example of how inequality is created, maintained and resisted in creative work. The central research question guiding this project is: With the growing trend away from traditional work rooted in formal organizations and toward cultural industries, how can we understand the relationship between work and inequality in non-standard, creative labour? More specifically, this dissertation asks:

1. How is the "ideal worker" created and maintained in the non-standard work settings of stand-up comedy?
2. How do marginalized workers in stand-up comedy negotiate their own work in relation to the ideal?
3. How do marginalized comedians manage their work to comply with and also resist the dominant work culture?

In the following chapters, I answer these questions using data from observations at an assortment of comedy shows and the experiences of comedians from a variety of social locations.

The analytical chapters capture the culture of work in stand-up comedy, how marginalized workers grapple with that culture, and how marginalized workers comply and resist the prevailing mainstream culture of stand-up comedy, all while using an intersectional lens. Chapter four uses Joan Acker's (1990) theory of the "ideal worker" but asks how it is maintained outside of formal organizational structures. I ask if, and how, conceptions of the "ideal worker" exist in non-standard work environments. The findings establish that there is a clear, embodied conception of the ideal worker in comedy; however, unlike Acker's theory that emphasizes the organizational structure as key to the creation of the ideal worker, I find that the ideal worker is the result of three inter-subjective mechanisms of rule: (1) "Diversity Logics", (2) "Compulsory Networking" and (3) "Creative License". Taken together these mechanisms of rule ensure that the ideal worker in comedy is white, male, and heterosexual. This chapter makes a contribution to the sociology of work literature by building on Acker's earlier work and shifting the focus away from organizational structures to uncovering the intersubjective processes that create the ideal worker in non-standardized creative industries. Further, this analysis refutes the construction of creative jobs as neutral and instead, confirms that even in non-standard work, conceptions of ideal workers are produced through intersubjective mechanisms of rule. In other words, even without formal organizational structures, creative industries find ways to create and sustain inequality in work.

Having established the processes by which the 'ideal worker' is constructed and maintained in cultural work, chapter five teases out the ways in which marginalized workers, workers who are positioned outside the ideal, negotiate their work. Here I draw

upon the body of literature in the sociology of work that examines the shift toward

neoliberal individualism (Kalleberg 2009) as well as the more specific writing focused

upon self-management strategies in the cultural industries (Banks 2007; Gill 2010). This

literature draws attention to the increasing individualization, autonomy and need for self-

management in creative work; however, it has yet to explore the significance of social

location. With this in mind, this chapter is driven by the question: how does the existence

of an ideal worker inform processes of self-management for marginalized workers? I find

that comedians who occupy one or more intersections of marginality (specifically related

to gender, race, and sexuality), describe a heightened need for reflexivity and self-

awareness in relation to their proximity to the ideal worker that makes self-management

strategies in comedy complex and onerous. In other words, marginalized workers must

engage in additional labour due to their proximity to the ideal worker. Specifically I

explore how marginalized comedians self-regulate in relation to their comedic content,

their appearances, and their emotions. These findings demonstrate the need to address the

relationship between social location and individualization and autonomy in work in order

to further understand processes of inequality. Simply stated, self-regulation in relation to

work should not be treated as an abstract concept because self-regulation works

differently for differently situated workers.

      In chapters four and five, I highlight processes of inequality that provide strong

support that inequality exists in non-standard, creative work. Chapter six builds on these

findings by asking how marginalized workers engage with their work by using strategies

to negotiate where and under what conditions they work. I set up this chapter by

discussing theories about workers compliance and resistance (Burawoy 1979) to show the

importance of considering worker subjectivity in relation to work opportunities and

experiences. I find that there are three prominent strategies that marginalized comedians

take in response to their work cultures. In the first case, comedians employ what I call

"justifiable acquiescence" in that they deliberately choose to overlook inequalities in their

work and make attempts to comply with the work culture; doing so requires added

emotion work (Hochschild 1983); however, this strategy allows workers to participate in

prominent comedy spaces. In the second case, comedians choose to opt-out of comedy

work all together. In the third case, comedians choose to operate outside of the

mainstream comedy arenas and carve out spaces that are specifically curated with equity

principles in mind. This approach also requires additional work. These approaches have

some rewards for the workers but also some drawbacks. In acquiescing to the culture,

workers maintain their ties to mainstream comedy but they are constrained in how they

can challenge the status quo. In opting-out comedians no longer have to endure the work

culture of comedy but are also no longer performing. In creating new spaces workers

provide opportunities to develop their own work in a safe environment; however, because

these spaces are cultivated outside of the mainstream channels their opportunities for

building networks and gaining mainstream success are severely limited. Thus, none of

these approaches radically disrupts the established culture of work, allowing inequality to

reproduce itself by undermining resistance to the status quo and legitimating inequalities

through the compliance of workers in the one case and segregating marginalized workers

in the other. This dissertation contributes to the work and inequalities literature by

demonstrating the importance of analysing how strategic engagement with unequal work

environments contributes to or challenges inequality, and how forms that this can take in

creative work. Further, this chapter shows the difficulties of resisting inequality in

informal work contexts, thereby confirming the deep fixity of inequality in the work

culture itself that mirrors that of traditional work environments. Despite this lack of

radical change this chapter also highlights the solidarity and empowerment that can come

from the resistance in these curated spaces.

Two

<u>Literature Review</u>

This chapter will provide a literature review for the empirical analysis of work in stand-up comedy, focusing on how the rise of work in cultural industries has led to normalizing economic expectations and neo-liberal agendas which foster processes of inequality. In order to contextualize this project I review relevant debates in work and inequality, shifting economies and cultural industries before discussing research on comedy work in particular. The review of literature related to the definition of work, inequality and work, and intersectionality and work, provides a foundation to understand the complexities of agency and structure in producing and reproducing inequality in work. I then consider the evolution of labour market economies toward cultural industries, followed by definitions of creative work and its relationship to neo-liberalism in order to provide an overview of the contemporary socio-labour context. The bulk of the literature review discusses relevant research on the relationship between social inequality and creative work, specifically as this relates to management, pay, hiring, and hours. Finally, I give a brief overview of comedy work in specific to help situate this particular case within these literatures.

2.1 What is Work?

Work has been of interest to sociologists because it is a fundamental human activity that plays a major role in shaping our social relations. People's lives are largely organized around work. Furthermore, what people do for work has a major influence on their personal identities and their social positions in society; however, defining what work *is* requires some specificity. In a broad sense, "work refers to activity that provides a socially valued product or service" (Krahn, Hughes, Lowe 2015:xxviii). The specific activities that count as work are many and have evolved over time. For example, feminists fought for unpaid work, largely in the form of childcare and domestic responsibilities, to be recognized as forms of important work. Additionally, community work, internships, apprenticeships, and creative work have further blurred our understandings of employment relationships in contemporary capitalist societies. Much sociological research focuses on workplace relations, as well as organizational and institutional structures as sites of inequality raising questions about power, conflict, and cooperation in work (Krahn, Hughes, Lowe 2015). The following section will explore some of the scholarship in this area and tease out the complicated relationship between the inequality that is embedded in workplace structures and the ways in which work reproduces systems of inequality.

2.2 Inequality and Work

Sociologists have long established that work is a site of social inequality. Work environments are managed, policed and regulated in ways that advantage some and

disadvantage others. Early studies in the sociology of work relied on human capital

theory (Becker 1975) which argues that occupational position is determined by how hard

one works in acquiring an education and in their workplace. Essentially, this theoretical

model relies on a meritocratic logic suggesting that education and social institutions of

work are neutral. This narrative remains popular within the general public but the theory

has been criticized by academics for neglecting to consider that hiring and promotion

practices are highly influenced by socio-economic status, community of origin, gender,

race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other personal identity characteristics (Krahn,

Hughes, and Lowe 2015). Work contexts do not exist in a vacuum and thus they are

influenced and built upon many of the same hierarchies, dominant narratives, and

stratifications that govern our society.

    With this in mind scholars have conducted research to illuminate some of these

trends. For example, studies have shown that if someone comes from a family whose

members have a legacy of attaining university degrees, considered a vehicle of upward

mobility in work, the chance of them graduating from university substantially increases

(Turcotte 2011). Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) documented the disproportionate

representation of women, immigrants, visible minority groups, and students in jobs with

low pay, no benefits, limited authority, little respect, physically demanding work, and a

lack of protection from exploitation and harassment. Importantly, the dominant

representation of these groups in secondary labour markets is not a coincidence but a

product of systemic and structural bias. Further, research has shown that discriminatory

hiring practices experienced by visible minorities is sometimes enacted through subtle

everyday practices within a workplace bureaucracy (Beck, Reitz, and Weiner 2002) but it can also take the form of explicit racism (Stasiulis and Bakan 2003; Milan and Tran 2004). Discrimination in relation to hiring and promotion practices has also been documented in relation to disability (Prince 2004) and age (Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch 2011). Additionally, gender has been shown to be the paramount basis for job assignment, leading to several examples of sex segregated jobs (Reskin 1993). This is an example of labour market segmentation theory which posits that segregation between good and bad jobs in the labour market occurs on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity and age. Good jobs are considered to have safe and comfortable workplace environments, to be intrinsically rewarding, in the form of being challenging with high autonomy and low alienation, and have plenty of extrinsic rewards characterised by high pay, good benefits, job security and opportunity for promotion (Kalleberg 2011; Rinehart 2006). Conversely bad jobs tend to have uncomfortable and unsafe workplace environments, and few intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. Importantly, it is women, visible-minorities and young workers who are particularly vulnerable to being segregated into bad jobs which tend to be non-standard jobs that pay less, and have less job security and benefits (McMullin and Curtis 2017). As such, structural forces outside of the individual, organize people's positions within the workforce.

Yet, research also shows that work outcomes are not exclusively the products of work structures but are also intimately linked to personal decisions. Therefore, it is important to consider socio-political conditions and individual ideologies when it comes to work (Burawoy 1979). That is to say, both circumstances *and* preferences influence

educational and occupational choices and outcomes. Of course, there are complicated

relationships between our understanding of individual choices and relational constraints

(Tilly 1998; Sewell 1992). For example, the scholarship on gender and work

demonstrates the relationship between the mutual impacting forces of work, societal

narratives, individual responsibilities and choices, and organizational opportunities and

barriers.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) innovative research shows that distributions of

power play a major role in the careers of men and women. Specifically, she demonstrates

that women in higher ranking positions occupy "token" statuses in organizational

settings. This means that the presence of women in the organizational hierarchy is

symbolic to give the appearance of more equality without actually changing the structure

to become more equitable. Kanter argues that tokenism is a self-perpetuating system

largely based on responses to structural conditions being reframed as gender differences

in work behaviour. For example, if there are few opportunities for the only woman in the

board meeting to speak this will be considered a result of women being innately quiet and

meek rather than a product of the unwelcoming environment. Joan Acker (1990) furthers

our understanding of work and gender by arguing that gender itself provides the subtext

for organizational structure; therefore it is not simply the organizational structure that is

impacting gender relations and more specifically, where women are located in workplace

organizations, but rather that societal understandings of gender itself are embedded in

organization structures. Thus, jobs are not abstract, neutral entities, but embodied and

imagined with male workers. Acker's (1990) theory has been applied to an array of

organizational contexts to help explain gender inequality in work (for example, Tienari,

Quack, and Theobald 2002; Shelley, Morabito, Tobin-Gurley 2011; Williams, Muller,

and Kilanski 2012).

Scholars have also highlighted that gender stratification does not exist in isolated

workplace contexts, but rather gender inequality in work is inextricably linked to the

gendered organization of other institutions such as the family (Armstrong and Armstrong

1994; England 2005; Hoshschild 1989). For instance, women's domestic and childcare

responsibilities have an impact on the decisions they make about work and on how

employers treat them for hiring and promotion (Ranson 2005). Women's experiences

with work are often mediated by their relationship to motherhood. Correll, Bernard and

Paik (2007) argue that there is a wage penalty for mothers. They also show that in

contrast to men who are often rewarded for having children in ways that improve their

chances for hiring and promotion, women are penalized for their motherhood statuses.

This example demonstrates the complex interconnections between social expectations

related to gender, in this case how societal narratives about motherhood and fatherhood

influence gendered understandings about work.

The research on women's negotiations of paid and unpaid work helps to illustrate

the complexity between structure and agency when it comes to work outcomes. Catherine

Hakim (2002; 2006) argues that more women are opting out of work because it suits their

preferences in terms of paid employment and marriage/child-care responsibilities. She

identifies three dominant patterns for women's preferences when it comes to work:

"home-centered" where family takes priority, "career-centered" where employment takes

priority and "adaptive" where less demanding jobs are balanced with family duties. Other

scholars (Williams, Manvell and Borstein 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2014; Stone

2007) have been critical of the simplicity of this "opt-out" thesis because it places too

much emphasis on personal choice and fails to include structural barriers and constraints.

Thus, scholars have highlighted the role of "maternal walls" and "glass ceilings" in

shaping women's experiences in work (Williams, Manvell, and Borstein 2007; Williams

and Dempsey 2014). In contrast to Hakim's argument, Pamela Stone's (2007) study of

professional women found that women were much more likely to be "shut out" by

structural barriers than "opt-out" by their own volition. These studies suggest that

research on work requires a complex understanding of existing constraints and agentic

preferences. With this in mind, my research explores both the culture of stand-up comedy

and the choices that comedians are making in relation to the existing work environment.

In addition, my research will follow the lead of inequality theorists who champion

an intersectional approach (McMullin and Curtis 2017). Much of the literature in work

and inequality discusses discrimination in work place settings based on a single-axis

model (i.e., gender). Recently, there has been more attention paid to the advantages of

adopting an intersectional framework to consider issues related to work and inequality.

The advantages of this approach are particularly evident in research that has shown

varying experiences based on identity characteristics within similar working

circumstances. For instance, Christine L. Williams' (1992) applied the concept of the

"glass ceiling" to men who work in predominately female populated jobs and found that

rather than confronting barriers to promotions, men in these occupations actually

benefited from being the 'minority' gender and instead rode the "glass escalator." Thus,

Williams builds on Kanter's (1977) theory to show that tokenism is neither a gender-

neutral concept, nor does it work the same way for women as it does for men.

Subsequently Aida Wingfield (2009) applied Williams' concept of the "glass escalator"

to black men in the female dominated profession of nursing and again, found that

previous research did not adequately explain the experiences of racialized men in these

fields. Simply stated, racialized men in nursing did not get to ride the "glass escalator."

Further, in her research on gay and lesbian teachers, Connell (2012) shows that the

concept of the "glass escalator" depends on homophobia in order to maintain

constructions of hegemonic masculinity and the advantages that come with them. These

examples show that processes of promotion in gender segregated work cannot be

explained by gender alone, highlighting the need for intersectional approaches. With this

in mind, Williams' (2013) revisits her concept of the "glass escalator" and acknowledges

that her original conception failed to address the myriad social categories that intersect to

shape the experiences of men. Additionally, Williams (2013) highlights the workplace

transformations characterized by neoliberalism that have occurred since her original

analysis including temporary, project-based, unstable work. Thus, Williams calls for new

concepts in order to better explain gender inequality at work. Failure to address

intersecting social locations in Kanter's (1977) and William's (1992) research limits the

understanding of gender and work hierarchies. Arguably, workplace inequalities are the

result of interconnecting power relations wherein processes of discrimination and

exclusion mutually reinforce and sustain each other.

These examples highlight the advantages of taking an intersectional approach to research on work. To this end, Joan Acker (2006) argues that too often scholarship in the sociology of work has focused on one dimension of identity as the basis for organizational and individual discrimination, leaving intersectional understandings analytically subordinate. In an effort to account for these dynamics Acker (2006) has coined the term "inequality regimes" in order to show how intersections of gender, race and class organize processes of inequality at work. This concept heeds the call for an intersectional (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005) investigation of work inequalities specifically focusing on "the shape and degree of inequality, organizing processes that create and recreate inequalities, the invisibility of inequalities, the legitimacy of inequalities, and the controls that prevent protest against inequalities" (Acker 2006: 444). As discussed in the introduction, this research will build on Acker's earlier concept of the "ideal worker" while also incorporating her call for a more intersectional approach to interrogate the structural and procedural inequalities in stand-up comedy. Combining Acker's more recent directions with her ground-breaking work will provide insight into how intersecting identity dynamics help to create and maintain the "ideal worker."

This section illustrates the rich body of research that demonstrates how social inequality is both product and outcome of the way work is organized in our society. These findings will inform my own analysis because central to my research is an attention to how the multiple and intersecting gender, racial and sexual identities of comedians shape the organizing processes of their work, and of stand-up comedy, more

generally. In this regard, I explore the relationship between structure and personal

negotiations in terms of who gets to do comedy, how they do comedy and where they do

comedy. However, the bulk of the above research explores inequality processes as they

relate to traditional workplace settings leaving one to ask if these processes remain the

same in non-traditional work environments? In the next section, I consider shifts in the

economy which have led to an increase in creative work and consider how creative work

differs from traditional settings and why this is important.

2.3 Creative Work

Each prominent shift in the organization of the economy has brought about theoretical

insights on social inequality and work. Early work by Karl Marx (1848) argued that the

power differential between those who owned the means of production and those that

worked for them would result in ever growing class conflict. Since Marx's writings,

economies have changed and evolved, causing scholars to re-consider the relationship

between power, inequality, and the changing nature of work. The onset of various

economic changes in the Canadian context has provoked optimism about the potential for

reducing conflict and increasing harmony at work. In the early 20th Century, Canada had

established a resource and manufacturing-based economy that went through a major shift

with the introduction of joint-stocks (Krahn, Hughes and Lowe 2015). This change

prompted some to be hopeful about the potential found in the "managerial revolution"

which asserted that the dispersed level of ownership would result in less conflict in work

(Burnham 1941). Similarly, some argued that the post-industrial society would reduce the

concentration of power because knowledge and abilities to solve problems were just as beneficial as owning property in this new context (Bell 1973). Yet research since has confirmed that both of these predictions were overly optimistic and that social inequality persisted in the post-industrial era. With the more recent shift toward a rise of "creative economies" in the early 2000s, we have seen similar levels of optimism (see Florida 2002). Research looking into the equity dynamics in creative economies is ongoing and has been overall less robust and slower than research that emerged after previous economic shifts.

The creative economy as an entity is relatively new and until recently has escaped questions and studies of inequality for three prominent reasons. First, many jobs in the creative economy have not been understood as forms of work but rather as hobbies or art forms that reside outside of traditional work. Technically, jobs in the creative economy produce valued services or products and therefore they fall under the broad definition of work yet, many of these jobs are not traditional forms of work and therefore they are not always counted as legitimate jobs. Secondly, creativity is often thought of as a lone solitary process, void of a relationship to structural and systemic conditions (Crewe, Gregson and Brooks 2003; Hesmondhalgh 2007). Lastly, the autonomous nature of many jobs in the creative industries has led some to believe that workers get to avoid discrimination associated with hierarchies and stratification. Some scholars have challenged these understandings by asking questions about inequality in the creative economy and calling on others to engage in empirical research to do the same (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; McRobbie

2002; Pratt 2007). It is important to consider issues of inequality as they relate to the

creative economy because: (1) creative work environments often differ from traditional

settings in several ways and (2) creative industries appear to be growing. Both of these

will be further explored below but first we should consider what is meant by the term

"creative economy."

A variety of expressions have been used to describe work in cultural industries

and the creative economy. The most notable terms have been cultural work (Banks 2007)

and creative labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). These terms are used

interchangeably and some scholars have taken to using a combined term of "cultural and

creative industries" or CCIs (Conor, Gill and Taylor 2015). Following suit, this

dissertation uses the terms creative work and cultural industries interchangeably. Some

argue that the creative economy is characterized by the novel competitive edge it offers

workers in an over-credentialized economy, others employ creative economy to reference

the "growth of the particular industries that produce cultural outputs" (Gill and Pratt

2008:2). This dissertation works from the premise that cultural work or creative work

involves "the production of 'aesthetic' or 'symbolic' goods and services; that is,

commodities whose core value is derived from their function as carriers of meaning in the

form of images, symbols, signs and sounds" (Banks 2007: 2). While it can be difficult to

configure the degree to which material productions represent aesthetic and symbolic

goods given that it can be convincingly argued that artefacts have agency (Latour 1991),

as well as politics (Winner 1985), this definition certainly applies to comedy work since

there is no material output and it is solely a symbolic service, null of material use-value.

As mentioned above, creative work can differ in many ways from traditional work settings. First, there is less of an emphasis on how government legislation dictates the operation of creative work. For the most part, labour legislation continues to overlook or even ignore many forms of nonstandard work (Fudge and Vosko 2001). Secondly, there is little to no bureaucratic structures to many creative industries so these work structures end up relying exclusively on informal authority and control. Informal and intersubjective regulation are common in traditional work settings as well but the difference is that creative work is often *dependent* on this form of governing. Third, the lack of bureaucratic structure ensures that there is no well-defined bureaucratic hierarchy or career ladder. Fourth, there are no developed labour markets (Althauser 1989) which usually lead to greater job security and career opportunities. Lastly, there are no labour market shelters in many creative industries, either in the form of professional associations or unions. These differences produce an alternative labour market context that warrants a reconsideration of traditional theoretical scholarship aimed at understanding inequality and work.

More research on inequality in creative work is timely since there has been an increased interest in the role that jobs in creative industries play in our society. Some have even painted creative and cultural work as an economic saviour (Florida 2002, Howkins 2001, Smith 1998). Further some predict that creative work will be the "oil of the 21st C" (Ross 2009). With this in mind, city planners have invested time, energy and funding into producing "creative cities" (Banks 2007), which according to Florida (2007) should be the number one factor considered in what he terms the most important decision

of your life -- where to live. With this philosophy in mind, cities have attempted to

capitalize by creating inviting environments for the "creative class" to reside in the hopes

of receiving the reputation of a "creative city" and revitalizing their economies. As a tool

of urban development, creative cities "are supposed to be the solution to urban problems

of many kinds: economic stagnancy, urban shrinkage, social segregation, technological

aging, [and] global competition" (Lang et al. 2008: 531-532). With these kinds of

promises it is no wonder that there is a lure to invoke creative city policies and practices,

particularly in the face of mass industrial closures.

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada provides an excellent example to illustrate these kinds

of shifts. For a long time the steel industry was the heart of labour in Hamilton but in the

last few decades the city has witnessed the closing and outsourcing of several of its steel

plants (see Russomano 2015). Given that Hamilton is a more affordable place to live than

Toronto yet in close proximity to it, Hamilton seems to have attracted members of the

Torontonian "creative class." The migration of creative workers to the city has given rise

to the mantra "Art is the new Steel." While some critically minded residents resent this

rebranding and what they have characterized as a provocation of gentrification, city

planners seem to have embraced this idea and have consulted counterparts from the

United States to further these initiatives (Hamilton Spectator August 8th, 2015). Thus, the

need for further research into these work environments is increasingly necessary as

cultural industries continue to grow. This is particularly true when it comes to issues of

inequality as Conor, Gill and Taylor (2015) argue, research into creative industries needs

to "interrogate the myth of diversity and equity within the CCIs [creative cultural

industries], and the distinctive patterns and dynamics of inequality and exclusion" (p.1).

Work is too often plagued with the "progress narrative" (Edley and Wetherell 2001)

where equity is seen as organic and inevitable which diverts attention from deliberate

efforts to ensure that this happens. The popular narratives about creative work and the

city support or rebranding are directly related to the neo-liberal context in which these

areas of work are growing.

2.3.1 Neo-Liberalism

Cultural production and the organization of work are strongly shaped by dominant

societal ideologies of neo-liberalism. Simply put, neo-liberalism refers to a laissez-faire

economic model which favours free-market capitalism, a model that thrives on

presumptions about individualization and competition. Therefore, similar to human

capital theory, a meritocratic logic is reinforced under neo-liberalism so that workers

understand their outcomes as being intrinsically tied to individual choices and personal

effort.

One of the ways that neo-liberal ideology has permeated work is through the

evolving notion of incentive. Economist Frederic Lordon (2014) explains that the

incentive behind work was historically linked to a carrot-and-stick model. In these cases,

the negative consequences to unemployment are poverty and ultimately hunger and the

positive consequences can be the opportunities to obtain what we desire, usually some

combination of material and social rewards. Lordon (2014) argues that this model was

not optimal for management as both consequences were external to the culture of work

itself. Therefore, "the ruthless neo-liberal project […] is to construct a model of work that produces 'intrinsic joyful effects'" (Lordon 2014: 51-52). The idea that there are internal rewards attached to work and that this kind of work is the most desirable, in many cases *the* key to happiness, is the very basis of the creative economy. The internal rewards are designed to be all-encompassing so that the very fact that one enjoys what they do is reward and justification enough to trump any of the less desirable parts that may accompany their job. The transfer to internal rewards provides the foundation for the neo-liberal agenda that governs contemporary understandings of work.

The emphasis on the internal rewards of work fits with the optimistic narratives about creative work. As McRobbie (2002b) notes, work that is associated with the creative economy tends to be thought of as socially prestigious. The creative economy dematerializes labour so that work becomes "packaged as leisure, and hardship and boredom are effaced by the promises of creativity and satisfaction" (Pang 2009:56-57). This is further compounded by the deeply rooted narratives around work in our society, such as "do what you love," "follow your passions," and "find your calling". Further, work in creative economies is often considered to be synonymous with one's craft or art, leaving it particularly vulnerable to neo-liberal and "do what you love" discourses. These conceptions move away from work as a means of survival and instead present it as a lifestyle choice that encompasses expressions of one's whole self and identity.

This is particularly true of ideologies in Western countries. Alvin Toffler (1991) argues that with the shift to an information society, traditional labour becomes less significant. That said, others (Pang 2009) note that much of this work is still needed but it

is simply not valued in the same way. The current focus on information and creative

economies renders service work and other bad jobs invisible. For example, Google's

"work complex," in the heart of Silicon Valley, is touted for providing perks such as free

food and laundry service to their employees. It is taken for granted that by "employees"

they mean their information technicians. There is no mention of the workers who are

actually responsible for preparing and serving the "free" food or doing the laundry. It is

also important to note that many of the workers doing the manual, service work are

female and racialized workers given that members from these equity-seeking groups are

overrepresented in these lines of work. Put simply, the autonomy and perks of many

creative jobs are dependent on the subordinate (and less creative) labour of others. The

undervaluing of service and industrial work is also why a lot of it has been outsourced to

non-Western countries. The privilege of wealthy countries allows them to more easily

adopt creative work with its internal rewards while outsourcing more routinized and

mundane forms of work. As Pang (2009) explains, "the migration of monotonous

assembly-line work is in part willed by the citizens of wealthy nations, so that they – and

particularly members of the younger generation – can partake in more 'innovative' and

'rewarding' careers" (p. 56). Thus, there is no social prestige associated with non-creative

or non-intellectual based work in the everyday mantras about work in Western societies.

    This vision is in opposition to the 1960s beatnik generation who worked

exclusively for external rewards which went to fund their artistic endeavours. In these

circles, there were strict boundaries between work and art so that art did not risk

becoming encumbered by other peoples' wants or the pursuit of external rewards. Thus,

art was done in spite of work and not as a form of work itself. The idea of suspending

"greed" for wages and combining work, art and activism is the result of glorifying the

inherent and internal rewards associated with work itself. This sacrificial narrative of

working primarily for the internal rewards and for the betterment of the world can

become license to be treated badly as a worker; at best your work is undervalued and at

worst, not valued at all. These bifurcated constructions of internal rewards or fair wages

presents workers with a false choice, dedication and love for a job should not be

contradictory to the assertion of rights as a worker.

Neo-liberalism can be understood as an affirming force for contemporary

capitalism and work ethic in Canada. People have largely internalized the idea that their

success is based on self-reliance and individualism or as Silva (2015) writes, "the cultural

logic of neoliberalism resonates at the deepest level of the self" (pg. 18). Max Weber

(1905) understood that societal change was the product of ideas and ideologies. He

convincingly showed that capitalism initially formed in the very places where there were

high numbers of Protestants practicing Calvinism, thereby concluding that it was

Protestantism that helped to provoke and establish the system of capitalism. Calvinists

believe in pre-destination and so they established guidelines which were meant to let you

know if you had been chosen to be "saved," so that you did not need to live in fear of

your fate at the end of life. A successful and well-paying job as well as the ability to

create an economic surplus or savings were all considered "signs" in the present life that

you had been chosen to be saved in the afterlife. These characteristics are congruent with

capitalism, thus Weber (1905) argued that capitalism was provoked and sustained though

the "protestant work ethic." Despite a global decline in the orthodox practicing of

Protestantism, many of these virtues related to work ethic remain priorities and markers

of success for people in society. Thus, one could argue that the neo-liberal ideologies,

dazzlingly present in creative work, contribute to the tenacity of capitalist ideals.

Throughout this dissertation, I will show the power of the "creative work ethic" to sustain

meritocratic, neo-liberal capitalism and justify inequality at work. Similar, to Weber's

theory this argument highlights the ability of ideologies to affect social change except

that instead of religious ideals contemporary work ethics are sustained through neo-

liberal ethos. In addition to shaping popular attitudes about work, neo-liberalism has also

contributed to the transformation of how work is organized. In the past traditional work

settings were characterized by stability and career ladders which are increasingly

uncommon features in contemporary work settings (Williams 2013). Instead, as Williams

(2013) argues, contemporary work is often flexible, project-based and temporary. This is

particularly true for work in cultural industries.

      The next section explores how creative work is organized by considering several

areas that are central to the organization of work: management, pay, hiring, and hours.

Neo-liberalism informs positive and optimistic understandings of these areas of creative

work but critical scholarship shows the omnipresence of inequality in these seemingly

"autonomous" and "flexible" work environments. So, despite these novel work contexts,

inequality remains obstinate.

2.4 Organization of Creative Work

When it comes to the potential of equity in creative industries there appears to be a divide among theorists. On the one hand, there are scholars who see the way that work is organized in cultural industries to be novel where meritocracy reigns and is unconstrained by social inequalities that exist in traditional work environments (Florida 2002; Howkins 2001). On the other hand, there are theorists who argue that the diversity and flexibility often associated with creative work are overstated and do not negate systemic inequality (Banks 2007; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008; McRobbie 2002; Ross 2000). The following subsections will draw on the literature that debunks some of the optimistic myths about creative work in terms of how the work is organized, by focusing specifically on management, pay, hiring, and hours. This research will show some of the general characteristics related to creative work which will help establish the foundation for this research.

2.4.1 Management/Supervision in Creative Work

Theorists with a positive interpretation of the potential of creative work argue that creativity necessitates autonomy which allows workers to break free of rigid hierarchies and top-down management that characterizes so much of the industrial working world. This is largely fueled by the premise that "creativity is embodied in a particular type of personality: the individual creative genius" (DeFillippi, Grabher and Jones 2007:511). That said, research has consistently debunked the myth of the spontaneous revelation by a solitary scientist or artist and shown the ways in which science and creativity are socially

constructed processes that are bound by institutional conditions (Hargdon and Douglas 2001; Kuhn 1962). As Roberts (2000) points out, rather than being entirely self-reliant many artists are acutely aware of their audiences and are willing to change their outputs in an effort to conform to the expectations of the audience. Furthermore, she argues that despite the coveted idea that the value of art and creativity should be independent of public scrutiny (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944), ultimately it is the consensus of a mainstream audience that provides a platform for the art to be seen, showing that external processes are just as pertinent to the creation of art as internal ones (Roberts 2000). This need for public support and the willingness on the part of the creative worker to conform is one of the tensions present when creative work becomes commodified. It reminds us that capital gain remains the goal of an economy under a capitalist system and also tends to factor in to some degree in the goals of the creative workers themselves.

Despite the reliance on commodification, an argument in favour of the freedom and democracy associated with creative work is that even under capitalism, creative work must afford some degree of "autonomy" to cultural workers in order for creativity to occur and ultimately a profit earned (Ryan 1992). In other words, "the romantic myths of the artist suggests, that people with such gifts cannot be subjected to the constraints imposed on other members of society" (Becker 1982:14). That said, the boundaries of this autonomy are unclear and some see the supposed flexibility, freelancing, and autonomy offered as novel working conditions for creative workers as nothing more than a guise for continued exploitation. While some workers may benefit in small ways from these trends, as Pang (2009) points out "workers are also responsible for their own career

development and security" (p. 59). Work may not be subject to the same kinds of surveillance as in the past but this is accompanied by less job security, which for a lot of creative workers means a constant threat of unemployment. For example, stand-up comedy is not subject to the same kinds of management structures as many traditional workplaces yet as the analytical chapters will show, surveillance is still present in these work settings but it tends to be organized differently, in some cases imposed by the workers themselves. In spite of specific scrutiny workers in cultural industries often become the agents of their own subjection through the effects of the panoptical surveillance. As Foucault (1975) explains, "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (pg. 202-203). Thus, there is opposition to viewing creative work as an autonomous paradise. Instead, creative work can be exploitative and alienating. Of course, these trends are largely related to neo-liberalism and the societal shift towards individualization which contributes to a competitive environment rather than a more collegial, autonomous one.

         Another downfall of not having a specific management structure is that it is not always clear where to direct complaints about workplace inequality. Further, having no embedded work community means there is little opportunity to create unity among workers in order to provoke change to working conditions. Indeed, in an unregulated, neo-liberal context, any chance at building solidarity is counteracted by the drive for individual competition. Ultimately, from this perspective, the individualization of work

prevents any collective responses – successes and failures rest on the shoulders of the workers themselves which shifts attention away from structural inequalities. Further, the seemingly impermeable narrative that creativity is an individual phenomenon makes creative work particularly vulnerable to neo-liberal discourses which often mask questions about macro structures of inequality.

In an effort to grapple with recent developments in capitalist production and changes in management structures some scholars have developed a neo-Marxist perspective by the name of Autonomist Marxism (Hardt and Negri 1994; Lazzarato 1996). Autonomist Marxists argue that authority is less centralized and hierarchized than it has been in the past and therefore they believe that opportunity for change comes from the micro resistances in everyday life decisions. Much of the Autonomist Marxist scholarship is criticized for focusing exclusively on theoretical interpretations and lacking empirical examples to support their theories. Additionally, some have accused Autonomist Marxists of being overly optimistic and post-structuralist (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). I agree with these criticisms that see Autonomous Marxism as overly reductionist and laissez-faire.

Ultimately, it is unclear that having "less" formal type management in creative work contexts leads to a greater sense of autonomy or flexibility. Creative workers are often hyper-aware of how the quality of their output can have significant impacts on future opportunities and their overall livelihoods. A lack of formalized management structures in work also undermines opportunity for solidarity among workers and grievances towards unfair employers and work practices. With this in mind, my research

questions explore the role of informal management settings on maintaining inequality, particularly as it relates to underrepresented workers in the industry. Specifically, I explore how constructions of the "ideal worker" based on gender, race, and sexuality are maintained in stand-up comedy in spite of a formal organizational structure.

2.4.2 Pay in Creative Work

In our contemporary capitalist society we tend to think of payment as an important symbol of the value of work. Of course, as mentioned above, this notion has been challenged with the understating that much important *work* in our society goes unpaid. Further, the emphasis on the value of internal rewards when it comes to work has increasingly complicated general understandings of how work is valued. This is particularly prevalent for jobs that involve creativity since there is an understanding that this kind of work is rich with nonmonetary rewards. This logic is likely why payment for cultural work tends to be lower than in other industries in Canada. A 2017 Statistics Canada table confirms this trend, showing average weekly earnings (including overtime) for Canada's twenty-two industries whereby "Arts, entertainment, and Recreation" comes in second-last place, just in front of "Accommodation and Food Services" (Statistics Canada 2017). Thus, creative work tends to have some of the lowest average pay for jobs in Canada.

Andrew Ross' (2000) work considers the difficulties of "pricing wages" for those performing creative work. He argues that work in all sectors is becoming increasingly precarious which leads to circumstances where workers become more likely to accept a

flexibility of rewards in exchange for getting an opportunity to work. Thus, Ross (2000) argues that it is creative workers themselves who end up "providing the largest subsidy to the arts" (pg. 6). Again, this kind of exploitation in creative work is easily rationalized through narratives of getting to do what you love and engage in work that offers the potential for self-realization. Essentially, Ross (2000) describes groups of workers who voluntarily work for low-wages as a "natural outcome of a training in the habit of embracing nonmonetary rewards – mental or creative gratification – as compensation for work." (pg. 22). Ross' emphasis on the voluntary-nature of workers is important to this discussion since the low wages in creative work cannot be explained through structural factors alone.

There is a strong narrative in many creative industries that a certain amount of unpaid work is part of the process. Gillian Ursell's (2000) interviews with freelance television producers revealed that many were very willing to work for extremely low wages in exchange for the supposed autonomy that comes with the work and to generate a portfolio of contacts. This free labour or "cultural discount" is particularly apparent in the world of internships where workers are willing to work for free in the present in exchange for future rewards. The promise of future rewards has led to what Kathleen Kuehn and Thomas F. Corrigan (2013) have coined "hope labour" meaning "un- or undercompensated work, often performed in exchange for experience and exposure in hopes that future [paid] work will follow" (p.10). This kind of work is very common in creative economies and can range from unpaid or low paid internships, to workers

providing free performances, or even investing in conferences and travel in order to network with the "right" circles.

Informed by twelve interviews with Canadian women doing unpaid internships Leslie Regan Shade and Jenna Jacobson (2015) argue that gender and class are major factors when it comes to accessing unpaid work. Their data shows that "upper class youth with family support were able to take advantage of intern opportunities." (pg. 200). Thus, they confirm that women, who are often thought to be more easily exploitable and those from upper class backgrounds are more likely to take on internship work. Internships also tend to be taken up by those considered to be in a "pre-professional age", so that they are predominantly filled by youth.

Thus, unpaid or underpaid work is becoming ubiquitous with creative work or as Ross (2000) calls it "sacrificial labour." This is in large part due to the subjectivity of the worker who is willing to accept low wages or no wages at all, in exchange for getting to do work that they "love" and are "passionate" about. Indeed, this passionate labour reserve highlights the cruel rationality of creative work - the love for your work ought to be reward enough. Further, workers are also sold the neo-liberal narrative that putting up with poor working conditions and continuing to work hard will eventually lead to fiscal and positional success. The understanding of these jobs as being "cool" and desirable (McRobbie 2002) is a second reason for the increased tolerance of exploitation in these industries. Taken together, these conditions undermine any potential bargaining power around wages that workers in these industries can employ. These popular narratives are

common in cultural industries and addressing them helps to situate creative work

specifically when exploring questions about self-management, consent, and inequality.

2.4.3 Hiring in Creative Work

Beyond arguments of autonomy some have claimed that the creative economy offers a

novel work space that may escape some of the traditional discriminatory processes that

plague older organizational structures. For instance, Richard Florida (2002) argues that a

diversity of people is favoured in a creative economy so that "talented people defy

classification based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference or appearance" (p. 79).

Further, Florida (2007) claims that those attracted to creative work tend to avoid "rigid

caste systems." While he does not argue that the creative economy has entirely eliminated

discrimination and segregation issues in the economy, he does claim that it has opened up

new avenues for minority groups and that creativity is such a powerful skill that it can

subsume discrimination based on race and gender. Florida's interpretation evokes the

meritocratic ideology where it is presumed that the most "creative" worker will be

rewarded regardless of structural barriers related to identity politics.

Other positive interpretations about the emancipatory potential of the creative

economy are closely tied to ideas around individualization and detraditionalization (Beck

1992, Giddens 1994). Beck's (1992) work focuses on the increased individualization of

our contemporary society. Individualization is thought to be a by-product of post-

modernity which unravels traditional economic relations and structures that are

customarily related to industrial societies. While Beck is critical of some of these

processes, according to Banks and Milestone (2011), "his work contains a strong utopian thread in that he suggests the possibility that detraditionalization processes may bring about some emancipation from the more conservative and oppressive of traditional social forms, including the naturalization of gender" (p. 74-75). In a similar vein, the creative economy is often described as being inherently cool, egalitarian and creative which would mean that axes of difference no longer become a strong basis for discrimination (Gill 2002). These ideas perpetuate the message that creative work is organized to defy inequality which is partly why inequalities in creative work have been under studied.

Despite these optimistic ideas about increased diversity in creative work, several recent studies suggest that creative work continues to favour certain people over others, namely white, middle-class men (Banks 2017). Moreover, diversity of workers varies depending on which sector of creative work is examined. For example, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2015) show that sex segregation in relation to specific jobs in cultural industries is prevalent. They find that women are likely to be employed in creative work such as marketing, public relations and production co-ordination whereas men tend to take on technical jobs and more prestigious creative roles. These findings suggest that diversity within creative work is not consistent and there tends to be gender-based segregation according to the specific job.

Hiring inequality is also connected to the precariousness of project-based jobs wherein hiring is continuous and often informal in these settings. Precarious work is a growing development in our society yet "among skilled and professional workers those in the cultural and creative industries (CCI) have been at the forefront of this trend towards

'precarization'" (Wing-Fai, Gill and Randle 2015: 51). This scenario requires constant

attentiveness to possibilities for future work. Thus, as Gill (2010) argues part of being a

creative worker involves being "on" at all times or as one of her interviewees puts it

"life's a pitch." Importantly, certain life circumstances are better suited to being

constantly available. This is related to Wing-Fai, Gill and Randle's (2015) finding that

age and parental status mediate women's opportunities to sustain careers in film and

television.

       Networking tends to impact hiring in all forms of work but nearly all recruitment

and hiring is through word of mouth in cultural industries and project-based work. This

has led to what some have termed the "reputation economy" where you are only as good

as your last job. Research shows that women and other minorities fare better when there

are regulated stable patterns of employment (Krahn, Hughes and Lowe 2015). Again, this

is in part related to having a lifestyle that allows for a lot of time and energy to be allotted

to networking. Additionally, given that there are no set hours or work settings in a lot of

creative work, this networking can happen at any time and in anyplace. Thus, there is a

need to demonstrate a "belonging" to the creative working world, meaning that many

creative workers are forced to participate in informal cultures of work or what McRobbie

(2002b) calls "club culture sociality." Further, scholars have highlighted that due to the

dominance of white men in creative work, it is not uncommon for work environments to

take on fraternity-like settings where debaucherously "masculine" and discriminatory

culture are seen as the norm (Nixon and Crewe 2004). This environment puts more

pressure on those who are not white men to find ways to fit in and be part of the work culture.

The prevalence of white men in creative work can also be explained by the homophily effect (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001), or in other words, the tendency for people to hire those that represent their images of themselves. Given that many creative industries are dominated by white men, particularly in positions of power, the homophily effect follows that they will be more likely to hire people that mirror their own sociodemographic makeup. Natalie Wreyford's (2015) research highlights this phenomenon when she compares the limited amount of working class, women and black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals (BAME) in senior, decision-making roles in the UK film and television industries with a similar lack of representation in the industry as a whole. These findings support the reproduction phenomenon that occurs when hiring in creative industries. In summary, rather than being less complicated and inclusive, it appears that hiring in creative work is more complicated and exclusive due to the individualization, the constant need to apply for work, and the homophily effect. These common hiring characteristics provide insight into how inequality can be maintained in non-standard, creative work; however, further examination is needed to address how these reproduction mechanisms are shaped by intersecting power relations to create 'ideal workers.'

2.4.4 Hours in Creative Work

The supposed flexibility and autonomy when it comes to choosing your own hours and making your own schedules is considered another boon to creative work. Yet, it has been well-documented that creative work tends to include "long hours and bulimic work patterns [and] the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play" (Gill and Pratt 2008: 14). Thus, it is common for creative workers to work well-beyond what would be considered full-time hours (Horowitz et al. 2005) even without being directly ordered to do so. In many cultural industries there are no set working times or direct supervision from superiors. Rather, providing more freedom for workers with the absence of set working hours, translates into being in a work mode *all* the time (Gill 2010). This "always-on" circumstance applies to formal work that needs to get done and the informal work or networking which is a key factor in relational labour, important for fostering networks and ultimately securing paid work.

  This "always-on" approach relates to Foucault's concept of governmentality which contends that people are trained to accept and reproduce for themselves the conditions of their subordination. The governmentality approach explores how prevailing economic arrangements in cultural work become internalized and therefore self-perpetuating. The concept of governmentality helps to show the ways in which creative work environments tend to endanger the very constructive working conditions that they ostensibly engender. Foucault's (1975) insights about power inform the governmentality approach to work. He argues that power is not something that certain people hold and yield over others, rather power is an omnipresent force that can be used in varying ways

and is dependent on circumstances and context. Thus, according to Foucault (1976) power, "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (p.93). These "governed workers" end up depending on meritocratic principles but instead of conforming due to power and coercion these ideals are appealing due to the promotion of a lifestyle, one that promises above all else, meaning, self-fulfillment, and autonomy. Angela McRobbie (2002b) writes about the lure of this coveted "creative celebrity" lifestyle and the "seduction of autonomy" when she discusses the creative work of fashion designers in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the indistinguishability between work and non-work hours is seen as a price that is paid for getting to engage in creative work.

While governmentality could be interpreted as a deterministic and internalized force the role of agency remains evident in these circumstances. Many creative workers actively choose to participate in the work they do, but like all work, it carries with it a prescribed, discursive and practical framework that mediates their choice. Thus, some creative workers justify the long hours by subscribing to rhetoric of needing to "pay your dues." This is related to an uncritical acceptance of circumstances that are characterized as natural and simply "the way things are." Even those workers who are more critical of the exploitation around hours surrender their acceptance and compliance to the prevailing arrangement because they see it as necessary for participation and a shot at success. Thus, there are varying degrees of awareness and choice being made depending on the actor in question but even in these more "flexible" industries there are arrangements in place that people are forced to reconcile with as they make their decisions about work.

The precarious nature of creative work also means that workers find it difficult to turn down any job opportunities that come their way which can result in a constant state of overwork. Essentially, this means that creative workers are often working much more than 40 hours in a work week. Ultimately, the flexibility and autonomy around hours that is promised in creative work is overshadowed by the pressures of maintaining a positive reputation with current employment and positioning oneself well for future employment. The precarious nature of work in cultural industries informs my research questions about processes of consent and resistance. Having established some of arguments related to inequality in creative work, I will now turn specifically to the case of stand-up comedy as creative work.

2.5 The Case of Stand-Up Comedy

This chapter has established that work is a site of inequality and that we could benefit from further understanding processes of inequality in creative work and creative industries using an intersectional lens. This premise has informed my empirical investigation of work in stand-up comedy. But why choose stand-up comedy as a case study of creative work? I argue that stand-up comedy is a fitting site to explore debates about inequality and creative work because it intersects with several concepts that have emerged out of sociological analyses of contemporary work settings. Stand-up comedy work can be characterized as immaterial labour, precarious labour, affective labour, emotional labour, venture labour, cultural labour, creative labour and relational labour (Gill 2010; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008). Further, (1) there are

few sociological studies of work in stand-up comedy, particularly in Canada, (2) it is a

growing field of work, (3) it has historically been a site of exclusion for many

disenfranchised groups, particularly women, and (4) cultural texts produced through

comedy influence our understanding of the world and therefore who gets to create these

texts matters.

It is common for employment in the arts to be understudied as work but this is

especially true of stand-up comedy since the work itself is considered to be "non-serious"

by nature. Indeed, there were several historical developments that helped establish stand-

up comedy as a legitimate field of work. Stand-up comedy is said to have initially

developed from loosely scripted theatrical prologues and monologues (Stebbins 1990). In

North America, comedy emerged as part of vaudeville acts until the 1960s when stand-up

comedy became a show in and of itself. As Stebbins (1990) points out, there were two

major factors that impacted the working lives of comedians. The first was the comics'

strike in 1979 at *The Comedy Store* in Los Angeles. Prior to the strike *The Comedy Store*

justified not paying their comedic acts because they saw their venue as a place where

comics could work on their material and learn and grow as comedians. The strike was

successful and *The Comedy Store* agreed to pay their comedians, albeit modestly. This

change led to the emergence of a tier of professional comedians who were able to support

themselves through comedy by booking gigs on a regular basis. The second factor was

the rise in demand for comedy in North American which led to a boom of comedy clubs

and chains in the United States and Canada.

This boom of stand-up comedy has continued into the present day where there are more stand-up comedy venues than ever before. Canada alone has approximately forty comedy clubs exclusively devoted to stand-up comedy. That does not include the many restaurants, pubs, theatres, and coffee shops that regularly include stand-up comedy shows as part of what their venue offers. There are countless new podcasts that have emerged which discuss stand-up comedy and an A.M. radio station in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area dedicated to exclusively playing soundbites from stand-up comedians. Stand-up comedy has also been institutionalized as a diploma program at *Humber College* along with several other classes offered throughout Toronto. Needless to say, this field has grown substantially and there is reason to believe that this trend will continue.

Stand-up comedy occupies a paradoxical relationship when it comes to social inequality. On the one hand comedy is considered to be one of the last societal realms with little to no regulation where people can, and are in some cases expected to, speak "truths" and provide social critique (Wuster 2006). Thus, many view comedy as a space unbridled by the constraints and regulations of "political correctness". Despite its significance as a bastion of 'free speech', comedy has a pronounced history of discrimination and exclusion which has led to the continued domination of young, white, cis-gender, heterosexual males in stand-up comedy. Thus, comedy is characterized by both the promise of unfettered creativity and as being historically exclusionary and discriminatory making it a fascinating site to explore creative work and social inequality.

Additionally, stand-up comedy and creative industries more generally are important areas of study given our recent economic context. Hesmondhalgh (2007) argues that "more than other types of production, the cultural industries are involved in the making and circulating of products – that is, texts – that have an influence on our understanding of the world" (p. 3). I argue that stand-up comedy is an important site within cultural industries to study narratives and their influence on our understanding of the world given that what we choose to laugh at reveals a lot about our culture and what is valued and devalued in our society. Therefore, the people who get to create and perform comedy have a role in reflecting and producing cultural outputs, as well as getting paid to do so, which is why it is important to ask who gets to perform stand-up comedy and under what conditions. Kayan Short (1992) agrees that what we laugh at is highly reflective of our cultural values. She points out that a lot of humour in our society revolves around women and the body which tends to be a primary site of gender role anxiety. Therefore, as Swords (1992) contends, "women don't make the jokes because they are the jokes" (p. 69) in our decidedly misogynistic culture. Thus, who is included and excluded in comedy work impacts which cultural texts get produced and promoted. Therefore an understanding of objective and subjective processes of inequality in stand-up comedy work is an important analysis to take on.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature above speaks to debates around the creative economy and the varying impacts that may be felt by workers, yet, as several scholars have pointed out, there is a

lack of empirical studies that show how workers themselves grapple with these constructions of work. Further, some of the academic debates around the creative economy fail to acknowledge how some of these circumstances play out differently for members of equity seeking groups. This dissertation not only provides an empirical example of how inequality processes unfold in the working world of stand-up comedy but it also brings insights from research on inequality in traditional workplaces and organization to bear on literature about creative work and cultural industries. In so doing, this research will fill several existing gaps in the literature.

First, this research extends Acker's concept of the "ideal worker." Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations is based on the premise that inequality is built into work organizations and gendered ideals get reproduced, in part, through organizational logics. Thus, it is unclear how "ideal workers" are created and reproduced beyond what we know about gender and how this happens outside of formal organizational logics. My research fills this gap in understanding how "ideal workers" are sustained outside of organizational logics in informal and new economies by exploring the ways in which intersubjective mechanisms of rule replace formal work logics but continue to sustain constructions of "ideal workers" based on gender, race, and sexual orientation ideals. Secondly, my research makes important additions to theories of self-regulation and self-management in work. Banks (2007) and Gill (2010) have highlighted the general lack of traditional management in cultural industries and the prominence of self-regulation that has emerged in its place. Yet, there is a crucial gap in understanding the role of social location in shaping processes of self-regulation, particularly for those who are not

situated as the 'default' creative worker. Thus, this research adds a needed layer of nuance to theories about self-regulation in cultural work settings. Finally, this project contributes to the scholarship on how worker consent and resistance happen outside traditional organizations of work. Burawoy's (1979) research was instrumental in incorporating worker subjectivity into discussions about work. That said, Burawoy's analysis is based on a traditional work settings, has been criticized for being androcentric (Davies 1990), and does not adequately account for the complex interplay between compliance and resistance and the ways in which these decisions shape work opportunities. My research attests to the importance of considering worker subjectivity and extends Burawoy's theory by analyzing the compliance and resistance strategies marginalized comedians use in relation to their work and what impact this has on their work opportunities and the overall culture of the work environment.

Additionally, with few exceptions (Stokes 2015) much of the research on inequality and creative work focuses on a single axes of difference (ie. gender), whereas this research uses an intersectional framework to understand inequality. As an exception, Stokes' (2015) research analyzes the intersection of gender and sexuality in relation to the cultural industry of fashion. Her findings show that the potential for gender privilege for gay men in a traditionally feminized work environment is complicated by a combination of assumptions related to intersections of gender *and* sexuality. Thus, gay men's experience of work in fashion is characterized by professional advantages based on assumptions about the association between masculinity and cultural greatness as well as disadvantages related to problematic homophobic assumptions, highlighting the need to

look beyond gender alone to understand experiences of work. With this in mind, my

analysis builds off of the critical interpretations of cultural industries by using an

intersectional approach to extend theories about work and inequality, specifically as they

relate to the "ideal worker" (Acker 1990), self-management approaches in creative work

(Banks 2007; Gill 2010), and compliance and resistance in work (Burawoy 1979).

      The critical approaches are helpful for understanding how societal structures

impact the organization of work but they do not always effectively account for the

specific power relations at work and the subjective understandings and experiences of

workers. The governmentality and self-management approaches to cultural industries fill

this gap by examining how workers themselves make sense and act according to the

inter-subjective understandings of their realm of work. My research takes both of these

approaches into account in illuminating processes of inequality in stand-up comedy,

primarily as they relate to gender, race and sexuality. Using qualitative methods, I draw

on data from interviews and observations to examine how inequality in stand-up comedy

and in creative industries more broadly is both shaped and maintained by discriminatory

practices that have traditionally plagued cultures of work. As well, I examine the manner

in which these practices help to ensure that creative work is embedded in controlled and

discriminatory contexts. I discuss my research methods in more detail in the following

chapter.

Three

<u>Setting and Methods</u>

This chapter will begin by describing the social world of stand-up comedy in Canada.

This explanation will help to paint a picture of the context of this work culture to better

situate the findings within that setting. Specifically, I review some history of comedy in

Canada, some language unique to the comedy world, the training options for comedians,

and the industry side of comedy in Canada. Additionally, I will discuss relevant

methodological issues and the analytical tools I used to gather and analyze data for this

research.

3.1 Setting – The Culture of Stand-Up Comedy

Canada has a proud legacy of famous comedians (Dan Aykroyd, Samantha Bee, John

Candy, Jim Carrey, Catharine O'Hara, Eugene Levy, Rick Moranis, and Martin Short,

among many others) who have achieved high levels of comedic success. Andrew Clarke

(1997) writes about the connections between the evolution of Canada as a country and its

relationship to comedy. Specifically, he argues that Canada truly became a nation in the

eyes of the world after they conquered a German position in Vimy Ridge in April 1917.

This timing coincided with the Army using comedy and performance as a way to increase

morale in the military establishment. As Clarke (1997) writes, "if the victory at Vimy marked the birth of Canadian nationalism, it is fitting and more than a little ironic that it also marked the birth of the flipside of Canadian nationalism: comedy" (p. 7). The comedy initiative was headed by Captain Merton Wesley Plunkette, from Orillia, Ontario, who was a grocer but had a musical background and was sent to France in 1916 to entertain the troops.

The shows consisted of songs and improvised skits with audience members. Eventually, the skits became more refined and a group of consistent participants turned into a comedy troupe by the name of the *Dumbells*. The *Dumbells* were active throughout the war and were given forty-four weeks of shows in Toronto when they returned which all sold-out. As a result of this success, they toured the country and also secured performances in Britain and America. As Clarke (1997) notes, "By the early 1920s, the *Dumbells* were Canada's first internationally successful comedy export" (p. 20). It is significant to note that the *Dumbells* were an exclusively white male troupe, until 1928 when Plunkette hired women to participate in a show entitled "Don't Worry." Up until that point, the female characters had been played by men and several of the original troupe members wanted to keep it that way and protested the hiring of women. As it turned out, it was at this time that the *Dumbells* received poor reviews and disbanded. Some argued that this was because the addition of women ruined the sincerity of comedy that had emerged out of real war scenarios, a realm exclusive to men. I would add that narratives about women not being funny more than likely contributed to the timing of this

downfall. Of course, exploring the phenomenon of discrimination towards female

comedians is a central theme to this research.

Since the 1920s, Canada continued to produce and export comedians in the forms

of comedy writers, comedy actors, sketch comedians and stand-up comedians. There are

several notable comedy initiatives that are local to Canada. The first is *Second City*

Television (SCTV) which is a television sketch comedy show based in Toronto that ran

from 1976 to 1984. The second is the *Just for Laughs* comedy festival that has run

annually in Montreal since 1983 and is the largest international comedy festival in the

world (Brown 2007). And finally, is the advent of *Yuk Yuks*, a national comedy club

chain founded in 1976. This history helps to highlight the intimate connection between

Canada and comedy. The remainder of this section will shed light on the contemporary

components of comedy work in Canada. Canada is a privileged site to study this kind of

work because of its vast and rich history with comedy.

3.1.1 A Note on Language

As is the case with many social worlds there is a particular language that is used when it

comes to comedy. As I conducted my interviews I came to realize several colloquial

terms used in the comedy community. Much of the vernacular seemed to be inspired by

imagery of war. For instance, to do really well on stage is to "kill," or if you did

exceptionally well, you "murdered." Conversely, to do really poorly on stage is to

"bomb," and to go first in a set is referred to as "taking the bullet." "Killing your babies"

is another dramatic (and disturbing) expression that many comedians use in order to

signify jokes that they have had to eliminate from their sets because they are not getting

any laughs. This violent imagery arguably stems from the vulnerability that is associated

with this kind of work and performance. For many of the comedians, going on stage was

to engage in a war, the opponent is the audience and ultimately they will decide your fate,

either you "kill" them or they "bomb" you. It is also significant to note that this violent

imagery, often associated with hegemonic masculinity, is both product and reflection of

the majority white, male, heterosexual demographic in stand-up comedy. Comedians

would also refer to audience members as "real" people. This is because many comedy

shows were attended by other comics and so the amount of "real" people, meaning non-

comedians, who were in the audience becomes a measure of success for the show itself.

There is a meaningful distinction between "gigs" and "open mics." Gigs can take

many forms but they are generally more formal and deliberate than open mics. Some gigs

are one-time only, for instance special nights at a comedy club or a corporate event, while

others are well attended shows that happen regularly (weekly or monthly). Gigs tend to

be carefully curated in terms of the order of comedians who perform and they sometimes

feature a headliner. Thus, producers of gigs (usually comedians themselves) have a

greater responsibility in organizing the performance and the lineup in an effective way.

Shows with headliners tend to have fewer comedians perform overall but they are on for

longer periods of time. A gig typically involves formal advertising and a cover charge

which is used, in part, to pay the comedians. Gigs tend to be more highly revered, they

are considered the "real" performance where comedians perform their tried and true

material. This is distinct from the open mic scene which are treated more like "practice shows" where comedians can 'hone their craft' and develop their material.

There are numerous open mics throughout the city. They are usually less formally organized. Some require comedians to contact the host prior to the show to secure their spot in the lineup, while others have a sign-up the night of. In some cases, open mics take the form of "bucket shows" where comedian's names are drawn from a bucket to determine the order of the lineup. In these cases, less rigid organization can result in a performer being bumped as time runs out before everyone in the bucket has an opportunity to perform. Open mic performances are usually under paid and at best often payment is in-kind rather than monetary (e.g. a free beer ticket or food voucher from venue). Open mics, in particular, relate to the trend in creative work of performing for free with the rationale that it provides experience. The difference between gigs an open mics also shows the hierarchy and value placed on different versions of performance in the community.

3.1.2. Toronto Scene

Toronto offers a unique site for stand-up comedy. This is related to several factors. For one, Toronto is home to the only formal training institute at *Humber College* that offers a two-year diploma program in "Comedy: Writing and Performing." Secondly, and perhaps very much related to the first point, is that there are a lot of stand-up comedians in Toronto meaning that unlike other urban areas in Canada, one can find a several comedy

shows any night of the week in Toronto. Finally, Toronto is home to the *Yuk Yuks* headquarters, the largest comedy company in Canada.

In Toronto, comedians typically enter the comedy scene through one of three main routes. The first is to graduate from *Humber College* with a diploma in comedy, the second is to take training courses offered throughout the city and the third is to simply try performing stand-up at an open mic and organically grow through experience. Speaking with an array of comics who have taken these different paths, each route has its pros and cons.

The *Humber College* diploma is a two-year program that offers holistic approach to teaching the craft of comedy. The curriculum includes classes in stand-up, improvisation, scriptwriting, sketch comedy, and a variety of other classes which focus on the history and theory behind comedy. The program is also a feeder to the comedy industry in Toronto. For instance, there is a "*Humber Show*" that happens weekly at *Yuk Yuks* and is comprised exclusively of students in the comedy program. There is also a showcase that is performed by *Humber* comedy students at *Second City* each year. Most comedians who go this route find that the built in network and networking opportunities are the biggest boon to the program.

Other comedians get started in stand-up by taking less formal classes usually offered by some experienced comedian through a comedy club. Some of these classes are geared specially for women (ie. "Comedy Girl") with the understanding that the realm of comedy offers a particularly intimidating environment for women. By the end of the

class, students are expected to have 3 to 5 minutes of material to present at a live show. These classes usually run from 5 to 7 weeks in length and cost between $200 and $250.

There were mixed opinions among the comedians I interviewed about whether formal training made a noticeable difference in one's success as a comedian. While many found that there was a disconnect between the theory offered in the training programs and the practice of doing stand-up, even still, many found that formal training courses provided necessary access to networking opportunities. *Humber* is particularly beneficial to jumpstarting this process because of the ties that it has with the industry and because students in this program are immersed in comedy culture for two-years with a group of like-minded people. That said, there is often a big drop in enrollment from the first to second year of the program and several *Humber* graduates mentioned that few graduates from their cohort have continued on in comedy.

There are only two formal chains of comedy clubs in Canada. The first, *Absolute Comedy,* has a total of three venues, all of which are in Ontario (Toronto, Kingston, Ottawa). The second, *Yuks Yuks,* is the only national chain with fifteen clubs across Canada. *Yuk Yuks* was founded in 1976 by former stand-up comedian, Mark Breslin and his friend Joel Axler. The first club was opened in a basement on Church St. in Toronto and in 1978 they moved to their current location on Bay St (Stebbins 1990). The

franchise slowly grew from there but the headquarters remains in Toronto, making that city a hub for stand-up comedy. [1]

In addition to the formal institutional realm of comedy, the open mic scene in Toronto also plays a significant role in the comedy scene and the work trajectory of comedians. Several comedians that I interviewed mentioned that Toronto has more open mics per capita than any other city in the world. Providing exact numbers is difficult as open mics vary greatly. While open mics often occur at established comedy clubs, they are not relegated to these spaces. For example, open mics can be found in restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and even in people's homes, making the process of tracking near impossible. While difficult to accurately track, the availability of open mics creates an array of opportunities for comics throughout the city on any given night. However, because there is no centralized advertisement system for these shows, they largely rely on informal networks to generate audience and performer presence. Overall, the significant presence of informal open mic opportunities in addition to the presence of formal industry-based organizations make Toronto a hub for comedic work and an optimal site for research on the creative industry of comedy in Canada. Next, I discuss in detail, how I collected the data for this research.

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[1] As mentioned above, Montreal is another notable Canadian city associated with stand-up comedy as it hosts the largest international comedy festival in the world, *Just for Laughs*. Due to time and travel restrictions I was unable to conduct research in Montreal for this project.

3.2 Methodology

My research project uses a critical, feminist approach to explore the power and complexities of work in cultural industries, using the case of stand-up comedy. Feminist scholars have debated whether a feminist methodology or method exists and if so, how it does or does not differ from existing methodologies (Doucet and Mauthner 2007; Edwards 1990; Harding 1987). This continues to be an ongoing debate but there are a few features that have emerged from these discussions which I incorporate into my research. Thus, while some of the specifics are contentious I attempted to have all of my research follow in the tradition of feminist research practice (Smith 1989; Harding 2004).

Firstly, consistent with feminist assertions about research, I disregard the positivistic notion that "good" research is value free and culture free (Harding and Norberg 2005). Specifically, I side with stand-point theorists, both in theory and in practice, that value free research is not only impossible but also unwelcome. Secondly, it has been said that feminist research should not only include women but be for women as well (Smith 1987). Too often woman has been considered a homogenous category and feminists have rightly been criticized for rarely considering how social problems impact *all* members of a targeted group (Crenshaw 1989). With this in mind, this project is deliberately focused on the narratives and experiences of women and other minority groups. Further, I will ensure that this research is accessible and relevant to members of targeted groups who work in stand-up comedy by creating an executive summary of my findings and sending it to participants from the study. Relatedly, "feminist research is concerned with broader social change and social justice" (Doucet and Mauthner 2007).

The hope is that this research illuminates processes of inequality so that the findings can be helpful and empowering for women and other minority groups who seek to change the inequity in their work environments, particularly the components that so often get invisibilized. Lastly, in keeping with feminist notions of interrogating power dynamics I made efforts to be reflexive of power and positionality in gathering data which is explored at length in the next section. All of these features contributed to my critical approach and my intention to reflexively question the dominant ideologies at play and explore opportunities for the creation of resistance.

Having entered the field with some prior knowledge of comedy, both from my preliminary readings and as a comedy fan, I already knew that comedy was a male-dominated profession. This knowledge informed my initial primary research question: what are the processes that sustain and reproduce male dominance in comedy work? As is often the case when it comes to qualitative research, my research questions changed as I gathered more data and became increasingly informed by my participants' experiences and the context of the work environment. Specifically, I altered my research question to ask: with the growing trend away from traditional work rooted in formal organizations and toward cultural industries, how can we understand the relationship between work and inequality in non-standard, creative labour? This allowed me to explore other social categories such as race and sexuality which proved to be important demarcations between dominant and subordinate categories of workers. Thus, I sought to understand inequality and work in stand-up comedy paying particular attention to how women, non-white, and queer comedians perceived and experienced their work.

3.3 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

Given that my research involved human participants, I began gathering data after

receiving ethical approval from the *McMaster Research Ethics Board*. Ethical research is

an ongoing process and therefore I remain committed to reflecting on my ethics

throughout the time that I spent gathering the data and continue to do so as I represent the

findings. I rely heavily on reflection practices as part of these ongoing ethical

considerations.

I understand critical qualitative research as an interpretive process where, I, as the

researcher am co-constructing meaning with the participants. In other words, I reject the

premise that researchers can be objective throughout their research and instead agree that,

"language does not reflect reality but is constitutive of it" (Bettie 2003: 22). Thus, I paid

deliberate attention to being reflexive throughout the research process in order to

acknowledge my own positionality and the ways in which that was influencing my

choices as a researcher (Smith 1989). Although there has been an increased sensitivity

surrounding some of the ethical, political, and methodological issues associated with in-

depth interviewing (power differentials, illusions of equality, attempting to "know" and

represent others' voices), it remains a central and productive method for feminist research

by tapping into the experiences of women (Oakley 2000) and other marginalized groups.

With this in mind, I paid attention to power dynamics that were present in the interviews

and made efforts to avoid essentialist practices. Providing an occasion for women to

express their experiences and an opportunity to discuss issues important to them has been

a long-standing goal of feminists. However, some feminist scholars (Olesen 2000; Phoenix 1994; Stacey 1991) have highlighted the dangers of researchers exploiting or distorting women's voices through research. Olesen (2000) states, "Even though researchers and participants may both shape the flow of silences and comments in an interview situation, the researcher who writes up the account remains in the more powerful position" (pg. 231). As researchers we "set the agendum" (Presser 2005: 2069) for the research which means that we determine the direction of the research in explicit and implicit ways from the start of the research project to the end.

Although it is impossible to eliminate this power dynamic entirely, my awareness of these issues helped me to reflect on the ways in which my interests mediated my topic choice, how the interviews played out, and my written interpretation of the participants' views. I made it a priority to be sensitive to the discursive power bestowed upon me as a researcher. As such, I made efforts to view myself, as the researcher, on the same critical plain as my participants (McCorkel and Myers 2003). As a white, straight-presenting woman who is a PhD candidate I understand the privilege that comes with that position and made efforts to consider how these social locations informed the hierarchy of power between myself and my participants. As a social scientist I hope that my research is informative and a potential catalyst for change. Ideally, this research would help to inform and improve the circumstances of my participants and the working conditions in comedy. That said, I realize that the only person who is sure to benefit from this initiative is me since it fulfills a component in attaining my PhD. Thus, there is a power differential

insofar as I am benefitting by analyzing the inequality that others experience (Wolf 1996).

While I feel it is important to mention my own identity dynamics, I agree with feminist research practice that argues we must go further to reflect on how these identity markers relate to the production of knowledge in our research. This type of reflection allows researchers to expose "the assumptions, motivations, narratives and relations which are part of the researchers' backstage" (McCorkel and Myers 2003: 200). For example, in reading over my data it became clear to me that the interviews which had a better flow and tended to be longer were with participants whose values and ideologies were closer to mine. This means that I have more data from those participants and therefore that this dynamic influenced the scientific "truth" I present. I explore the additional ways that my positionality influenced my data collection later when I discuss my analysis.

3.4 Methods of Data Collection

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

My initial intentions were to exclusively interview female comedians and those that hire comedians as I was primarily interested in understanding women's experiences. Later, I realized that in order to get a more holistic insight into gender inequality, I also needed to explore the experiences of men. This was a helpful shift as it is also what helped me to address the social categories beyond gender that impact work in comedy. Further, I

quickly realized once starting my research that comedians themselves were usually the

ones who also ran shows and therefore hired other comedians. Thus, it did not make

sense to have separate guiding questions for comedians and those who hire comedians, so

I focused my interview efforts entirely on stand-up comedians who by default also

happened to be producers. I decided to recruit participants from Toronto because it is

considered a comedy hub and its relative proximity made it possible for me to travel there

and conduct interviews.

Initially, I recruited my sample by googling "Toronto Comedians." This led me to

a variety of comedian's websites. I catalogued the information that I could garner from

their websites, including their contact information. I then began to e-mail comedians,

asking if they would be interested in being interviewed for this project. I received a few

emails back from comedians who were willing to participate and I was able to generate a

snowball sample from there. I was careful with the snowball sample technique so as not

to compromise the heterogeneity of the sample by exclusively following one referral

chain (Aurini, Heath and Howells 2016: 56). Specifically, I followed up on a maximum

of two referrals from each comedian before contacting a new participant thereby starting

a new chain. That said, the comedy scene in Toronto is fairly insular and several

participants mentioned others throughout their interviews which highlighted the

familiarity in the community despite my efforts to follow different chains.

Once some of the initial themes emerged I employed a purposive sampling

procedure as I wanted to make sure that I heard the experiences of comedians who fit the

dominant category of comedian (white, male, heterosexual) but also that the majority of

my sample were purposefully those that fell outside of that norm. One of my early

contacts did not want to be formally interviewed but provided me with some information

about the social world and gave me some tips for recruitment. This initial contact proved

to be a helpful informant, particularly with their suggestion to use *Facebook* as a

recruitment tool. Thus, I created a *Facebook* profile for research which led to a rich

network of comedians. I used social media (*Facebook*) to recruit comedians which

worked much faster than my initial direct email method. Of course, some of my e-mail

and *Facebook* recruitment callouts were left unanswered but for the most part comedians

expressed enthusiasm that someone wanted to speak to them about their experiences in

comedy. I ended up with twenty-five interviews in total. I determined that I had reached

saturation at twenty-five interviews because the responses had become redundant with no

new relevant information emerging. Thus, for the purposes of this research the interview

process had reached a point of diminishing returns (Aurini, Heath and Howells 2016).

   I provided each interviewee with a copy of my research letter. I informed them

that I would make an effort to uphold confidentiality throughout my analysis before each

of them signed the consent form. My approach to confidentiality follows Benjamin Baez

(2002) who argues that confidentiality can help to protect those that benefit from existing

power arrangements because it prevents the full exposure of these arrangements that so

often remain hidden. Thus, confidentiality in this case is effective in protecting identities

at this point in time but does not protect against hegemonic structures which impact the

working experiences of comedians, limiting the opportunity for movement in this work.

That said, I understand the negative backlash that can come from speaking honestly about

a work environment and felt that not offering confidentiality would have impeded my

participants from honestly and openly sharing their experiences.

The interviews lasted between 1 to 2 hours, and were audio recorded with the

respondent's permission and transcribed verbatim. For the most part, interviews were

face-to-face, although four occurred over Skype (these were based on participants'

preferences). I allowed the participants to choose where the interviews took place and

they often chose coffee shops that were local to them or else at bars before their comedy

sets. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured and largely consisted of open ended

questions. An interview schedule was created prior to the interviews that outlined topics I

was hoping to cover in relation to their experiences as comedians. Examples of questions

include: How did you get started in comedy? How often to you perform a month? How

often would you want to? What sort of strategies do you employ when trying to get hired

at clubs? Do you find your comedy appeals to a specific demographic of audience

members? Most of the same topics were covered in each interview though the wording

may have changed throughout them based on the give and take with comedians. The

interview schedule was informed by my prior knowledge on the subject, my readings,

and the information I discerned from the many blogs and podcasts that are run by

comedians.

Initial recruitment messages mentioned that I was conducting doctoral research on

women's experiences in comedy. I realized within the first few interviews that phrasing

the interviews to discuss women's experience in particular may have turned some people

off because the women and comedy subject can be a touchy one. Thus, I made slight

alterations to my recruitment scripts to focus on discussing general experiences of work

in comedy with a focus on inequality.

Throughout the interviews, I was committed to following the lead of the

participants if they brought in new conceptual directions. I asked broad questions, or

practiced "content mapping" which allowed the participant to identify areas of interest

that were pertinent to their experiences (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003). I also probed

or practiced "content mining" in order to get more detail or a more in-depth

understanding of something that an interviewee said (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003).

This is particularly helpful when dealing with concepts that have become "naturalized"

such as gender or race. Characteristics associated with gender and race have become so

ingrained that it can be difficult for people to discuss these concepts as socially

constructed categories. Therefore, further probing can aid in critically questioning

seemingly "essential" human traits. I took notes throughout the interviews so that I could

keep track of comments and follow-up at some point in the interviews.

In total I interviewed 15 women and 10 men. Seven participants in the sample

identified as gay, lesbian, or queer and 5 were people of colour. The age range was

between 19 to 47 years of age. I did not ask any direct questions about social class but

was able to garner from responses that there was a mix of social classes. In creating my

interview guide I assumed that variables related to class would come up organically since

we were talking about work but the untraditional environment of stand-up work and the

multi-job reality of many of my participants made identifying their class status more difficult. In hindsight, asking participants to directly self-identify their social class may have allowed for an additional level of analysis. That said, I was able to gain some understanding of their class status based on information they shared, including the different kinds of day jobs that respondents held, whether they were able to try comedy full time, and whether their families were helping with schooling or living expenses. I also did not explicitly ask about mental illness, however, six participants volunteered that they experience some kind of depression or anxiety. Again, this sample is purposeful so that there was more diversity in my research sample than would generally be seen in the total population of comedians in Toronto. In terms of their stand-up comedy work, I asked each participant how often they performed a week and whether that was their ideal or if they would prefer to perform more or less. The table below summarizes my research participants' demographics and work contexts:

Table 3.1: Research Participant Demographics and Work Contexts

Name	Gender	Race	Sexual Orienta-tion	Comedy Full Time	Wants Full Time	Frequency of Performan-ce	Additional Job
Danielle	Woman	White	Straight	No	Yes	Some	Office Job
Kylie	Woman	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Teacher
Erin	Woman	Brown	Straight	No	Yes	Some	ESL Teacher
Laura	Woman	Black	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Entertainer/Host
Andrea	Woman	White	Straight	No	No	Few	Writer
Martha	Woman	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Property Owner
Barb	Woman	White	Queer	No	Yes	Lots	Student
Cindy	Woman	White	Straight	No	No	Few	Barista
Stacy	Woman	White	Straight	No	Yes	Some	Sales

Ruth	Woman	White	Queer	No	Yes	Lots	Student
Joy	Woman	White	Straight	No	No	Some	Box Office
Eric	Man	White	Queer	No	No	Some	Barista
Heather	Woman	White	Queer	No	No	Some	Law Clerk
Chris	Man	Brown	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Organizer
John	Man	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Day Bartender
Isaac	Man	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Engineer
Adam	Man	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Office Job
Mark	Man	White	Straight	Yes	Yes	Lots	None
Greg	Man	White	Queer	No	Yes	Lots	Veterinarian
Sarah	Woman	White	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Part-time Job
Roger	Man	Black	Straight	No	Yes	Lots	Prep Cook
Jeff	Man	White	Queer	Yes	Yes	Lots	None
Kendra	Woman	White	Queer	No	No	Some	Works in TV
Larry	Man	White	Straight	No	No	Some	Office Job
Gloria	Woman	Brown	Straight	No	Yes	Some	Sales

As researchers, our "insider" and "outsider" statuses are constantly shifting and the meaning that these statuses bring to the research is highly context dependent. That said, there were some moments throughout my research where I felt my outside status as a non-comedian and my inside status as a woman (when interviewing other women) had an impact on the data collection. Since I am not a comedian myself, I had an element of outsider status with all of the people I interviewed. This was an advantage in so far that I did not have many assumptions about what it was like to work in comedy and felt comfortable asking for clarification so that I was getting the entire picture from the participants themselves. I did have insider status when it came to gender when I was interviewing female comedians. This did not necessarily mean that I had an easier rapport with female participants or that I could more easily relate. As Code (1995) writes, "only rarely can we presume to understand exactly how it is for someone else even of our own class, race, sexual orientation and social group" (p. 30). Nevertheless, in some cases I

believe that my status as a woman increased the level of comfort that some female comedians had around discussing their experiences with gender discrimination in comedy. That said, in other cases some women were defensive when discussing their gendered relationship to comedy. The letter of information that they read prior to the interview mentioned that I was interested in exploring the gender dynamics involved in comedy with particular attention to women. Given, the storied history that women have within comedy, there were times when this topic felt tense. In addition to the general history of women and comedy, one participant shared that in the not too distant past, another researcher wrote about the relationship between women's looks and being funny. I was told that several women in the community were put off by this article because of the analysis which allegedly made claims about female comedians who did not fit the ideal beauty standard. Thus, I think some of the female comedians I interviewed were trying to figure out the "angle" of this project, knowing the many stigmatizing narratives associated with women and comedy. That said this tension seemed to dissipate as the interviews unfolded and I continued to build rapport with the participants.

I also felt as though some of the men I interviewed were more reflective and sympathetic to the struggles women face in comedy. I attributed this to the gendered dynamic of the interview. I believe some men may have expressed a sensitivity to the plight of women in comedy based on my own gender and the overall theme of the project. For example, one white, male comedian discussed his frustration with male dominance in comedy and the strategies he takes to mentor and encourage women in comedy. Yet, he later revealed that he had recently done a set during the all-black

comedy night at *Yuk Yuks*. When I asked how he felt about doing that show, he proceeded

to tell me that he was well received by the audience. Therefore, rather than interpreting

my question as one that sought to unpack the power dynamic in having a white performer

take a spot that could have been used to showcase a black comic at a specifically black

show, he understood my question to be in reference to how his performance went. This

signaled to me that he was more critical and reflective about gender inequities than in his

positionality to race in these work contexts.

Overall, I felt the participants felt comfortable speaking with me about their

experiences. I made deliberate attempts to make the interviews more conversational than

question and answer and I believe this facilitated their sharing. I also made efforts to

mirror the casual dress attire that many comedians had by wearing casual clothes to the

interviews. Although I did not offer any compensation for the interview times I was

highly flexible when it came to scheduling and re-scheduling in order to show my

appreciation for the time they were willing to give. I also engaged in respondent

validation by soliciting feedback from participants who agreed to be contacted again at

different stages throughout the project

3.4.2 Observation

My observational data was gathered at comedy shows. I made deliberate efforts to attend

a variety of different kinds of comedy shows in different areas of town. I attended

"general" comedy shows as well as themed exclusive performances such as "queer"

comedy shows and "all women" comedy shows. I also attended open mic shows with

varying levels of formality and industry level shows. I attended several shows of the

comedians who I had interviewed so that I could thank them by supporting their work but

also so that I could have a more holistic understanding of their interview narratives by

having experienced their work contexts firsthand. This allowed me to directly observe the

interactions among comedians at shows and how the shows operated. Additionally,

attending a show prior to asking for an interview from a comedian was a helpful strategy

for establishing rapport. Below is a chart depicting characteristics of the shows attended:

Table 3.2 : Comedy Show Characteristics

Type of Venue	Frequency of Comedy Shows	Mainstream or Speciality	Times Attended	Fixed or Open Mic
Bar	>3/week	Specialty	3	Fixed line-ups
Comedy Club	10+/week	Mainstream	2	Fixed line-ups
Bar	~1 /week	Mainstream	1	Open mic
Comedy Club	10+/week	Mainstream	3	Fixed line-ups
Comedy Club	10+/week	Mainstream	3	Fixed line-ups
Bar	~1/week	Mainstream	2	Open mic
Coffee shop	~1 /month	Specialty	2	Fixed line-ups
Restaurant	1/month	Mainstream	1	Open mic
Restaurant	1/ month	Specialty	1	Fixed line-ups
Bar	~1/month (now closed)	Specialty	1	Fixed line-ups
Bar	~2/month	Mainstream	2	Fixed line-ups
Bar	~ 2/month	Mainstream	1	Open mic
Bar	1/week	Mainstream	3	Fixed line-ups and open mics

Restaurant	1 /week		2	Open mic
Bar	1/ week	Mainstream	2	Open mic
Bar	1/ month	Mainstream	1	Open mic

The shows were public spaces such that I did not declare my research intentions. I attended several shows alone which is not 'the norm' as many shows are frequented by groups of people; therefore, my solo status was questioned at times when speaking with comedians after shows. In cases such as these, I disclosed my research intentions. Attending some shows with comedians who I had already interviewed facilitated my own research networking as I was introduced to more comedians which led to many informal conversations about work in comedy. I included notes from these informal encounters when writing up my field notes.

Attending a selection of comedy shows provided valuable insight into the work culture and gender-specific norms and dynamics that played out at work. The observations I made during these shows led to a great deal of insight about the perspectives exhibited by the comedians occupying marginalized positions and those in the dominant or "ideal" category. Observational analysis is particularly valuable for qualitative research since it allows for observation in a natural setting and also permits researchers to provide insight into the phenomena based on their own experiences (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). It is also a way to provide insight into the workplace dynamics that cannot be fully captured through individual interviews. As Kahn and Jerolmack (2013) argue a great strength of combining interview and observational methods is that we can access the similarities and discrepancies between accounts and actions. Further, attending numerous comedy performances provided valuable insight

about the setting in question, enabling me to ask more informed questions and guide the discussion towards topics that I had identified as important.

Each comedy show varied in length and number of performers. Some shows had a set list that had been organized prior to the event night, whereas others operated on a first come basis, and others still employed a random lottery method to determine which comedians would get to perform that night. All of the shows took place in either a bar, a comedy venue (sometimes both), or a coffee shop. In each case, an emcee or host structured the evening but the role that the host took differed depending on the show. For example, some hosts would take on a larger role in the show and do mini sets of comedy in between the comedians, whereas others would do little more than a quick introduction to each comedian. In some cases, I took short notes while watching the comedy show if the circumstance allowed, but for the most part, my observation notes were taken by hand immediately after the shows. Handwritten notes were later typed and included in the analysis of my data.

3.4.3 Data Analysis

The interview and observational data was collected between June 2013 and January 2017. Throughout the data collection process, I made analytical notes on observations and interviews. Following the completion of my field work, I reviewed the data in its entirety and made notes regarding any recurring themes. Through this close read I was able to identify important experiences, or key ideas and concepts that related to work inequality

in stand-up comedy. I used a manual coding process throughout where I colour coded the data by using the highlighting function on a word processer. While manual coding tends to be more labour intensive than computer assisted qualitative analysis, I deliberately chose to code manually because I find that it necessitates a closer engagement with the data. I repeated this process three times and isolated the dominant codes and themes that emerged from the data. Eventually, main themes such as networking, tokenism, censorship, and self-regulation, emerged. At this point, I went back over the data to ensure congruity between the thematic categories I identified and the participants' responses. I proceeded to comb through each theme again and noted any sub themes that emerged. I then read through all the data again to ensure that the emergent themes continued to be representative of the data in the context of the overall interviews and observational notes.

In coming up with thematic categories I was mindful of the confines of language and the risks of reproducing or reifying problematic master narratives. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes, our language is steeped in a Western system of knowledge and therefore, drawing on the very language to write these words carries with it a colonial knowledge base. Further, using identity categories (ie. female) can mask the socially constructed legacy of these concepts and serve to reinforce problematic essentialist notions. Despite this risk I did not want to abandon these categories in my analysis because the consequences related to occupying these categorical frames are themselves very real (Omi and Winant 1994). Alas, acknowledging that our language is encoded

with colonialism and essentialism does not dismantle this dynamic but my hope is that

readers can keep this is mind as they take-in my analysis.

3.5 Conclusion

The interview and observational data were collected concurrently. Both worked to inform

and supplement each other. I made several efforts to increase validity throughout the

research project. For one, I gathered my research over a relatively long period of time

(June 2013 – January 2017) to ensure that I was not simply capturing a moment in time

but was instead analyzing the social world of stand-up comedy. Secondly, I employed

more than one method of research in order to be able to compare and contrast data that

had been gathered in different ways. Thirdly, I strategically used verbatim transcriptions

so that I could better discern the context and tone of the participants' responses. Lastly, I

used respondent validation by soliciting feedback from participants at different stages

throughout the project. The following chapters will show the analysis that came out of the

collected data.

Four

The Maintenance of the "Ideal Worker" in Stand-Up Comedy

4.1 Ideal Workers in Non-Standard Work

Scholars have shown the ways in which traditional workplace environments and bureaucracies are set up in relation to an assumed prototype of an "ideal worker" (Acker 1990). Moreover, the archetype of the "ideal worker" implicitly represents privileged social locations, in the form of white, heterosexual, men[2]. Consequently, workplace cultures tend to be organized in a way that advantages the "ideal worker" and discriminates against those that do not fit the category, causing and sustaining inequality at work. Some scholars argue that the novelty of work in cultural industries escapes these patterns of inequality because they operate away from traditional organizational contexts and encourage autonomy and creativity for workers (Caves 2000; Florida 2002). With this in mind, I ask how the "ideal worker" is maintained in the non-standard work settings of stand-up comedy? I argue that the autonomy associated with cultural industries is overstated and that informal, intersubjective understandings of "ideal workers" prevail. My findings show that an "ideal worker" standard exists in stand-up comedy and there are several mechanisms of rule that conspire to uphold this category. Therefore I build on

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[2] As exceptions, the "ideal workers" for jobs that tend to be undesirable, underpaid, and require a lot of submission, is considered to be a woman (Salzinger 2003) and in some cases women of colour are considered even more "ideal" for these types of work (Hossfeld 1994).

Acker's (1990) earlier model by showing that an ideal worker is created and maintained even in the absence of formal bureaucratic structures. The terms of work in comedy are constrained by three mechanisms of rule – "diversity logics", "compulsory networking", and "creative license." Taken together, these mechanisms of rule sustain the construction of the "ideal worker" and perpetuate the social inequality present in stand-up comedy.

In this chapter I draw on prominent concepts such as tokenism and networking which ensure the success of some and the failure of others within stand-up. While there is a rich history of how both networking and tokenism perpetuate inequality in standard employment contexts, I apply these concepts to the burgeoning context of cultural industries. I show that not only do these concepts have relevance beyond the realm of work that happens in traditional organizational contexts within the novel work environments found in cultural industries, but in some cases the lack of formal bureaucracy in cultural industries makes them significantly stand out. Lastly, I will discuss the regulation of work in stand-up comedy paying specific attention to the role of "creative license" and the part that audiences, comedians, and industry leaders play in upholding the norms around the comedic work culture. The dominant themes in comedy create a setting that is welcoming to some and hostile to others. Collectively, these sections will paint an overall picture of the work environment of stand-up comedy and unpack the mechanisms of rule that create and sustain the "ideal worker" in comedy.

4.2 The "Ideal Worker"

Joan Acker's (1990) formative research on gender and work highlights the common

occurrence of obscuring gender in organizational theory. Workers are discussed in a

supposed generic way which seemingly disembodies the worker even though general

references to workers are referring specifically to *male workers*, with masculinized

bodies, socialization, and experiences (Acker 1990). Specifically, traditional work

environments are organized to accommodate those that can work in a standard day job

and prioritize work over family, both flexibilities customarily afforded to men. Largely

due to cultural expectations women are more likely to take on care work (in the form of

childcare, elderly care and community care) and domestic responsibilities, all of which

shape job and promotion chances and opportunities (Hochschild 1989, Kan, Sullivan and

Gershuny 2011).

For Acker (1990) inequality is built into work organizations and gendered ideals

get reproduced through five processes, the division of labour, cultural symbols,

workplace interactions, individual identities, and organizational logics. While several

scholars have successfully tested Acker's theories (Tienari, Quack, and Theobald 2002;

Shelley, Morabito, Tobin-Gurley 2011), others have extended the theory to apply to new

economies. Williams, Muller and Kilanski (2012) apply Acker's theories to women

geoscientists on the oil and gas industry as an example of a job within a new economy

characterized by work that is "precarious, [uses] teams instead of managers [to] control

the labour process, [uses] career maps [to] replace career ladders, and future opportunities

are identified primarily through networking" (p.550). They find that despite "work

transformations" the new organizational logics centered around teams, career maps and networking continue to reflect gendered organizational logics. Creative industries are removed from both the traditional work organizations, originally discussed by Acker (1990) and the "new economies" analyzed here because they tend to operate outside formal organizational structures which some argue may alleviate inequality embedded in organizations.

Despite the belief that cultural industries can escape these patterns and provide freedom and autonomy to workers, when tied to the economy, creative work becomes embedded in controlled contexts (DeFillippi, Grabher and Jones 2007). Therefore, work in the creative economy is less likely to be the autonomous, professional utopia some herald it to be. Instead creative work is often plagued by structural precarity, anxiety, exploitation and inequality (Banks and Hesmondhalgh 2009). These inequalities are present in stand-up comedy and the "ideal" and imagined worker as male is pervasive. Similar to Acker's arguments, this reality is in part due to the logistics of working in comedy, such as the time necessary for writing creative material and performing comedy. Comedy shows are generally at night and therefore even more elusive for people with childcare and domestic responsibilities than a standard day job. In addition to the logistical difficulties of executing work in comedy for many women, are the strong narratives that women are not funny. These conditions amount to a masculine culture within comedy so that even if women can overcome the barriers to perform comedy work they are still forced to contend with a culture that devalues, overlooks, and ridicules women. As comedian and activist Lindy West writes, "one of comedy's defining

pathologies […] is its swaggering certainty that it is part of the political vanguard, while upholding one of the most rigidly patriarchal hierarchies of any art forms" (New York Times 2017).

Importantly, the universal comedian is not only male but also implicitly white, cisgender, able-bodied and heterosexual. Therefore comedians who fall into these normative social categories occupy an "unmarked" or "neutral" category and others are made to regulate their work in response to this ideal type (see Brekhus (1998) for more on the sociology of the unmarked). "Unmarked" categories are important in maintaining social hierarchies in society, whether it be through conceptualizations of marriage (Heath 2013) or in this case, work. Thus, women, people of colour, queer individuals and those with all of these intersections become "marked" comedians, who must negotiate their work in reference to the "unmarked" standard. Whereas women, people of colour and queer comics are referred to as "female comedians", "black comedians", and "queer comedians", respectively, white, heterosexual men are simply "comedians", a title not requiring any prefix. For Acker (1990) the "ideal worker" is built into and maintained through the organization of work itself whereas in stand-up comedy it is the intersubjective mechanisms of rule which strengthen narratives of the "ideal worker" and support the dominance of "unmarked" or ideal comedians. Thus, Acker's (1990) theoretical insights about how the presence of an "ideal worker" prototype generates inequality remains valid but the ways in which the "ideal worker" is sustained is happening in different ways outside of traditional organizational contexts.

A significant outcome of fitting the "ideal" worker mold in comedy is that you tend to get more opportunities to perform which eventually leads to greater material rewards. For example, the roster of the largest employer of comedians in Canada, *Yuk Yuks*, includes 156 white men, 13 men of colour, 37 white women and 1 woman of colour. These figures highlight the dominance of the "ideal" when it comes to work in comedy. Exclusively looking at demographic numbers of comedians and who is more likely to get paid can provide some information about the industry but is also limited for two reasons. One, many stand-up sets are unpaid so the frequency of performance is not necessarily a measure of material success because where one generally performs impacts the pay and exposure. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the numbers and demographics of who is performing alone do not articulate the processes and negotiations that comedians engage with in order to do work in stand-up comedy. Thus, this work context requires a qualitative approach in order to discuss who is participating and how they are participating, highlighting how this work setting operates outside of traditionally formal workplace organizations. In the absence of traditional career ladders and formal hierarchies it is necessary to observe and speak with comedians to hear their experiences with trying to secure meaningful stage time. The following mechanisms of rule help to shape who gets access to stage time in stand-up comedy and the advantages and/or barriers they face along the way.

4.3 Diversity Logics

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) milestone research on gender in corporate work operationalized the concept of "tokenism" as it applies to labour. Kanter argues that the structure of work organizations clustered the majority of women in jobs at the bottom with no opportunity for promotion, with a few "tokens" at the top. The few "token" workers from marginalized groups at the top of the organization give the illusion that there is equality despite the fact that their presence is largely symbolic and numerically much lower than the rest of those in top management positions. Acker (1990) criticizes Kanter's work for not illuminating the specificity of male dominance in organizations and for continuing to consider gender as standing outside of organizational work structures rather than being embedded within it. While I agree with Acker's argument that gender is entrenched in work processes themselves, I continue to see the value of Kanter's concept of tokenism as masking workplace inequality. Specifically, Kanter shows that women are often hired as token representatives in male dominated workplaces, optically representing more gender equality without actually putting women in positions of power where they could reasonably influence the workplace culture. Although this is not a new concept I argue that tokenism is often pervasive and pronounced in stand-up comedy. This is largely on account of the hiring process in comedy and the openness on the part of organizers to adopt a tokenized roster wherein there is a need for one woman, one black person, one queer person, and so on, to fulfill token spots and give off the guise of diversity. Indeed, the pre-fixes used to "mark" marginalized comedians also serve to categorize the token positions.

There are more social pressures to achieve a "diverse workforce" than there were in the past. While there was a push for more gender equity in the 1970s, nearly fifty years later there have been policy initiatives and social shifts which encourage racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, ability, and age diversity. Therefore, contemporary workplace contexts are different than when Kanter was writing; today, there is far more focus on widespread "diversity logics" than single-axis gender equality approaches. That said, despite this rhetorical shift there is still a way to go in terms of actually seeing these efforts come to fruition in most sectors of the economy, particularly comedy. As recently as three years ago. *Saturday Night Live* came under fire for having few people of colour and no women of colour on their show.

The process of getting hired in the stand-up comedy world is different from traditional forms of work in that workers tend to be deliberately recruited and hired rather than applying through an "open" process. For many shows, the producer will directly ask the comedians that they want to take part in their show. This means that they either need to know the comedian personally or else have heard of them through their established networks. If it is a corporate show, the bookers will often consult the industry-side whereby comedians have agent representation. The process of getting represented usually means auditioning; in comedy this is called a "showcase." However, in order to get an opportunity to showcase, one generally needs to be chosen to do so and most comedians who get represented end up showcasing several times before they are chosen. Therefore there is a great deal of hiring discretion in comedy.

Sociological research has shown that people like to hire those that resemble

themselves (Rivera 2012). This phenomenon is related to the homophily effect which

suggests that people are more likely to associate and connect with those who share

similar characteristics and demographics (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). In

comedy, this leads to a social reproduction of the "ideal worker." Undeniably there is

greater representation of marginalized comedians than there has been in the past;

however, I argue that the process of gaining representation leads to a high instance of

tokenism (Kanter 1977). In other words, the recruitment of a small number of people

from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality and broad

representation in this workforce does not represent a fundamental change in the culture of

the comedy world. In the social world of comedy, marginalized comedians are often

explicitly told that they are "filling a quota". While the practice of tokenism is explicit to

comedians from marginalized groups, the comedians themselves are ambivalent about its

role in the comedy world. Some comedians acknowledge how quota filling has helped

their careers. As Greg states:

> when I don't have a lot of gigs I wouldn't mind being the token gay, that would
> get me in there. I don't mind being your little statistic so you can get a grant from
> whomever for your diverse show. (Man, White, Queer[3])

In a similar example Erin notes:

> well see it's like a blessing and a curse to be a female comic like sometimes you'll
> get a gig because you're a female comic and they need more female comics in a

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[3] Several of the comedians I interviewed used a variety of terms to describe their
sexuality throughout the interviews, thus I am using the term "queer" for those who
identified as "non-straight" with the exception of comedians who consistently used a
preferred term to describe their sexuality, in which case, I use their preferred term.

show. Cause usually there's one female for every ten comics going up or none. (Woman, Brown, Straight)

Chris is also aware that his ethnicity has landed him paying gigs as a token comedian, "Yeah or they will have a token girl in the lineup. But that tokenism is not limited to women I would say it's also like an ethnic thing, for example I'll get the minority spot I know for a fact" (Man, Brown, Straight). These quotes highlight the complicated relationship that comedians have with tokenism. While these respondents acknowledge their underdog status as marginalized comedians in the industry, queer, female, and ethnic respectively, they also recognize that this can at times help them secure work. These examples show that paradoxically, it can be desirable to occupy a "token" position for immediate booking opportunities, however, the very fact that there are few of these positions and they are only filled when there are explicit efforts to do so reinforces that they are out of the norm. The remarks that getting hired as a token or statistic can be considered an advantage also highlight the individualistic and competitive attitudes that are easily cultivated in precarious work environments. This also shows that "tokens" have a consciousness about their status and the consequences on their work opportunities.

While tokenism has been shown to help certain individuals get isolated gigs, as Kanter (1977) demonstrates having token representation does little to change or subvert overarching power structures. In fact, tokenism often works as a self-perpetuating system with any interruptions of the status quo primarily serving as reminders of difference. This system relegates "tokens" to the sidelines where they cannot access the same opportunities as those in the mainstream. This was especially obvious when looking at print material for comedy competitions, which often contained categories such as "best

comedian" and "best female comedian", implicitly inferring that the "best comedian"

would be male. Even more discouraging is that there were times when the prize money

associated with these two rewards was different with the best comedian prize being worth

more. One comedian, Barb, shares her experience with a comedy competition that she

considered travelling up north for:

> the competition was set up that there was like five prizes and it was first place,
> second place, third place, fourth place, fifth place. And then the guy sent me an e-
> mail and he's like "hey I want to know your thoughts on this, we're going to have
> a funniest female prize as well." And that made me really mad, I was kind of like
> well, what is this the Special Olympics of comedy? I don't want to win the
> funniest female. I want to win first, I want to win the grand prize. (Woman,
> White, Queer)

Not only does this demonstrate how pay inequality shapes women's experiences in

comedy when it comes to prize money but it also reifies the justification for that

reasoning – the notion that men are comedians and women are "female comics." It is

significant to note that while there continues to be a gender wage gap in traditional

employment industries there are organizational efforts and policies that exist in an

attempt to curb some of this discrimination which are not present in most cultural

industries (Fortin and Huberman 2002). Stand-up comedy in Canada has had very little

success when it comes to organizing formal policies and regulations which I argue makes

it particularly vulnerable to workplace inequalities.

Not only are marginalized comedians themselves aware of their juxtaposition to

the ideal type, or token status, but it also tends to be a factor in the way others evaluate

them. This is apparent in an anecdote told by a comedian, Mark, about his girlfriend who

is also a comedian:

> Like audience members after one of my girlfriends' shows… people will frequently come up and just be like […] the number one thing she gets is "oh my god you're actually funny for a female comedian" or "I never laugh at women but you're actually funny." It's like why would you need to say that? Why can't you say "I enjoyed the show?" People are actually shocked that another gender made them laugh or another race made them laugh. (Man, White, Straight)

This quote highlights the audiences' tendency to internalize the "ideal" type in terms of their preconception of who comedy workers are. The stigma attached to marginalized comedians is also revealed as these audience members were surprised that they found a non-male comedian to be funny.

While some comedians emphasized the benefit of tokenism for getting isolated gigs, others found tokenism and quota filling to be insulting. For some, tokenism undermines a comedian's abilities and talents. As Sarah put it:

> I got this great opportunity to open for this bigger name comedian and I was super excited and then afterwards one of the guys sitting on the show was like 'yeah thanks for doing the show, we needed a girl.' It's like I'm glad I can fill your quota with my vagina. Thanks a lot vagina, got me the job again. (Woman, White, Straight)

Similar to the example above, it was common for women in particular to be reminded that their presence was a symbolic gesture of gender equality within the social world of comedy. As Barb notes:

> there was an article in a Hamilton paper three years ago about a show I was on and I was reading it and I never noticed it before but it says such and such decided to have [Barb] on what would otherwise be an all-male show to bring a female perspective. And I kind of read that and I was like oh I thought that I got on that show because I was funny but I guess it's because I'm a woman. (Woman, White, Queer)

While most comics agree that being considered funny is an important part of success in comedy, there are several factors related to identity that impact the determination of

whether someone is considered funny or not. Therefore, contrary to intuitive logic,

crafting and delivering "good" jokes is not the most important factor in achieving success

and stability in comedy. In other words, it is not always the funniest person who gets the

most opportunities; in fact this was rarely the case due to mechanisms of rule, such as

diversity logics.

Diversity logics within the social world of comedy is particularly evident on the

industry side where clubs attempt to add demographic variation to their roster in order to

be able to fulfill any booking request. For example John explains:

> It sounds offensive to say but it's just how the industry works, okay I want one
> woman, I want one black guy. That's how actually *Yuk Yuks* signs people they
> look at their roster and what they have. I remember I did an interview with the
> owner of *Yuk Yuks* once and he was telling me how he books people or hires them
> and he was like "you know what I have too much of right now, it's fat guys with
> beards, I don't need any more fat guys with beards, I could use a really good
> brown guy." (Man, White, Straight)

Jeff explains another way in which this process is reinforced:

> Oftentimes they will put people in the same category run against each other. Like
> there are two black girls on Wednesdays right now who showcase for Mark
> Breslin [the owner of *Yuk Yuks*]. On every showcase for Mark Breslin they're
> right in a row like it's always the two of them back to back. (Man, White, Queer)

The practice of quota filling demonstrates how the work structure is sustained through the

use of tokenism. If an organizer is only looking to fill one spot with a black female

comedian, even if both black women were two of the funniest overall comedians

showcasing, there is only room for one of them.

It is also important to think about the people who are making these selections. The

owner of *Yuk Yuks*, Mark Breslin, a white, heterosexual man, makes the final call on

comedians that join the roster. As demonstrated earlier, the comedy world is one wherein

the status quo tends to reproduce itself. Therefore, as an industry leader, he is viewing

these comics through a specific cultural lens which likely contributes to the continued

over-representation of a demographic not unlike his own. As Roger observes:

> Yeah like that's how they look at it you know. Yeah they'll just be like alright we
> need one gay guy or something like that or we need one ethnicity or something
> like that. They should just have a larger group of people selecting them and then
> like a wider array of like people getting a chance to showcase their talent you
> know. And like cause a lot of like I don't know old white guys may not find my
> humour…whatever but if I go to a black club they'll be like running around the
> aisles and shit just because it's like shit that they relate to and stuff you know.
> (Man, Black, Straight)

The assumption that different audience demographics may desire different styles of

comedy creates a need for "theme" or speciality nights. For example, one Sunday every

month, *Yuk Yuks* hosts "The Nubian Show" which is an all-black comedy night. There are

also all-female shows and all-queer shows which exist within Toronto. Specialty shows

which showcase comics who have mental health issues and brown skin also fall under the

"theme night" realm. Some comedians have argued that the presence of these types of

shows continue to distinguish these comics from "mainstream" comedians and works to

perpetuate the distinctions between "marked" and "unmarked "comedians (a topic I

return to in chapter 6). Theme nights also allow producers to avoid challenging the

inequities by holistically diversifying their shows as they can instead use theme nights as

a means of diverting criticism away from the inequality found in the comedy world.

Importantly, speciality shows do not pay as much as corporate gigs, which tend to occur

sporadically rather than regularly and generally do not provide mainstream exposure.

     In sum, processes related to diversity logics in the culture of stand-up comedy are

mechanisms of rule that help ensure the maintenance of the status quo. Diversity logics

highlight who are considered "ideal workers" because tokens are only understood in relation to those who are considered "ideal." In other words, the bias and lack of accountability when it comes to hiring in comedy reveals the "ideal worker" by showing who is not "ideal," the token. Diversity logics can also divert attention away from the inequalities present by providing the impression that the dominant workforce is becoming more diversified. Further, these processes go largely unchecked in industries with no formal regulation. The presence of tokens in stand-up comedy gives some marginalized comedians more stage time which can translate into further exposure and potential material success but by virtue of being tokens these instances are seen as anomalies. Thus, the use of diversity logics within comedy reinforces the construction of the "ideal worker" and perpetuates inequality.

4.4 Compulsory Networking

Sociological research on workplace inequality has shown the value of networking and social capital when it comes to getting hired and status achievement (Erickson 2001; Lin 1999). Despite dominant narratives of meritocracy, factors beyond personal skill and effort are associated with hiring practices. Research shows that networks are gendered and racialized (McGuire 2002). Social class, in particular, has a strong link to educational and work opportunities, largely on account of the useful intergenerational contacts and networks of upper classes that tend to provide hiring opportunities not afforded to those outside of the circle. I would argue that the importance of networking is paramount in stand-up comedy because the lack of formal regulation and policy makes hiring practices

exclusively dependent upon who you know. Getting hired and promoted in standard

employment can be helped by networking but it is also often based upon set criteria

(years of experience, performance evaluations, educational credentials) and management

need to be able to justify and substantiate their choices which is not the case in most

cultural industries. Rather, in stand-up comedy, who you know is not simply one of the

many factors considered in acquiring work, it is often the only factor. Moreover, the

cultural outputs being sold are fundamentally attached to the worker. Given the bias built-

in to the hiring process, noted above, who you know and how you are connected is an

integral part of getting work in the stand-up world. Ironically, many of the comedians I

interviewed disclosed that they gravitated to stand-up because they did not have to work

with other people (as opposed to other comedy performances such as improv or sketch

comedy). I also found that despite being on stage and having to deal in networking, social

discomfort was prevalent among many of the comics I spoke with. As Sarah notes:

> Yeah I never really loved that aspect of it, like the schmoozing part, but it's
> necessary and you can definitely, like some of my friends are great comedians but
> they maybe don't get the same opportunities as other comedians because they're
> too nervous or they're like "oh I don't need to talk to so and so, it will just
> happen." But it's so clearly part of the job. You have to make sure people know
> who you are to stand out. (Woman, White, Straight)

For many comics networking was considered the most important component to success,

even beyond your ability to be funny and perform well. Simply put, in many cases

networking skills are more important than comedy performance. As Isaac explains:

> So yeah networking is definitely big, probably the most important part. People
> will refer you too. Like hey this is the guy who works out West or this is the guy
> who runs this festival so I better put a good word in for you. (Man, White,
> Straight)

Isaac's quote highlights the importance of interpersonal ties (Granovetter 1973) for

generating employment opportunities in stand-up comedy. Having connections with those

you had already established good reputations in comedy paid off more, which because of

the dominant demographics in comedy means having ties with comedians considered to

be "ideal" was particularly helpful. Again, as the research shows it is easier to make

networking connections among people who have shared identity characteristics. Simply

stated, it is often easier for those who fit the "ideal," by way of their social location, to

network with other "ideal workers" who are already established in comedy which helps

to provide more opportunities, exposure and access to even further networks for

individual workers. This was evidenced by "ideal" comedians in my sample getting more

gigs shortly after starting comedy while marginalized workers seemed to need to work

longer in order to get a similar amount of stage time.

In order to take advantage of these networking chances it was essential for

comedians to come off as likable and cooperative at all costs. The more comedians that

my participants knew, the more often they performed. One's ability to get along with

others and not "rock the boat" is their passport to opportunity and in comedy, much like

other creative industries, the onus is on the individual to maintain a steady stream of paid

work.

On account of this, one's ability to get along with others in the community is

paramount to success. Thus, kindness and compliance are necessary aspects of working

in this industry. Broadly speaking, combative demeanours do not tend to be rewarded in

cultural industries or as McRobbie (2002) puts it, "It's not 'cool' to be difficult" (p. 523).

When asked what it takes to be a successful comedian, Barb replied:

> I think you've got to be talented, you've got to write and all that. But I think above that you have to be really nice to everyone even if you don't like them. Smile and be nice to everyone, never complain, take every opportunity, perform as much as you can but above all I think it's just being nice to people. (Woman, White, Queer)

It is no coincidence that this expectation seemed particularly salient for women. As Joy

expressed:

> But I think for the most part the most successful female comics in Toronto just go along with the status quo and just work hard and do their thing and eventually it pays off for them. Because of the way that it works right now I don't think that you have too much of a choice in that. Other than working hard, going along with it and networking with people even if they are kind of misogynistic or whatever. (Woman, White, Straight)

Another comic told stories of having to be kind to comics on a show knowing that they

were verbally abusive to outspoken comedian friends of hers simply because she did not

want to risk ostracizing herself. Not only did this task take a lot of emotion work

(Hochschild 1983) at the time but it was also accompanied by guilt for not standing up

for a friend. For marginalized comedians, dealing with discriminatory content and

environments seemed to be part of paying one's dues in comedy which often required the

suspension of values and opinions so as to not disturb the general order. This adds

another layer to the difficulty of networking for marginalized comedians and shows that

the process of networking itself is laden with inequalities.

Some equity and feminist-minded people who oppose the oppressive elements of

stand-up and have attempted to speak out against discriminatory content have been muted

by the broader community through tactics such as blacklisting. Consequently, there did

not seem to be any effective opportunities to pushback against injustices or operate as a

successful comedian outside of the mainstream culture. Not only is there a tendency to

fail at raising consciousness within the comedy community but comics who do speak out

risk compromising their networks and are therefore less likely to gain access to paid

performances. As Ruth explained:

> Yeah I know a lot of people who have come under a lot of I guess abuse for speaking up for themselves. [Name of comic who is a white, queer woman] being one of those people who is very, very strong and very brave and she'll speak out for herself and she'll speak out on behalf of other people that she feels have been discriminated against or belittled. And people hate her. She' a brilliant comic and people hate her because she doesn't take shit from anyone. And yeah people are awful to her. And people will send people threats online and people will tweet offensive things and people won't book people because they don't like them. It's all about who you like so if you have someone who's a thorn in your side because they're actually sticking up for themselves then you're not going to get booked in certain places or you won't want to be booked in certain places because they're people that you clash with so much. (Woman, White, Queer)

Other comedians also referenced this same outspoken woman who they knew to be

disliked by some members of the comedy community which demonstrates that despite

having one of the highest concentrations of comedians in the world, the Toronto scene is

close enough for word to spread fast and have direct impacts on social capital, be it

positive or negative.

The necessary kindness required for effective networking also facilitates the

reciprocity comedians rely on for work. Many comedians produce their own shows and

can then use stage time as a way to leverage stage time for themselves on other shows.

Therefore the social capital gained through networking in comedy often manifests itself

as stage time. This trend amplifies the need to get along with other comedians in the

community. Thus, the emotion work necessary to create and maintain social ties

implicitly sustains the status quo which is in opposition to the explicit status quo

maintenance that occurs through diversity logics. As Joy shares:

> I feel like one of the currencies in the stand-up world at least is having this sort of social cache of having your own room or having your own thing to offer the person. And I think a lot of people say like I'll book you if you book me kind of thing. (Woman, White, Straight)

Several comedians admitted to booking other comedians because they had booked them

in the past even if they did not think of them as funny. As Sarah puts it:

> But yeah there's some people that ask you to be on the show and you're maybe not the biggest fan of them but they put you on their show before and you're like I totally owe them now. And that's how they get on the shows and yeah it feels like you're obligated sometimes. (Woman, White, Straight)

These examples continue to affirm that who you know in the world of stand-up can often

be more important than your ability to generate and perform comedic content that

consistently makes audiences laugh.

The degree of comfort that workers feel within the stand-up comedy community

also contributes to opportunities for successful networking. The social environment in

comedy, both in terms of opportunities for social engagement and general tone, tends to

favour those that are members of the dominant comedic group. By virtue of being

considered "ideal workers", white, straight, male comedians tend to predominantly work

with similar and likeminded people. These circumstances lend themselves to creating

friendships and social bounds with colleagues. As Jeff theorized:

> the reason that you see more straight white guys sticking at it for longer is also because it has a social aspect for them. They get to go and hang out with their friends who are exactly like them. Like there's going to be 10 of them there and they're all buddies so the social aspect curbs how much the actual experience sucks. (Man, White, Queer)

Again, this observation reflects the homophily effect. To this end, a young white male

comic explains that taking a night off work also usually means suspending his social life

for the evening:

> Like I'll have nights where I think you know maybe I need a night off and I won't
> go out and do a set and by 10 o'clock I'm like pacing in my apartment and I'm all
> antsy and I'm like I want to work, I want to hang out with my friends, where are
> all my friends? Oh! They're out doing comedy at a show right now. And that's
> another thing since I moved here just for comedy 95% of the people I know in this
> city are comedians, most of my friends are comedians so sometimes a show is
> more a hangout than a show. You'll come and you're just like I just want to see
> everybody and I guess while I'm here I'll do a set. But it's also just nice to hang
> out with all your buds. (Man, White, Straight)

So in this case his work environment is intimately connected to his social world which

means that working hard also carries with it the opportunity to play hard. Importantly,

this comedian is well networked and despite having a secondary job as a day bartender

gets a lot of opportunities to perform. This also shows the ways in which male comedians

can hire and promote their friends (other male comics) to ensure a cycle of domination in

this industry. It is also an example of "homosocial reproduction" wherein people are

more likely to recommend and promote those who have social similarities with them

(Elliot and Smith 2004).   These processes are reflective of Hartmann's (1976) definition

of patriarchy as "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base and

which, through hierarchy, establish or create inter-dependence and solidarity among men

that enable them to control women" (pg. 138). There is a solidarity among the "ideal

workers" in comedy which has created a situation where "straight, male comedians,

bookers and club owners have always been the gatekeepers of upward mobility in stand-

up" (West 2017). For the most past, this represents an advantage for "ideal workers" and

a barrier for marginalized comedians.

Going out and being seen is an important way that comedians maintain and build

on their networks. Kylie, who has a full time day job, told stories of sacrificing sleep in

order to stay relevant in the comedy community. She discusses the importance of not

only going out to open mics, but also sticking around for the social parts before and after

shows:

> They [bookers] know me, they've seen me out. So open mics are really important
> if you just kind of book shows and then you go out and don't do the kind of the
> scene the social side of the scene you get left behind. You really do. (Woman,
> White, Straight)

Networking in general is very important in cultural industries so that the line between

work and social events often becomes blurred. Gregg (2008) has referred to this

phenomenon as "compulsory sociality" in neoliberal workplaces where the pressure to be

social is so strong that one is never really "off-duty." The obscure boundaries between

work and social worlds is even more salient in comedy given the time and environment in

which the work takes place. Thus, the social environment serves as another mechanism

that reifies the status quo. It is much easier to network and socialize with those around

you when you feel welcome and as though you have things in common. This means that

for comedians who are among likeminded people, relationship building can happen more

organically, benefitting them as both social and work investments. It is not simply the

lack of opportunities for social engagement that can be alienating for marginalized

comedians but the constant negative and discriminatory "jokes" can also create an

unwelcoming environment, particularly for those whose identities are consistently the

butt of those jokes.

In relation to networking, McRobbie (2002) highlights the predominance of the

club culture sociality of work in new media industries and the fact that this tends to be

incompatible with domestic responsibilities. She argues that since most domestic

responsibilities continue to be women's work this creates informal exclusionary

boundaries around gender (McRobbie 2002). Stand-up comedy, of course, primarily

takes place in clubs and at night so women's ability to be available during that time is not

exclusively networking outside of traditional working hours but also for opportunities to

do the work itself. Nevertheless, McRobbie's findings remain applicable, as Martha, a

young female comedian notes, "I think the hours and the environments for comedy is off-

putting for a lot of women you know" (Woman, White, Straight). Another young female

comic, Joy, elaborates:

> I think also female comics don't go out as much as some male comics cause first
> of all there are more male comics still and I think a lot of the female comics have
> other life responsibilities more so than the guys do. And I think that's just
> symptomatic of you know other gender things. Like if I'm a stay at home mom
> I'm going to be a stay at home mom, if I have a day job then I have a day job, if
> I'm a girl I also want to hang out with my friends more or my boyfriend more. My
> boyfriend doesn't like it that I'm by myself in a bar with a bunch of guys around
> me all the time right. You know what I mean? So there's that kind of pressure
> whereas a guy would be like my girlfriend comes to my shows you know? So I
> think there is a different gender dynamic which is why women don't go out as
> much. (Woman, White, Straight)

This quote illuminates the gender dynamics and emotion work that is often expected of

women to put into their relationships. Aside from being primary caregivers in maternal

circumstances, even women without children tend to have time and energy expectations

in their relationships that differ from men's. The quote above also demonstrates the gender dynamics often found in heterosexual relationships. Here, Joy expresses that her partner feels threatened that she works in a predominately male space in a setting that is often associated with flirting which factors into her decision to go out and perform. Notably, none of the comedians I spoke with mentioned having kids. I interpret this tendency as evidence of the degree to which family is disassociated and seemingly incompatible with comedy work. Further, aside from Joy's quote above there was little, if any, discussion about the relationship between working lives and family lives.

Given the work that comedians are hired to, do it would seem that whoever makes the audiences laugh the most would receive the most rewards in the form of bookings and stage time. Yet, because hiring is not based on standard criteria getting work is dependent on networks. In the case of comedy, processes of networking seem to favour workers who fit the "ideal." Stand-up comedy has historically been dominated by white, heterosexual men and so individual comedians must gain the support of these workers who are already established in the field. Due to processes of homosocial reproduction this tends to be easier for comedians who fit the "ideal." Conversely, marginalized comedians often need to bite their tongues even if they disagree with elements of the work culture or risk losing opportunities to get booked. Further, the discriminatory environments and the kinds of social commitments that networking requires tends to be more compatible with white, heterosexual, male lifestyles and identities than others. Thus, "ideal" workers can more easily network which has significant consequences for labour market rewards in

comedy because networking is a strong determinant of who is and who is not getting

work in the culture of stand-up comedy.

4.5 Creative License

Throughout the duration of my fieldwork, conversations often centered on freedom of

speech and more prominently, the fear of censorship. Censorship is used rather broadly in

the social world of comedy as traditionally it tends to refer to state sanctioned silencing;

however, in this context, comedians used "censorship" to refer to any regulation of their

comedic content. Despite this extreme aversion to being censored, content regulation is

very common. This realization manifested itself as a key finding because censorship, real

or imagined, is a major way in which work in comedy is organized and regulated.

Oftentimes social actors found in the audience as well as the larger industry create

parameters that the comedians needed to conform to if they wanted to get paid for their

comedy work. In this way, social actors in the comedy world regularly served as censors.

This is significant to discussion about inequality in stand-up because the ways in which

comedy content is regulated through censorship tends to benefit "ideal" workers by

maintaining the status quo.

Sociology of work literature has traditionally been concerned with employer-

employee relations but more recently there has been an interest in expanding that analysis

to include the "triangle of power" which adds a consideration of the customer to these

contemporary work discussions (Korczynski 2013). For the most part, this analysis has

been applied to interactive service work where costumers are often given tools that

impact workers' experiences such as customer feedback forms. Uniquely, the customers in many cultural industries are audiences and audience member feedback has a dramatic impact on cultural industry work. This is even more pronounced in live performance, such as stand-up comedy, because the audience feedback is instant.

While many art forms are intimately connected to the spectators I would argue that stand-up comedy has a distinctive relationship to the audience. For example, if one writes poetry one may be considered a poet even if very few people read their work. The act of writing alone may offer the cathartic experience that one gets from their "craft." In contrast, presenting jokes to an audience is an inextricable component of being a stand-up comedian. Thus, what the audience finds funny plays a significant role in shaping the content that comedians produce and perform. As Adam succinctly puts it, "Good comics know that the audience are your friends, if you have no audience then you have no job" (Man, White, Straight). For this reason, it makes good business sense for comedians to have an acute awareness of the audience's reactions. This leads some comedians to stake out the audience prior to their set in order to curate their performance to the kind of humour that they assume the audience prefers. Others describe changing jokes on the fly when they sense that the audience is not into their planned material. Ultimately, the audience reaction is both the risk and reward of performing stand-up. As Isaac puts it, "The audience always has the right to disagree with you that's what makes stand-up so scary and exciting" (Man, White, Straight). The reaction from the audience is the source of vulnerability for comedians and also a measure of evaluation for their work.

While many of the comedians describe negative experiences involving heckling and getting booed on stage, they unanimously agree that an audience's silence is the worse reaction you could receive while on stage. Any sound is better than none, even if the sound is negative feedback. In fact, the aversion to silence is so powerful that one emcee in the city regularly begins the show she hosts with an introduction about audience behaviour that includes instructions on enacting silence to express your disagreement with any content. This preamble communicates the power of the audience's silence, as the harshest reaction for a comedian to receive on stage and explicitly puts some accountability on the audience to express if they are uncomfortable or disagree with anything that the comedian is saying.

My observational notes show that if the comedy shows are specialized, meaning that it specifically stipulates a particular identity that is being featured, such as a "queer" or "black" comedy show, audiences are a relatively homogeneous group that reflect the theme of the night. Again, this observation reflects the homophily effect (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001) whereby individuals tend to take up space with and gravitate towards others who are similar to them. The most common audience in mainstream shows were comprised of white men, also reflecting the homophily effect given that mainstream comedy is dominated by white men. Interview data showed that most comedians were aware of this and often adapted their comedy to appeal to the expected tastes of the audience. Again, "speciality" shows happen much less frequently than mainstream shows and offer less opportunity for employment, reflecting a separate but not equal logic. The social homogeneity helps to regulate who gets to do comedy

work. Furthermore, the dominance of straight, white, men in the comedy world allows

content that other groups such as women and people of colour find offensive to go

unchecked. Many of the comedians I interviewed agreed that they are ready to cater to

the audience's response and that the onus is on the audience to let the comedian know if

they have crossed the line. However, the expectation of that response can do very little to

thwart offensive content. As Heather explains:

> If you want to make offensive jokes that are harmful and re-perpetrate the same
> kind of oppression, you know especially in the case if you're a white male and
> you're doing racist material or sexist material or jokes about the rape of women
> then you know what you deserve whatever you get but unfortunately we also live
> in a culture that thrives on that kind of oppression and those are systems that are
> huge forces within our society so they're usually often nothing but rewarded for
> them. And the audiences love racist material. White audiences love having their
> own racism enforced by another person. (Woman, White, Queer)

Here, Heather powerfully highlights that the social world of comedy exists in a broader

culture which is shaped by systems of oppression and power that influence all forms of

work, including comedy. This also means that audience members are unlikely to be

effective gatekeepers when it comes to offensive material since they are also steeped in

the same narratives that suggest that racism, sexism, and homophobia are humorous in

the first place.

Further, several comedians mentioned that offensive material can provide them

with a cheap laugh allowing them to avoid the dreaded silence on stage. As Greg said:

> well some of the [club] owners are misogynists and homophobic. But just the
> audiences expect that. Like you can get a cheap laugh by going on stage and
> making a gay joke. (Man, White, Queer)

Again, the idea that this kind of material is expected reinforces its ubiquity in our culture.

Overall, these responses show that the audience and their reactions, presumed or real, act

as a regulating force in terms of the material that comedians perform. The consideration

of how these regulations play out tended to be especially meditated by comedians who

belonged to equity seeking groups or groups whose physical appearance differed in any

significant way from the norm.

As mentioned in the discussion on networking, the need to be fully accepted by

other comedians in order to secure work opportunities means that the consensus from

other comedians around acceptable content is also required. That said, due to the

traditional characterization of comedy as a beacon of free speech and the ubiquity of

discriminatory content comedy communities seem to be more concerned with regulating

any disruption of that understanding. As Heather puts it:

> Because there is a very long standing tradition of racism and homophobia and
> misogyny within comedy. A long tradition and a storied tradition. And if most of
> the heroes that people are looking to or the examples that they have set for
> themselves meet those guidelines and then they have someone say to them you
> can't do this they suddenly cry that the PC [politically correct] police have come
> to snatch them from their beds at night like the boogey man. (Woman, White,
> Queer)

Heather's quote demonstrations how resistant the comedy community is to change and

how the cycle of comedians who rely on bigoted content reproduces itself. Much like any

other industry, young workers tend to model themselves after established, successful

workers in their field which in the case of comedy are largely represented by "ideal"

comedian prototypes who for the most part have participated in the discriminatory style

of humour. Thus the possibility of change is seen not only as a threat to current practices

but also as disrespectful of those that came before.

The most obvious recent example of this came about after an outspoken

comedian, Lindy West, made this argument: "comedy's current permissiveness around

cavalier, cruel, victim-targeting rape jokes contributes to (that's *contributes*—not causes)

a culture of young men who don't understand what it means to take this stuff seriously"

(West 2013). West specifically chose to comment on rape jokes because of their

pervasive use in stand-up comedy. As Danielle shares:

> Oh yeah there's a lot of um….that's something that bothers me. I don't know how
> long it's been going on but too long in my opinion. There is a lot of rape jokes
> that goes on in rooms. Like I am telling you at least one rape joke that goes on in
> every room if not five. (White, Woman, Straight)

Danielle's observations are consistent with my own. My field notes show a high

frequency of rape jokes. In fact, every mainstream show I attended had at least one rape

joke. These jokes came in many different forms with differing degrees of sensitivity to

the topic. Some were written with a critical tone towards the perpetrators of rape and rape

culture while others were more in line with what West describes as cruel and victim-

blaming.

West's opinion incited intense reaction, often in the form of violent misogynistic

threats (West 2013). For West, calling out the status quo undermined both her livelihood

and her safety. Interestingly, many of the threats came from fellow comedians,

highlighting that despite how willing comedians are to cater to audiences during a

performance, many felt that they needed to fiercely defend their theoretical right to say

whatever they wanted on stage. This was a dominant attitude in the culture of comedy

and therefore there was a presence of social control from the community of comedians

whenever there was a perceived threat to "freedom of speech." Nearly all of the

comedians I interviewed resisted the idea that comedy ought to be censored. The

predominant opinion was that you could say whatever you want, but the caveat seemed to

be that it had to be funny. For example, when asked if offensive comedy should be

censored, Mark replied:

> I don't think live comedy should be censored at all. I think it should be… but it
> also should be smart at the same time like going up there and talking about just
> awful things just for the sake of talking about them but having no like structure or
> like did you just say rape a million times like there's no point to that. Kind of like
> the shock humour which I think was a big thing a few years ago but now people
> are just like yeah give us some meat. (Man, White, Straight)

Despite the prevalence of this opinion, because comedy is subjective it is difficult to

discern what qualifies as funny versus just plain offensive. Nevertheless most of the

comedians interviewed agreed that comedy should not be censored. This shows that

comedians operating within the community itself helped to perpetuate the status quo and

showed violent resistance to change. This is not simply representative of the push for free

speech but a reflection of the strength of that narrative in the culture of stand-up comedy.

In addition to the regulatory control of comedic content that tends to be dictated

by the audience and many comedians themselves, the industry imposes content

boundaries as well. For instance many comedy festivals have clear guidelines about what

is considered acceptable and what is not. Comedians are subject to the guidelines set out

by whoever hires them. This usually means working "clean"--no swearing or crass

material-- or "squeaky clean"--nothing even potentially edgy or offensive. As Laura

explicates:

> You know what I mean like there's a censorship that happens depending on your
> audience if it's like a paying audience you're expected to do a certain type of joke

and they're hiring and you would hear about that beforehand. (Woman, Black, Straight)

Comedians are also expected to perform their tried and true material so that the creative element of comedy work tends to get put on the backburner when there is financial compensation involved. For example, John shared:

> […] well I mean if you're being paid there's sort of an obligation to do your good shit even if you have something new you want to talk about its like yeah but people paid to see this and they need to get their money's worth. […] it's just like bad business to try new stuff when someone's paying you. (Man, White, Straight)

Many comedians made distinctions around paid "gigs" and open mic shows and the content of the material was one of the main elements that characterized this distinction.

It is also the case that *Yuk Yuks*--which is considered to be the comedic qualifier in Canada, given that they are the largest comedian employer and have a monopoly over the majority of clubs in Canada—regularly imposes regulations on comedic work. Primarily, this is done by having all the comedians they employ sign an exclusivity contract so that they cannot perform at shows that are not organized through *Yuk Yuks*. Industry heads will at times tell comedians which material they want them to use from their set, even if it means repeating the exact same seven-minute bit week after week. Barb shares her experience, "I get censored all the time at *YukYuks* like tell these jokes, that's it, don't do anything new. And I'm like okay, sure, sure I'll do whatever you want" (Woman, White, Queer). This tension represents a fascinating paradox when it comes to work in comedy – while creativity and autonomy is considered to be paramount to the work in comedy and fiercely defended by comedian themselves, paid work tends to be constricted. Therefore, there appears to be more creative freedom in work contexts where

comedy is underpaid or entirely unpaid. Another comic, Heather, explained the tension

between the supposed intellectual freedom of being a comic and the corporate world of

comedy:

> Well I think there are values that contradict each other. There are people that by
> nature tend to be, not all, but I would say a good majority of people tend to be
> anti-authoritarian and they tend to be the type of people that got laughs in their
> class by smart talking their teachers or whatever. And they do want to challenge a
> lot of ideas a lot of the time but then at the same time the only way that you are
> going to be able to make this your living and be successful at it is by signing away
> those very freedoms that you were drawn to comedy over in the first place and it
> does make you a little bit of a kept pet at that point. (Woman, White, Queer)

Heather went on to make parallels to more traditional forms of contract work:

> Because even if you work for a comedy club you do not have the right to say
> anything you want. You are an employee and you have the right to perform your
> work duties as an employee of that club and if at any point in time that club
> decides that your work is no longer sufficient they may terminate you. So once
> you sign into that structure, that capitalist structure you are signing on to be
> censored by your employer […] it's a contract. (Woman, White, Queer)

As with many creative industries, artists need to be willing to obey by the rules in order

to get paid, and these rules are often established by the customers, in this case the

audience. This can be a difficult premise to accept when it comes to forms of art and

creativity as there tends to be a perception that creativity is a spontaneous and individual

phenomenon (DeFillippi, Grabher and Jones 2007). However, recent research has

attempted to debunk that myth and highlight the institutional conditions and design

strategies associated with creativity (Hargadon and Douglas 2001). As Roberts (2000)

wrote in relation to comedy, "Tim's [Allen] willingness to change his act to suit his

audience is nothing short of heretical to the contemporary belief that defines art as a

revelation" (p. 158). Furthermore, she argues that despite the coveted idea that the value

of art and creativity should be independent of public scrutiny "sooner or later, art, like standup comedy, lives on consensus. The comedian's material depends on an outside force to bring it to life" (Roberts 2000:159). Therefore, a comedian's creative processes are impacted by much more than their own creative will; instead, their creative work is highly regulated by members of the audience, colleagues and industry leaders.

In sum, the defence of discriminatory material benefits the "ideal" workers in comedy since they are not directly impacted by the misogynist, racist and homophobic content. The benefit for "ideal" workers is twofold, they can continue to work in an environment that is comfortable for them and they do not need to defend themselves against problematic content. The ability to more easily "go with the flow" and support the status quo ensures that "ideal" comedians are not seen as disruptive and difficult so that their community networking stays in tack. Thus, the fierce defence of creative license and anti-censorship rhetoric in stand-up comedy helps maintain the "ideal" worker and subordinate marginalized comedians.

4.6 Conclusion

Some optimistic scholars (Florida 2002; Howkins 2001; Smith 1998) argue that industries which do not operate under formalized, organizational regulation or policies, offer unbridled opportunities for workers and in so doing escape the constraints of inequality that plague traditional work environments. My findings show that the work culture in comedy is set up to sustain and reproduce inequality by constructing and privileging "ideal workers" who are white, heterosexual, men. While Acker (1990)

argued that gender is embedded in organizational work contexts, these findings indicate that even in the absence of organizational contexts narratives about gender, race, and sexuality are embedded in the work culture which reinforce the creation and maintenance of an "ideal worker." These standards are enforced by three prominent mechanisms of rule which create informal regulations in the culture of comedy. The first is "diversity logics" which work to highlight and perpetuate the dominance of "ideal" comedians in comedy work by producing tokens. Tokens can only be characterized as such in contrast to an established dominant representation thereby reifying the standard. The second is "compulsory networking" which encourages workers to conform to the status quo and limits opportunities for resistance. In order to attain work opportunities in comedy it is imperative that you have a strong network and therefore comedians must put in the emotional work to sustain those relationships independent of whether they like or agree with their colleagues. The last mechanism is "creative license" which encourages an intersubjective policing from audiences, fellow comedians, and industry leaders to regulate the material and creative processes for comedians. This shared understanding of how comedy should operate reinforces traditional expectations in comedy work which provides little opportunity for changing the terms of work or the construction of the "ideal worker." Taken together these mechanisms of rule form a powerful influence on the culture of comedy which dictates who can do what, who can say what, and who deserves what, sustaining and reproducing inequality in stand-up comedy.

These mechanisms of rule highlight processes of systemic disparity between advantaged and disadvantaged workers. "Diversity logics", "compulsory networking",

and "creative license" illuminate the creation and recreation of inequality, how these

processes are legitimized, and the controls that are present to avert protest and resistance.

Diversity logics operate explicitly while networking and "creative license" are more

implicit. In the case of networking, hiring is thought to happen based on who is the best

at the job. Yet, comedy happens in relation to who you know and in the case of "creative

license" there is a belief that you can say whatever you want in comedy but in reality

comedians regularly conform to expectations in order to secure paid work. While

diversity logics and networking are present in traditional organizational settings all three

of these mechanisms of rule describe how these specific processes operate in creative

work. Thus, this chapter applies Acker's "ideal worker" theory to a novel context and

also extends the theory to show that assumptions about workers are not exclusively

relegated to organizational settings but are often maintained through intersubjective

regulation in non-standard work settings. This is an important contribution and can help

frame future research on other cultural industries, providing insight into inequality and

work in our changing economy. For example, the latest "diversity report" from *Google*

shows that there continues to be a stark overrepresentation of white, male employees

(Google 2017). Future research may ask about the mechanisms of rule that are sustaining

"ideal" workers in culture industries based in technology. As our economy increasingly

moves away from standard organizational work settings it will become progressively

important to interrogate the mechanisms by which inequality is produced and maintained.

Having established the intersubjective regulatory culture of comedy, the following

chapter will explore how this culture is internalized by the workers themselves using the

concept of self-management. This will help to illustrate how despite participating in and

constructing this culture together, comedians are internalizing it differently depending on

their social locations. It will also unpack the complex relationship between autonomy and

consent in cultural work.

FIVE

How Social Location Shapes Self-Management in Stand-Up Comedy

5.1 Self-Regulation in Cultural Industries

The previous chapter demonstrated how mechanisms of rule, such as "diversity logics", "compulsory networking" and "creative license", sustained the cultural status quo, which reflects and reproduces the perspective of young, white, heterosexual men. Continuing to explore the idea of a cultural status quo in comedy and its consequences, this chapter explores constructs of "good work" with attention to the self-management of the workers themselves that shapes and governs this cultural industry. Following, Rosalind Gill's (2010) argument that contemporary precarious work requires "a management of the self, in which power operates not through formal, top-down structures or bureaucratic rationalities but through technologies of selfhood in which a novel form of worker subjectivity is incited into being," (p.17) I examine these "technologies of the self" (Foucault 1988) as they apply to the realm of stand-up comedy. Yet, thus far, discussions of self-management in cultural industries have paid little attention to how this process is reconciled with other expectations of self-regulation imposed on those occupying minority statuses. My analysis provides a much-needed level of insight to this concept by showing how social location influences and differentiates the processes of self-management in the case of cultural industries. In other words, how do workers who are

marginalized by their race, gender, and/or sexuality status negotiate their own work in

relation to the "ideal worker"? My findings show that comedians who occupy one or

multiple intersections of marginality tend to be particularly self-aware and reflexive

about their work and their work environments. Under conditions of heightened reflexivity

the process of self-regulation operates differently because there is more to negotiate

throughout the process. In order to highlight these idiosyncrasies, I examine what it takes

to be a successful comedian: unpacking what it means for various comedians to do "good

work" in stand-up comedy.

Cultural industries tend to be associated with particular lifestyles that promise,

above all else, meaning, self-fulfillment, and autonomy. As Angela McRobbie (2002b)

argues there is a temptation when it comes to the coveted "creative celebrity" lifestyle

and the "seduction of autonomy," commonly associated with jobs in cultural industries.

These imagined rewards are "sufficiently powerful to override any misgivings,

constraints or disadvantages that might emerge in the everyday reproduction of this

highly competitive and uncertain domain" (Banks 2007:55). The ability of dominant

ideas to trump undesirable working conditions is, again, relatable to Weber's (1905)

theory of the Protestant work ethic. In Weber's theory, a strong work ethic is developed

from religious ideology that places value on working hard in the present life in order to

be saved in the future. The difference in this case lies in the way internalized principles of

self-discipline are encouraged through the dominant neo-liberal form of self-management

rather than an organized religion. Further, the logic of a delayed reward and "paying your

dues" remains except that the expectation is that hard work and self-sacrifice will garner

rewards in the future lifetime rather than the afterlife. These understandings of what it means to do "good work" in the cultural industries are further compounded by deeply rooted narratives that frame work as a master status and make strong associations between what you do for work and who you are as a human being. As Gill (2010) suggests, it is not simply a case of traditional self-discipline but "thoroughgoing, wholesale management of the self, which requires the radical remaking of subjectivity" (p. 18). For many workers in cultural industries, this subjectivity is so entrenched in the culture of work that it goes unnoticed and becomes easily rationalized as the norm. Additionally the lack of top-down management structures that are often present in traditional work settings makes self-regulation particularly salient in cultural industries. Thus, there is an omnipresence of self-management that tends to permeate contemporary work settings.

Through the exploration of self-management within stand-up comedy, I argue that it is paramount to consider social location. How workers internalize, and aspire to do, "good work" happens within larger relations of inequality based on intersecting forms of oppression. For example, feminist theorists have long highlighted the ways in which women's bodies are policed and governed through internalized ideas around gendered norms and expectations based on lifelong socialization processes (Acker 1990; hooks 1992). While much of the early feminist literature on bodily policing presumed a relative homogeneity in the experiences of women, the vast body of literature on intersectionality provides much-needed nuance to the regulation of women's bodies. Furthermore, myriad marginalized groups experience bodily regulation based on complex intersections of race,

ethnicity, sexuality, (dis) ability, class, and age (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991). Therefore, these processes of socialization based on identity are present within workers and must be reconciled with the expectations of what it means to be a "good worker" in their field of work.

When Foucault (1988) discusses "technologies of the self" he is interested in how people use technologies that engage with their bodies as a means of producing certain subjectivities. In the case of comedians, it is their own bodies which they use as technologies for their work. Thus, comedians' bodies factor into what is and is not possible when it comes to their work in stand-up comedy. In other words, the decisions that marginalized workers make are made in relation to their own bodies and overarching societal understandings of those bodies. Thus, what qualifies as "good work" in stand-up comedy is intimately connected to bodies as a "technology of the self."

Some scholars have argued that the increased individualization in contemporary society has led to an increase in reflexivity (Beck 1992; Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994). I argue that minority groups have never had the luxury of not being constantly self-reflexive and self-aware particularly when it comes to being successful in the realm of work. Marginalized workers are accustomed to reflecting on and negotiating work because these environments have not been designed with them in mind. Thus, despite the general agreement on what it means to do "good work" in stand-up comedy, the processes that are enacted in an effort to achieve this status, and therefore the self-management, differs based on one's social location.

5.2 "Good Work" in Stand-Up Comedy

In order to understand the ways in which self-regulation is negotiated by members of equity seeking groups, we must first establish the presence of a "good work" narrative when it comes to comedy work. Traditional workplaces may stipulate what it means to be a good worker in their collective agreement or other forms of governing documents. These formalized documents, in turn, help to shape less formal, cultural understandings of good work. These same principles are reiterated and encouraged by management. Given that there are no formal regulating bodies when it comes to comedy work in Canada the "ideal worker" narrative is strictly established and maintained by the mechanisms of rule discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, even without a formalized articulation of "good work" there appears to be an agreed upon narrative of what this looks like in comedy.

The dominant ideology in the realm of comedy is explicitly neo-liberal wherein notions of hard work and self-sacrifice, in the hopes of future rewards, prevail with little consideration of how existing power dynamics shape life chances. Many comedians spoke of "paying their dues" in comedy, rationalizing low pay and investing their own money into this work, and commonly experiencing symptoms of insecurity and abuse from audiences and other comedians. The regularity of unpaid or underpaid work is a common form of exploitation in comedy. This is so ordinary that low pay is generally accepted as the norm by workers themselves. This is a typical narrative when it comes to work in cultural industries as artists tend to be expected to forego economic gain for the sake of getting to pursue their craft. As Ross (2000) notes, "artists and other arts workers

accept non-monetary rewards – gratification of producing art – as compensation for their

work, thereby discounting the cash price of their labour" (p.6). This is also true in the

case of stand-up comedy. When asked if it was difficult to get paid for certain gigs and

then do the same work another time and not get paid, Roger responded:

> Not really, because like when you start out you never get paid so you're just like used to not getting paid to do comedy and then once you start getting paid you're like "oh shit I'm getting money for this!" Fuck man! You just get so pumped. (Man, Black, Straight)

This quote highlights the dominant attitude of all workers in comedy (regardless of social

location): work hard and take every opportunity; if that opportunity happens to be paid

then that is a bonus but certainly not an expectation in all cases.

Further, unpaid internships or apprenticeships and the willingness to pay for your

own training and experience are common phenomena in cultural industries. This is the

case in stand-up comedy as well. Kylie, who held a day job as a school teacher (a much

more prestigious day job than many other comedians held), mentioned the advantages

that going to festivals can offer:

> so amateurs can get into festivals and make an appearance and stuff like that but you're paying your own way to the festival and paying for accommodation and stuff. You know people laugh because you're paying so much but if you think about it like your apprenticeship it's like anything you always have to pay for your training right? (Woman, White, Straight)

This mentality of paying for training and experience seemed to extend to touring as well.

As John explains:

> One of the things my stand-up teacher told me was that anytime you can go on tour definitely do it, even if you're going to lose a bit of money because you'll come back a better comic. (Man, White, Straight)

These expectations establish parameters around who can participate in these endeavours based on which people have the financial means to afford these opportunities for training, apprenticeships, and networking. It also shows the propagation of the idea that workers themselves ought to be willing to take losses in order to invest in their own betterment even though it is questionable as to whether that investment will pay off. These ideas highlight the ways in which neo-liberal logics get disseminated through comedy communities and how comedians tend to adopt this logic as compulsory.

All of these unfavourable aspects of the job were trumped by the "high" when the sets went well and by the possibility of "living the dream" which meant to do this work in a full time capacity. With this in mind, there emerged a consistent formula comedians used to nurture their chances for career success and to inform their processes of self-management. Take for example Ruth's answer when she was asked what it took to be a successful comedian, "Thick skin. Tenacity. Hard work. Ability to go out every night and not expect to get paid" (Woman, White, Queer). This answer was consistent with the most common responses when asked what it takes to be a successful comedian which included combinations of being funny, working hard, showing tenacity, being persistent, and having thick skin. Importantly, there are additional "backstage" ways in which one could understand "good work" in relation to comedy (ie. integration and centrality in the community) but the conceptualization used here is based upon how comedians in my sample understood good work.

Persistence, hard work, and tenacity are common ethos applied to work more generally. In fact, the vague concepts of tenacity and hard work tend to be so ubiquitous

with good worker narratives that they are applied to every sector of contemporary work environments. From service sector jobs to cultural industries employers are seeking "enthusiastic", "hard working", "driven" employees. It is no coincidence that the association between the characteristics listed above and success in one's career is the backbone of the neo-liberal ideology that keeps the myth of meritocracy alive which is why this line of thinking remains pervasive in traditional and non-traditional jobs alike.

Thick skin is related to comedy work as it is associated with the degree of vulnerability and instant feedback involved with live performance. That said, all of these terms are largely subjective, which is why it is important to note how the definitions of these supposed successful characteristics differed between people who occupied the dominant social location in comedy (white, heterosexual, males) and those who did not. As established, the "ideal worker" becomes the "unmarked" worker, in the case of the creative comedy industry, the unmarked worker is white, heterosexual, and male. This "ideal worker" is imagined by default when one refers to a comedian. This is evidenced by the fact that anything that deviates from those identity markers includes a pre-fix. For example, female, racialized and LGBTQ comedians are not referred to simply as comedians but instead as "female comics", "black comics" or "queer comics." Thus, this chapter explores the ways in which marginalized comedians self-regulate in response to "ideal workers" in comedy. While all comedians may internalize these seemingly "neutral" neo-liberal logics about "good work," what is considered "good work" is infused with assumptions that advantage "ideal workers." Thus, marginalized workers are forced to respond to these expectations in specific ways. Findings illuminated

differing considerations and negotiations of what it meant to be funny, work hard and

have thick skin. Below, I will discuss these differences in self-regulation as they apply to

comedic content, appearances, and emotions when it comes to work in stand-up comedy.

5.3 Self-Regulation & Content

There is a level of competency related to all work which becomes the gauge of what it

means to be successful at your job or else be a "good worker." In the case of comedians,

being good at your job generally means being funny so that audiences laugh at your

jokes. Psychologists and sociologists alike have been interested in what makes something

funny and why we laugh at some things but not others. Sociologists in particular have

made comparisons between comedic observations and the sociological imagination

(Bingham and Hernandez 2009), asked whether there are valuable ethical limits to

humour (Lockyer and Pickering 2008), and explored humour's essential role in social

interaction (Palmer 1994). This research demonstrates that what is considered funny is

closely related to processes of socialization, culture, history, time, and audience. In other

words, there is no single way to be funny; humour is dependent on circumstance and

most importantly, audience. Thus, when comedians suggest that "being funny" is key to a

"successful career", this specifically means the need to make audiences laugh. While all

comedians aspire to make audiences laugh, their strategies for doing so vary based on

their social location. Specifically, marginalized comedians have particular considerations

when they write and perform material with the intention of making audiences laugh. This

is especially evident in the way that gender, sexuality, and race impact the content of the comedy material.

Several "female comedians" mentioned that they were rarely encouraged to be funny throughout their lives and that their gendered socialization did not explicitly involve learning how to be funny. Take for example, Erin's comments which highlight the regulation of young girls' behaviour:

> we're kind of taught you know it's okay like you're emotional but don't be crazy, don't be silly, like it's not pretty, it's not cute. I just think that's what it has to do with. I just think to make it short, guys are more encouraged or it's okay for them to be funny and girls are not really encouraged to be crazy and get up there and act like a fool whereas it's okay for guys to do it. (Woman, Brown, Straight)

While young girls are taught to restrict their comedic presence, they are encouraged to laugh at boys. Thus, not only do many women enter comedy with the perspective that they are not the "doers" of comedy, but they also ought to encourage men to be funny. Therefore, pursuing comedy as a woman is already counter to the normative gendered socialization process, as Laura notes:

> women are socialized as kids to not be comedians, we're socialized to laugh at guys that are the comedians. You know so it's like breaking out of a mold that people have set up for you. (Woman, Black, Straight)

The fact that these women become comics despite the lack of encouragement shows some resistance to social control, yet all of the "female comics" spoke about the tension between their humour and their identities as women. Consequently, interview responses from female comedians consistently demonstrated careful consideration of how the content of their comedy sets would be perceived in light of their gender. During my interviews, women often brought up the relationship between their content and their

gender, even before I got a chance to ask about that topic. In contrast, interview responses

from male comics showed some thought about the content of their comedy but their

responses did not explicitly relate to their gender. For example, when women joked about

stereotypically female subjects these were characterized as "women jokes" based on a

combination of the content of the joke and the gender of the comedian saying it. The way

in which jokes are gendered in relation to who is saying them is a determinant of how the

jokes land with the audience. In general men who tell jokes about subjects stereotypically

related to men are uncriticised by audience members and the comedy community but

when women tell jokes about subjects stereotypically related to women it is seen as

controversial. Thus, women comics are required to be self-reflexive and self-critical

about where their gender fits into the culture of comedy.

The problem with "women jokes," is that the term is not only a category to

signify topics that many women can relate to, but the categorization of a joke as a

"woman's joke" carries less value as it is positioned outside of the realm of experience of

all audiences (i.e. men). For example, the quintessential female jokes are related to

menstruation. Any jokes about periods are considered to be ubiquitous "woman jokes",

and since female comedy is highly undervalued, many female comics consider period

jokes to be too taboo and risky to include in their set. Many women I interviewed spoke

about deliberately avoiding anything to do with period jokes. As Barb explains:

> Yeah, there's a big stereotype that female comedians only talk about their periods.
> Just period jokes right and I've always heard that and so I've never told a period
> joke, just in case, I didn't want to be a hack or whatever. (Woman, White, Queer)

In a similar vein Danielle and Stacy state:

> like when you go on stage you kind of sometimes depending on the room you can feel that they don't care just because you're a girl so because they think that you're just going to talk about periods or something. (Woman, White, Straight)

> Unless you've thought of a very clever way to tell a period joke I feel like you know like that's something people will lose you at. I want to say like a women's contribution to that kind of night [comedy show], is by going up there and just telling jokes that are funny that have nothing to do with the fact that they're a woman or if it does have something to do with women it's something unique to their experience as a woman. (Woman, White. Straight)

Yet interestingly, a man talking about his genitalia during comedy sets is so common these jokes fall into the widely-recognized category of "dick jokes." In fact, in all standard comedy shows I attended, (with the exception of segregated specialty shows such as "all-women" or "all-queer" shows), "dick jokes" played a prominent role in men's sets. Laura discusses her frustration with this double standard wherein "dick jokes" are accepted and even expected; however, comedic content related to women's bodies is actively discouraged:

> And he [a male comedian] and I had a heated debate because he's like you can't talk about periods it makes guys feel uncomfortable and I was like why do you guys all talk about masturbating and dicks then? I don't care about your dick and you masturbating, you know what I mean? (Woman, Black, Straight)

The frequency of "dick jokes" affirms the fact that male comics do not need to employ the same reflection about the degree to which their comedy corresponds to their readable gender on stage. While some female comics I spoke with rolled their eyes when referring to "dick jokes," there were no general stigmas associated with them and no threat of "losing" the audience or not being taken seriously on stage. Again, the unchecked nature of male comedic content helps to establish it as the default and the norm in comedy.

The gendered socialization associated with being funny, directly shapes women's approach to comedy. In speaking with women in comedy, I found two prominent expectations that women have internalized. The first is that they avoid comedic content that is perceived as "girly" even beyond period jokes and the second is that they conform to a traditionally male model of crass humour which may increase their potential to relate to the audience.

Women often mention their inflated concern that audiences will be turned off by topics that are unique to women's experiences even beyond periods. This sentiment has been internalized by many of the female comics themselves; take for example Mandy, who describes being turned off of what she interpreted as female-specific humour:

> Like I went to the *Women and Comedy Festival* in Boston and I was watching one show and I was like oh my god these topics keep coming up and I wrote them down in my note book. […]I just wrote down these topics and it was almost like cycling through these topics. It was like internet dating, cats, you know like their parents. It was very…and I was just like yeah okay so this list is exactly what people mean when they say they don't like female comics because these are female jokes. And then I was just determined not to do any jokes like that. So as different people went on I was writing the topics down, like dating, weight loss, weddings, babies, bridesmaids, getting older, being single, like a lot of self-deprecating stuff right? Which I don't do any of "ha ha." You know like having kids, going out with your nephews, roommates, like more family stuff so a lot of that like what you would think if you think of traditional female topics - babies, family, women getting older and issues with getting older. So it was all very like that and I was just like Uhggg. (Woman, White, Straight)

This response not only shows disgust with many of the topics covered by female comics but also sympathizes with the idea that these topics are unappealing. In other words, this reinforces the narrative that "women aren't funny," even to other women. Further, the governance of humour performed by women is so prevalent that women themselves are participating in maintaining these boundaries. Mandy's quote shows that she is trying to

distance herself from the female comics whose comedy deals with "traditional female topics." Her statement also expresses frustration with other female comics perpetuating these stereotypes.

Relatedly, the female comedians interviewed are acutely aware of the degree to which their comedy and the comedic content of their female colleagues seems "girly." As Erin explains:

> I have heard sometimes other female comics, not all, but for example my sketch partner she would talk about some comics talking about things that are too girly or concerns that what if people think that we are too girly because our group is called *Sketch and the City* and they'll think of *Sex and the City* (Woman, Brown, Straight)

This stigma is internalized to the point that many female comics who deliberately stayed away from "girly" content continued to expect it from their female colleagues. As Andrea explains:

> I do think though that there is a stigma. I mean I know even for myself like if I see a girl get on stage a lot of time I'll be like oh great she's going to talk about her relationship issues and a lot of times I'm right but sometimes they're funny. (Woman, White, Straight)

Thus, the pressures to stay away from certain comedic content were not exclusively coming from male comics, but these ideas are so pervasive that there was a tendency for women to regulate each other as well.

Similarly, some female comics were critical of other female comics who they felt relied too heavily on crass and sexualized material. As Cindy notes:

> because I've noticed that a lot of female comics, and I hate to police them and say like this is wrong or whatever, but I've noticed and sometimes it's better than others but that they're [female comics] aware that it's a male audience so when they are exploring topics of like sexuality its more that they're seeing it from the male's perspective but speaking it from a women's perspective. […]but then with

those kinds of performers I think about what are the guys watching you thinking about right now? They're probably not respecting your jokes they're probably just thinking about having sex with you because that's all you talk about. (Woman, White, Straight)

Despite these kinds of criticisms other female comics noted that conforming to these expectations of telling crass jokes could sometimes endear you to the mostly male comedy community which can result in more gigs. As Erin explains:

Umm…It is changing a little bit but it is still a boys club I think. It's mainly guys and if you can roll with the guys and sort of get in on that kind of humour or whatnot then you're in. And if you're not or if they see you as too girly or those types of things then you're not. (Woman, White, Straight)

Joy noticed a similar pattern:

Like it's a club of who knows who and whatever and there's certain girls that are more popular than others. Like I see a lot of the same girls getting booked on shows more. And I don't think it's necessarily because they're the funniest. I think their sense of humour or whatever they're presenting it fits more so in the structure of the predominately male world, you know what I mean. So its super cool that girls want to get up there and tell dirty jokes, that's awesome, and whatever but that's not my style of comedy. (Woman, White, Straight)

Again, this shows the kinds of deliberations women comedians in particular need to consider when developing their comedic content.

Despite a widespread understanding of the stigma, female comics differentiated in terms of how many "risks" they took in incorporating traditional feminine topics and experiences into their sets. Similarly, they consider to what degree they wanted to be seen as conforming to a model of crass, sexualized humour that is traditionally seen as masculine and incompatible with female social expectations. Regardless of what content they ended up with, the data shows that female comics employed continuous reflection on the relationship between topics for their comedy and their gender identities.

Having established the "ideal" comedian as a white, heterosexual male, comics

who do not occupy this category must regulate their work in response to this ideal type.

For women, they must negotiate who they are in light of this unmarked norm. To do so,

they must first prove they are funny. This pressure is further amplified by the

understanding that they are working to eliminate the stigma that women are not funny,

not just for themselves but for all women in general. As one comic explains:

> And it's just about proving that women are funny. And then it just puts so much stress on people coming behind them [previous successful female comics] because they aren't just trying to represent themselves, they're representing their gender. And then they need to be compared to the women that came before them. Men don't come into comedy thinking like "oh if I start going into comedy then I am going to need to be compared to the men that have come before me," they just go as themselves women go as women as a whole rather than just I'm me. (Woman, White, Queer)

Knowing she is representing all women, Ruth alters the way in which she crafts her

routine based on the expectations of her comedic content as a woman:

> I think that guys have a lot of freedom to talk about whatever they want because they're just people whereas girls are girls and they should talk about things from a women's point of view they can't just talk about things from a person's point of view, everything from them [female comedians] comes from the point of view of a woman. (Woman, White, Queer)

Ruth's response highlights the idea that men are the neutral, default category in comedy

and that there is a lot of work involved when attempting to "be funny" as a "female

comic". The scrutiny related to what is considered to be acceptable content for women to

joke about is particularly challenging in light of that fact that comedy is often derived

from personal experiences and "truths." "Ideal" comedians have the freedom to draw on

moments and experiences in their lives without necessarily needing to reflect on how the

audience will react to the negotiation of their content with their identity.

In contrast, reading the audience or trying to gauge both what they are capable of appreciating and also what will alienate them is a familiar experience for marginalized comedians. Incorporating one's sexuality, for example, was something that queer comedians carefully considered disclosing depending on the context of the comedy show. This was particularly true of comics who conformed to their gender expectations and therefore were not easily readable as queer. Barb, a queer comic, explains her decision to not disclose her sexuality in front of audiences in small towns:

> If I'm in a small town, like I just recently did Wallaceburg, I won't talk about being gay ever, ever. You know it's weird. It's 2014 but some people like I'll say that and they just don't want to laugh anymore. Like they don't get mad at me but they're like, "I am uncomfortable." So I won't ever talk about that. I actually change jokes around and I'll say like "my boyfriend" which is awful. It's awful but you know, you got to do it. (Woman, White, Queer)

In a similar vein, Greg, comments on his careful weighing of a variety of variables before deciding whether to reveal his sexuality on stage:

> What I learned with going on the road is not to come out to people on stage right away because that really sets an off-tone. Like sometimes it's fine but sometimes it's like meh you can feel the room tense up. It's like you can relax guys. […]There's certainly some women, a bunch of lesbian comics who are not out so don't talk about it, don't make reference to it at all because they've felt that it would end their career. (Man, White, Queer)

Again, it is important to note that much of the content that these comedians rely on is related to their life experiences so choosing to not divulge one's sexuality can sometimes mean avoiding content related to their personal lives and thus potentially changing the content of the entire set.

Similarly, responses from comedians of colour showed that they were aware of the racial make-up of comedy audiences and would alter their content accordingly. Since

most audiences at traditional, regularly paying comedy shows are predominately white

the majority of their shows required a heightened self-reflection and regulation. As Chris,

a brown comic, jests:

> Yeah I have made so many jokes about how like is this a comedy meeting or a
> Klan group gathering? I've been to comedy events I'm like holy crap it's a sea of
> white or holy crap it's a seas of white guys you know. (Man, Brown, Straight)

When audiences reflected the identities of the comedians, usually through "specialty"

shows, comedians of colour spoke about being able to connect more with the audience

and access all of their material knowing that there would be more potential to land the

jokes. Take Roger, for example, who explained why his material resonates more with

those that share his blackness, "if I go to a black club they'll be like running around the

aisles and shit just because it's like shit that they relate to and stuff you know" (Man,

Black, Straight). Likewise, Erin, notes that she draws more heavily on cultural material

when she can be sure that the crowd will have more reference points: "The show in

Montreal that we did it was a predominately Middle Eastern crowd. And we were doing a

lot of Middle Eastern comedy […]" (Woman, Brown, Straight). In both of these

examples the comedians felt as though they could use more content that they derived

from their own experiences as people of colour in their comedy act as the audience would

have an increased understanding of where they were coming from. Having audiences

with similar backgrounds meant that they could relax some of their self-regulation with

the knowledge that the materials garnered from their lived experiences would resonate

with the audience. However, the majority of comedy shows consist of predominately

white audience members, meaning that non-white comedians also have to employ heightened reflexivity and self-management to the content of their sets.

While being funny may be the ultimate key to success for comedians in their work, the interview data show that comedians who occupy marginalized social locations need a different degree of self-regulation, requiring particular attention and self-awareness in order to be considered funny, particularly when performing to generic audiences. Specifically, female comics need to consider how their comedic content relates to their gender and queer and racialized comics need to consider what they should and should not disclose about themselves in order to put the audience at ease. Ultimately, "being funny" and subsequently attaining the "good worker" status is a process that requires much self-regulation for marginalized comedians which contributes to an unequal work environment.

5.4 Self-Regulation & Appearances

The body is a common site of regulation, particularly for marginalized people. Folks who occupy marginalized positions have been socialized to self-regulate their bodies and appearances in a variety of contexts, including work. Appearance is a particularly salient consideration when work involves live performance so it is no surprise that aesthetics was a source of reflection when it came to self-regulation in comedy.

Several of the comedians interviewed mentioned that simply presenting as a woman on stage made them feel as though they needed to work harder in order to be accepted by the audience. Danielle puts it this way:

> When I go up there who know what they are thinking, "oh what's this girl gonna say?" You don't know. You don't know what they're thinking and you don't know how many you've lost so I think that's why girls have to work harder with their material to really show how funny they are like sooner in their set maybe. I think they need to win the audience sooner. (Woman, White, Straight)

Laura also expressed that there tends to be a higher standard for women when they perform:

> I think in general still now there's sort of a higher standard for like…when a woman goes on stage you'll hear groans sometimes and it's like fuck you, you know, it's so discouraging. As soon as you step on the stage you're held to a higher expectation like you better be really funny but as soon as you hit that then they're forgiving about it then their like oh my gosh you're really, really funny. So as soon as you hit the bar it explodes but to hit the bar is difficult. (Woman, Black, Straight)

These quotes highlight the need that these women feel to account for the bodies they present on stage even before they perform their material.

Women's performances on stage are not only scrutinized because they are women but their experiences are also shaped by how they look as women. What is acceptable and/or funny content for female comics is dependent on the perceived characteristics that an audience will apply to a woman's appearance. Therefore, women consciously shape their comedy based on how they assume the audience will perceive them. Several of the female comics I spoke with were told either by comedy teachers or through industry executives, that they should be doing "clean" material. These suggestions were not all explicitly related to the gender of the comics but the implicit message is that cultural expectations of women's behaviour are incongruent with crass comedic material. Teachers and industry execs who advised women to work "clean" were clear that it was related to finding comedy content that was consistent with "the way they looked." As Ruth explains:

> I recently had my stand up teacher tell me that the word "fuck" didn't suit me. And I am not saying that he said that because I am a girl. He was like "you're better than that" but I feel like that sort of thing, of people looking at a girl and they would say like that content doesn't suit you like "oh I don't want you to talk about that, that's not nice." (Woman, White, Queer)

Joy shared a similar experience of getting advice about her comedy based on her looks:

> So I have had people say to me "I think you're really funny but you're too cute to say that kind of joke, you're too cute to do that so don't do that." Whereas that's not me that's not me saying that I'm super attractive but what I'm saying is that sometimes there's a certain kind of girl where they're like okay you can tell dirty jokes but you can't because you seem really sweet and I don't like that. You know what I mean so it depends on how you present yourself and I think it has a lot more to do with how you look than if you were a guy. (Woman, White, Straight)

Therefore, if a comic had an "innocent" look to them, a perception more often associated with women, swearing did not suit them and there was a risk of their voice coming off as "inauthentic" on stage. This also means that some women were discouraged from accessing the crass comedy narratives that some comics claim leads to more opportunities for women in comedy.

The notion that women cannot be simultaneously funny and attractive is also deeply entrenched in comedic work. This tension shapes both the degree to which women are considered to be aesthetically pleasing and the content of their comedy. Gina Barreca (2012) states, "there's a line in the sand for women: on one side, there's too funny to be sexy, and on the other, there's too sexy to be funny" (Barreca cited in Fetters 2012). Being both funny and attractive, she argues, would lead to cognitive dissonance. I contend that this argument is problematic because it is dependent on hegemonic beauty standards which are largely shaped by the perceived wants of heterosexual men. That said, this rationale fits with the strong androcentric bias in comedy wherein everyone is

subject to comparison to the male "ideal worker." Moreover, the idea that there is a

connection between what you look like as a woman and what content you should or

should not be attempting was prevalent in the responses provided by comedians.

Not only are women responsible for gaging how their look fits with their comedy

routine, there is also an expectation that women will carefully consider what they wear on

stage so as not to create a distraction. Danielle shares her deliberation process when

preparing for a show:

> I have to win everybody, male or female, right away but you want to keep the
> males interested with your content because it's also thought of you know you've
> got to be careful with what you wear on stage. You have probably seen different
> female comedians, not a lot of them will show a lot of skin. Because you know
> it's thought of that the males are already going to be distracted. (Woman, White,
> Straight)

The self-scrutiny around what to wear in places of work and how this epitomizes

character and abilities is a common challenge for women in a variety of work places. The

onus is on women to ensure that they are well received based on what they are wearing

and also not a distraction to men. For women, not only is the readability of their

femininity a consideration for the topics and delivery of their comedy, their sexuality

must also be managed in order to ensure that the audience remains attentive. These

constructions are products of a patriarchal society that privileges the male gaze and

supports the myth of male hyper sexuality.

While comedians mute some forms of "difference" in order to have their content

resonate with audiences, in some cases, comedians draw attention to their inability to

conform to the "unmarked" comedian status. For example, Stacy explains learning about

the need to explicitly mention anything about your appearance that differs from the

dominant characteristics:

> One of the first things that I was told that you have to do to put somebody at ease
> when you're on stage is to address some element of the way that you look just so
> because you know that others…so if you're a fat guy you have to mention that
> you're a fat guy. So in terms of race usually they'll say something. […]So if it's
> like a majority group of white guys and a black guy comes up, he is going to
> address it because he is going to know or hopefully he is going to recognize that
> people are thinking about it and people are noticing it. (Woman, White, Straight)

Due to the relative homogeneity of the comedy world any perceived "difference" runs the

risk of making the audience uncomfortable. Thus, some comedians discussed being

taught to call out and acknowledge anything about their appearance that would be

considered out of the norm in order to eradicate the potential discomfort of the audience.

The idea is that this allows the audience to be at ease so that they can focus on the

material that the comedian is performing and also be relaxed enough to laugh. Stacy

explains how this applies to race:

> When a black comedian mentions a stereotype [about black people] the more that
> reinforces and comforts the audience because it's like ha ha he's mentioning
> things that I feel even though I don't want to admit that I am feeling them because
> that would admit that I'm a racist. (Woman, White, Straight)

Similarly, comedians who do not explicitly conform to gender norms are presumed queer,

and are therefore expected to call this out in order to ensure that the audience feels

comfortable laughing. Other comedians enact this strategy when calling out non-

traditional physical elements including being corpulent, being short, and having red hair.

The comedians in these cases may fit the ideal comedians based on demographics (white,

straight, men) but they are still required to call out their differences as they represent a

variance to the "good worker" hegemony in comedy. That said there are varying degrees

of cultural acceptability based on how one deviates from the norm and in general being white, male and heterosexual, even if not represented by a hegemonic masculinity tends to carry a cultural acceptability in comedy. Thus, mentioning these physical features help to put the audience at ease but does not necessarily require an additional labour on the part of the worker.

While calling out non-dominant physical characteristics worked to diffuse potential audience alienation, there is an exception for women. The risk in mentioning your womanhood on stage serves as a reminder that you are not a man and reinforces the stereotype that female comics tend to focus their comedy too heavily on "women problems." Thus, negotiating these particularly nuanced assumptions about the audience adds another layer to the process of self-regulation for marginalized comedians.

Again, those occupying marginalized positions have a lot to consider when it comes to their comedic content, their presentation, and the potential reactions of the audience. Female comics need to regulate their appearances based on gendered notions of acceptable behaviour and queer and racialized comics need to acknowledge their body presentation and skin in what are generally predominantly white, straight spaces. Increased self-awareness and regulation of appearance is necessary for marginalized comedians. This increased self-awareness perpetuates marginalized comedians' statuses as outsiders compared to the "ideal worker." Further, this outsider status undermines opportunities to secure regular paying work.

5.5 Self-Regulation & Emotions

All workers are required to develop skills in order to deal with adversity and push back in

their workplaces. This seems particularly true for work in cultural industries where

success is dependent upon audience approval and even more pertinent to stand-up

comedy where that feedback is instant. The general sentiment is that thick skin allows

one to deal with rejection from other comedians, the audience, and the industry. While all

comedians described the need to develop coping mechanisms in order to deal with

failure, the depth of which comedians develop their skin's 'thickness' varies greatly.

Specifically, for marginalized comedians, the ability to negotiate rejection extends

beyond their work not being well received into developing tools to negotiate

unwelcoming environments and discriminatory jokes about gender, race, and sexuality.

Broad societal power structures permeate all work environments which contributes to the

omnipresence of overt and covert forms of discrimination. That said, traditional work

environments have benefitted some as the result of policy and workplace organizing that

was designed to challenge workplace discrimination. However, these efforts are largely

repudiated in cultural industries (Adkins 1999; McRobbie 2002). As Banks and

Milestone (2011) note:

> In the new cultural economy, with its emphasis on individual talent, initiatives
> like equal opportunities legislation, anti-discrimination policies, collective
> representation and so on tend to be viewed as inappropriate hangovers from the
> old economy, structures that inhibit creativity and introduce elements of drag into
> the necessarily fast and free-flowing process of reflexive production. (P. 79)

Yet, rather than being a result of freedom and spontaneity, more often than not,

"creativity is a by-product of mastery of the sort that is cultivated through long practice"

(Crawford 2010:51). Accepting that processes involved in creative work are similar if not the same as traditional forms of work suggests that regulations to reduce discrimination and restore or sustain equality are necessary. This was evident when speaking with stand-up comedians who were members of marginalized groups.

Several comedians articulate their discomfort in having to perform their set on stage immediately after another comedian made discriminatory jokes about an identity that readably applies to them. Not only does this alienate marginalized workers from the space itself, but it also requires a significant amount of emotion work, wherein comedians suppress their own hurt and anger in an effort to put the audience at ease. Take Jeff's experience as an emcee at a comedy show wherein he, as a gay man, introduced an older white (presumably heterosexual) man to the stage:

> And then after I introduced him he like went on stage and like started like flipping around just like the most hacky gay clown shit being like, "Oh Jeff, Wow!" […] And like in that respect and in that instance in Kitchener they [the audience] were fully onboard [..]. (Man, White, Queer)

For Jeff, it was not so much the flamboyant impression that struck him, but rather the degree to which the laughter from the crowd supported the mockery at his expense. The support from the crowd moved the homophobic mocking from an individual-level opinion to a joke supported by a room full of people, bonding over homophobia. To make matters worse, as the emcee, Jeff would have to return to the stage multiple times that night. Broad support of homophobic values in one's place of work creates a toxic work environment for queer identified folks and affects constructions of personal workplace expectations. A positive audience reception is common with discriminatory material because it can often get "cheap laughs." It also depends on the values of the audience

consuming the comedy, as Heather stated in relation to racism, "the audiences love racist

material. White audiences love having their own racism enforced by another person,"

(Woman, White, Queer). This observation is consistent with my field notes, which

showed that audiences responding favourably to discriminatory content was not an

esoteric phenomenon (Field notes: October 2013, November 2013, December 2013,

August 2014, September 2014).

The combination of the audience's willingness to laugh at misogynist, racist, and

homophobic jokes with the comedian's fear of silence on stage can create an incentive for

comedians to rely on discriminatory material. This in turn, serves to poison the climate of

the workplace. Erin shares an experience of having to go up on stage following an

introduction from a sexist host:

> he's [the host] not there anymore but he was just such a sexist ass. Every time a
> female went up and did stand-up he would make little comments like she had to
> suck off the host to get a set. And he would say that about everyone, [female
> comedians], it didn't matter if you did good, it didn't matter if you did bad.
> (Woman, Brown, Straight)

In another example, Chris, discusses the emotion work involved in trying to discern a

cold welcome:

> Even among younger comics, a lot of them are so socially awkward they don't
> know how to talk to a girl much less work with her or accept her in the green
> room. So, we can't talk about our penises, now what['s] going to happen? They're
> just awkward. It's not a very hospitable environment for women. For all
> minorities for that matter. There's a lot of people sometimes who just go quiet
> when you walk in the room and you're not sure, do you not like me, is it because
> I'm brown or because that girl is here. What's happening? It's just like the rest of
> the world but far more concentrated you know. (Man, Brown, Straight)

As these experiences highlight, comedians occupying marginalized positions need thick

skins not only for the ubiquitous rejection associated with live comedy but also simply to

navigate discriminatory, unsupportive, and unwelcoming environments. Take for

example Isaac's description of comedy settings as they relate to women:

> Is there a hostile environment towards women in comedy? Yes. I've been to
> rooms and heard people say things and been like wow this is more offensive than
> a coal mine like really. And again, it's one of those things where people hide
> behind the fact that they're just joking and all the rest but I fully appreciate that
> when you get a bunch of young guys in a room and they're all joking about rape
> that that is very uncomfortable for women. And I think, I don't think that there's
> that awareness about how it affects other people, right? As far as other minorities,
> I would say that homosexuals would certainly, again there's a lot of homophobic
> stuff out there. To go out and be surrounded by that can be very difficult. I mean I
> can't imagine doing a show where someone, the comic before me was basically
> making fun of exactly who I am and the audience is laughing at you and to do that
> night after night which is what's required to get good. (Man, White, Straight)

As discussed in chapter four, the claim that one ought to be allowed to joke about

anything is often used in defense of discriminatory material. Regardless of where one

stands on this debate and whether or not they include this in their own material, the

constant presence of laughter at the expense of a person's identity creates an intimidating

and unreceptive environment for those occupying marginalized positions. This appears to

be a phenomenon that is not experienced in the same ways by straight, white, men as

there are less societal stigmas and stereotypes to draw from. As Adam explains:

> Yes I would say that you get straight white men who don't have a very good gage
> on what is acceptable and what is offensive because they are un-offendable you
> know. Like as a straight white male myself there's nothing you can say to me
> that's going to really offend me about being a man or being white or being
> straight like you're not going to hurt my feelings. You can make up some weird
> nickname like calling me cracker isn't going to hurt my feelings like I don't give
> a shit because straight white men have always been on top of the world right.
> (Man, White, Straight)

Hence, the predominance of white, heterosexual men as the "ideal workers" in stand-up

comedy. As one comedian states in relation to the amount of racist depictions of people

in comedy, "It closes doors because if you're not comfortable you're not going to want to be a part of any of that" (Woman, White, Straight). As this response notes, there is going to be a breaking point when it comes to the amount of "thick skin" a comedian is willing to grow which can limit the amount of marginalized comedians who participate, thereby reinforcing the status quo.

Similar to traditional work environments, women are also charged with the emotionally daunting task of diverting and avoiding unwanted male attention. This can be especially difficult given the disproportionate ratio of men to women and the general unregulated behaviour, as John describes:

> Yeah I feel for women in comedy man. It's one of those things, it would be so hard to start out because it's like this, you see it happen, the comedy community is like a sea of dudes who don't get laid that much so a new female comedian comes and they just get swarmed like so fast by all these dudes who are like, "why don't we get together for coffee and we can talk about your comedy," and shit like that. It's got to be so difficult. (Man, White, Straight)

Martha, also discusses the frustrations that come with unwanted attention when she is working:

> But it's an interruption for women you know, it's like please don't hit on me, I'm trying to be your equal here, I'm doing work, can you do this another time. Or like trying to get flirty, I think after the show if you want to have a drink with somebody that's one thing but guys don't know the difference. You know what I mean? (Woman, White, Straight)

While sexual harassment at work is a continual struggle for many women, the unregulated nature of stand-up comedy work enables an intensified vulnerability for unchecked sexual harassment. Further, some conflate heckling and sexual harassment which can lead to many miscommunications given that some see heckling as an acceptable part of a live stand-up performance.

This confusion was highlighted after Toronto comedian, Jen Grant, was sexually harassed during a corporate gig on May 13th, 2015. Grant wrote about her experience stating that a man in the front row yelled, "There's a 51 per cent chance that my buddy here will have sex with you . . . and I will take the other 49 per cent," three minutes into her act. In an effort to not disrupt the show, Grant continued with her material but the comments which she described as having a "rapey tone" continued. While Grant mentions that she has dealt with these kinds of scenarios in the past, she decided to write a blog about this one on her personal website because in this case she was unable to hide her hurt and ended up crying on stage and cutting her set short. There were some who read her story and showed support but also many who argued that this was simply heckling and that she was being "too sensitive."

The amount of self-reflection and emotion work that occurs after a set, particularly if it did not go well or a comedian "bombed," also seems to vary depending on the social location of the comedian. For example, many of the middle-aged women comedians who were interviewed talked about videotaping their sets and reviewing them in order to see which jokes landed and which jokes did not so that they could re-write material and practice their delivery. While the degree and strategy for reflection varied among comedians, my interview data show that marginalized comedians were more likely to have elaborate and deliberate approaches for evaluating their sets.

Conversely, "ideal workers" were more likely to continue to do the same material even if it was not getting a positive reaction from the audience. Greg reflects on his

observation of "ideal" comics that he sees who do not seem to change anything about

their act despite continually receiving negative feedback from the audience:

> And they've been doing it for years, with the same set, the same beats, the same jokes done in the same way every single time. I'm like unless I just happen to only ever see you on off nights I don't know why you think that this is somehow going to work at some point. (Man, White, Queer)

Another comedian, Adam, makes a similar observation and theorizes that the lack of

reflection on their comedic output on the part of white, straight males may be related to a

confidence that builds through societal privilege:

> Like all those people that I was talking about earlier that always go out and they always try the same jokes and they always bomb in my mind they're almost, anyone I can think of off the top of my head they're almost all straight white males, right. So I don't know why. I think it's just because they're ignorant to how bad they are. They have bigger egos because they've never had their egos crushed by racism or sexism or homophobia or any of those things. (Man, White, Straight)

Related to this, are my observational notes showing several instances of "ideal"

comedians not getting any laughs and reacting by blaming the audience. In one particular

case, the comedian addressed the audience saying, "why are you guys not laughing? Is it

because you don't speak English?" (Field Notes: November 2013). Similarly, Ruth shares

a story about a fellow comedian, "I know one guy who always whenever his jokes don't

hit and that's pretty often he goes 'oh fuck you that was funny.' And then that gets a

laugh and that's the biggest laugh of his set" (Woman, White, Queer). In contrast, I never

witnessed a marginalized comedian negatively address the audience if they were not

getting laughs. Thus, marginalized comedians were more likely to internalize negative

feedback from the audience and incorporate these experiences into their self-management

strategies whereas "ideal" comedians were more likely to externalize the experiences and

blame the audiences instead. Bombing for comedians who occupy marginalized positions

tended to provoke a hyper self-awareness. In Laura's case, not doing well on stage

provoked deep reflection about herself:

> Like if you go on and you suck, like no one laughs. You start to question yourself
> as a human being, what am I doing with my life. I have had so many existential
> crises from this whole process. (Woman, Black, Straight)

Cindy, echoes the need to self-reflect if a joke goes bad rather than directing your

frustrations to the audience:

> I hate that. That is my biggest pet peeve, is comedians blaming their audience for
> something not hitting. They can be nice but more of a 'come on guys' maybe or
> what is wrong with you. I've been to a lot of shows where it just like well this
> usually kills so I don't know what's wrong with you guys. You should not blame
> your audience, you have to be up front, you have to realize it's not them, it's you.
> (Woman, White, Straight)

Consequently, marginalized comedians seem more likely to reflect on what they could

improve about the jokes that were not landing with the audience or else, eliminate the

joke all together.

Ultimately, there appears to be a difference in the way that marginalized and some

"ideal" comedians deal with negative feedback from audiences. This difference can be

attributed to the degree of self-awareness, self-reflection, and emotion work required to

sustain their position in comedic work. Marginalized comedians tend to look inward

when they recognize that their performance was not well received. Conversely, some

"ideal" comedians tend to look at outward variables when trying to determine why a joke

or set did not work. This affirms much of the sociological work on socialization wherein

marginalized groups are socialized in reference to the dominant group. For example,

women, racialized, and queer identified folks tend to already be mindful of how much

space they are taking up, how others are reading them, and what the expectations are based on how they are read. Conversely, it is unclear if those who occupy privileged social locations have been forced to reflect to the same degree, which leads to the tendency to assume that there is a problem with the audience rather than with their material or delivery. It seems to be a distinction between feeling like you need to provide a service for the audience who is listening to you, in the former, versus feeling like you are entitled to the stage space and the attention of the audience, in the latter case.

Having thick skin is challenging for all comics given the degree of vulnerability that comes with being on display in live performance. When comedians "bomb" and audiences do not laugh or even heckle, comedians need to develop the coping mechanisms to persevere through the disparagement. That is true of all comics but comedians occupying one or more marginalized position need to not only manage the criticism related to their work but also the devaluing of their identity and who they are. In turn, comedians internalize these processes and environments thus causing acute self-regulation.

5.6 Conclusion

Given that part of being a good comedian is rooted in self-awareness and the ability to read the audience, logic would suggest that having these skills socialized from early on would be a boon to developing as a stand-up comic. That said, the very environments that necessitate these socialized skills are still present, meaning that the context in which comedy as a realm of performance operates, remains saddled with power imbalances.

Thus, there are differing gender, race and sexuality based evaluations embedded in this work. Consequently, these imbalances require differing strategies for self-management at work.

This chapter has analyzed the regulation of comedians themselves as they negotiate their work context. Cultural industry scholars have laid the groundwork for a growing body of research on self-management; however, an application of this concept to the context of comedic work, demonstrates how self-governance works differently for different workers adding a level of much needed nuance to these conversations. Self-management is a process that is intensified through the shifting economic trends because work realms adopt far less top-down management structures than in the past. The overall changes in the organization of work coupled with an increasingly individualistic and competitive economy has resulted in the internalization and self-policing of exploitative work expectations. More importantly, the ways in which self-management plays out, both in terms of what is internalized, but also what is expected, is negotiated in conjunction with intersecting understandings of the self. These firsthand accounts of the multifaceted identity dynamics at play in the realm of stand-up comedy add to the debate about the economic opportunities and emancipatory potential of creative work and the relationships between self-management, individualization, and negotiating workplace success. Additionally, this analysis shows how the body becomes a technology of the self for comedians, making comedy work inherently linked to the performer's body. These findings are important for enhancing our understanding of hegemonic power imbalances

and inequality in work, particularly as this relates to cultural industries which are touted by some as the next economic saviour.

When you exist in a society that affords you many privileges based on your social location and then you enter a field of work that tends to amplify those privileges and leave them mostly unchecked, there appears to be less motivation to carefully reflect on your presence in the world. Conversely, when you exist in a society with barriers, you must constantly reconcile your identity with your surroundings. For example, how can one take pride in their work and their identity when others are gaining success in their work by putting you down? The answer to this question is precisely why occupying marginalized social locations as a comedian requires different relationships to self-management, and diverse strategies for success as we can see with this chapter's specific reference to self-regulation as it relates to comedic content, the body, and emotion. With this in mind, the following chapter will explore what this heightened sense of self-awareness and reflection means for the strategies that marginalized workers employ to engage with their work spaces.

SIX

Compliance and Resistance in Stand-Up Comedy

6.1 Managing the Dominant Work Culture

In chapter four, I established the dominant discourses and the "mechanisms of rule" that conspire to reinforce the "ideal worker" in stand-up comedy and sustain the status quo. In chapter five, I highlighted the ways in which that discourse is internalized by comedians themselves and used to self-govern their expectations and behaviours as workers. Further, I showed how the process of self-management was not the same for all workers; instead, it was a process that was heavily influenced by the intersecting social locations of the comedians. In this chapter, I build on the previous chapters by asking how the culture of comedy and the self-management strategies employed by comedians relate to the ways in which marginalized comedians use consent and resistance to negotiate *where* and under *what conditions* they work. I argue that while workers may accept the necessities of self-management they are neither anesthetized to the inequities within comedic labour, nor are they under the spell of false consciousness. Instead, marginalized comedians are actively negotiating the conditions of the enterprise and their own values and needs as they navigate their work options. It is important to consider the choices that workers make in response to dominant work cultures because they often have real consequences for work and career opportunities. In the case of comedy this is largely associated with where

comedians perform and whether or not these spaces are considered "mainstream."

Mechanisms of rule and varying strategies for self-management establish and reinforce

boundaries around the conditions in which one can perform mainstream comedy. They

also illuminate the processes that fuel and maintain inequality and homogenization within

realms of work.

The debates surrounding the emancipatory potential of cultural industries do not

take into account the strategies that workers employ to deal with unequal work

environments. As the previous chapter showed, being a marginalized comedian requires

an acute sense of awareness and reconciliation with one's self and one's work

environment. This increased awareness has several variable outcomes in terms of

comedians' opportunities for work and in terms of where that work takes place. In

particular, comedians' decisions about whether to comply or resist the dominant work

culture greatly impacts where they work. I begin this chapter by considering established

theories related to consent and resistance when it comes to work. I then consider why we

need to further explore these processes in cultural industries and discuss examples of

three strategies that utilize consent and resistance when negotiating work in stand- up

comedy.

In the first case, comedians employ what I call "justifiable acquiescence" in that

they are aware of the inequalities in their work but deliberately choose to overlook them

and make attempts to comply with the unequal work environment, usually by engaging in

additional emotion work. In the second case, comedians choose to leave stand-up comedy

work all together. In the third case comedians choose to operate outside of the

mainstream comedy arenas and carve out spaces that are specifically curated with equity

principles and safe spaces in mind. Like most categorizations, these ideal types are not

mutually exclusive, nor are they deterministic depending on whether one occupies a

marginalized position or not. They are meant to represent broad patterns from the data

and also to show that, (1) there are varying realties for comedians when it comes to where

they work, (2) the culture of work and the way it is internalized has real consequences for

job-related decisions, and finally, (3) it is crucial to consider the role of agency when it

comes to the negotiation of larger work contexts in cultural industries.

6.2 Consent and Resistance in Work

Michael Burawoy's (1979) classic book *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour*

Process Under Monopoly Capitalism attempts to discern why workers work as hard as

they do. He concludes that it is neither the effort to be "good workers" nor the material

rewards. Instead, he argues, that social pressure and "gaming" were key reasons for

productivity (Burawoy 1979). In gaming, workers challenge *themselves* to make and

exceed the daily quota of factory outputs. Accomplishing this goal is referred to as

"making out" which provided a sense of "prestige, social accomplishment, and pride" as

well as a psychological reward of time passing more quickly (Burawoy 1979). According

to Burawoy (1979), these "games" were born as a coping mechanism to endure

subordination in the labour process. These games, however, are not in opposition to or

independent of management as they are regulated by the employer. For example, if

employees exceeded their daily quota output by too much they are asked by management

to record a certain amount of the overload towards their output for the following day. Burawoy (1979) argues that playing games generates consent about the rules and the games themselves are the bond between individual rationality and the rationality of the capitalist system. Put simply, Burawoy (1979) states that workers consent in various ways to the very work systems that constrain them.

Burawoy's research makes important contributions to the understanding of inequality and work by showing that we need to consider subjectivity and ideology in conjunction with the structural and political relations in order to fully understand patterns of enforcement and consent. That said, Scott Davies (1990) criticizes Burawoys's theory for being androcentric and argues that Burawoy is guilty of overgeneralizing by making conclusions about human behaviour through data that was predominately based on the experiences of men. Both of these pieces are significant to the discussion at hand insofar as Burawoy shows the importance of theorizing workers' subjectivities when it comes to the sociology of work, while Davies shows that worker subjectivity is not gender neutral given the omnipresence of patriarchal power relations and socialization. Following these conclusions, this chapter examines the role worker subjectivity plays in shaping creative workers compliance or resistance to their terms of work with attention to the impact of axes of difference.

In contrast to the discussion of consent, other research in the sociology of work highlights processes of resistance. Much of this research focuses on addressing why women in particular opt-out of work in the paid labour force. Some theorists focus on the opt-out as a strategy that suits women's preferences when it comes to managing paid

employment and marriage/child-care responsibilities (Hakim 2002; 2006). Of course, it is

not only personal preferences alone that dictate these decisions, we must also consider the

impact of women being "shut-out" through structural barriers such as "glass ceilings" and

"maternal walls" (Stone 2007; Williams, Manvell, and Borstein 2007; Williams and

Dempsey 2014). Further, women of colour and lower class statuses face increased

numbers of structural barriers when it comes to work (Williams and Dempsey 2014).

Taken together, these studies suggest that both structure and agency ought to be

considered when looking to understand why women leave certain jobs. The phenomenon

of opting-out can be considered both an act of resistance and compliance. On the one

hand, if a worker opts-out of a job (whether their choice was constrained or not) they are

resisting working in that particular environment. On the other hand, by leaving that work

environment they are complicit in the work environment itself remaining status quo.

In sum, we have theories from the sociology of work that help us understand

some processes of consent and resistance in work, however, these theories have been

derived from traditional work contexts. Thus, this chapter builds upon these theories to

show what consent and resistance look like in stand-up comedy. For example, Burawoy's

(1979) research contributes to understanding the subjectivity involved in comedians'

strategy of "justified acquiescence," yet a key difference between Burawoy's (1979)

research and cultural industries is that compliance in creative work is often required in

order to secure work opportunities whereas in traditional work, forms of consent are

strategies used to make work more bearable. Additionally, "justified acquiescence" better

captures creative workers *reluctant* acceptance of the culture of their work versus consent

which suggest that they are granting permission and does not account for the conscious aversion to that culture. Additionally, the literature around "opting-out" helps to situate this strategy in creative contexts, highlighting the interplay between the culture of work and personal ideologies that lead to these decisions. Lastly, the addition of the "curating spaces" strategy illuminates a third option that is not captured by work on consent or opting-out. This strategy showcases a unique option available in some creative work settings, thereby adding a necessary element to these discussions. All three of these strategies will be further explored in detail below.

6.3 Justified Acquiescence

As established, the topic of consent is important for conversations about workers. However, consent is complicated in work; for most people, work is necessary for survival, which can lead some to compromise, settle, or consent to less-than-ideal circumstances. Furthermore, as work becomes less secure and society becomes increasingly individualistic, people tend to consent to working conditions based on their personal and immediate needs with little attention to long term outcomes or collectives in mind. Also, much of the work in cultural industries operates with little formal structure and does not have the benefit of unions or specific policy, to keep just hiring and working conditions in check.

Additionally, much of the work in cultural industries doubles as a source of enjoyment so that consent may be further complicated by the genuine desire to continue to get work in a particular area. Howard S. Becker (2006) discusses the issue of consent

as it applies to "art worlds" and observes that "the scene consists of everyone trying to get what they want and the collective activity may be what no one wanted but what they all in effect agreed to" (p. 281). In many ways, this relates to the case of comedy and the concept of "justified acquiescence" in particular. There is a general acknowledgement of inequalities that are present in the culture of stand-up comedy but many people choose to overlook them in an effort to ensure that they will continue to have work opportunities and in so doing end up reproducing and reinforcing the culture of inequality.

All of the comedians I interviewed acknowledge that there is a dominant demographic majority, of white, heterosexual, young men in the stand-up community and as the previous chapters have shown, several mechanisms conspire to assist and sustain that demographic. Despite this recognition, some comedians intentionally overlook their underrepresentation in the traditional construction of a comedian. In deliberately disregarding the inequities and most importantly, not attempting to resist them, comedians from marginalized groups are able to participate in these work places. For many this means having to 'bite their tongues' and in some cases suspend their values and self-respect, as Ruth explains:

> And yeah it's not so much that they just flat out don't welcome women, even though some people definitely do have those misogynist viewpoints to that extent, just as much as it's like if you're in this boys' club then you need to act a certain way. There needs to be a certain part of yourself that you don't stand up for and there needs to be a certain amount of abuse that [you] probably don't even know is abuse that you're willing to take. (Woman, White, Queer)

Ignoring and re-framing are commonly used strategies for comedians who apply a "justified acquiescence" approach. The message of perseverance or "suffering for your art" is strong in many cultural industries and this narrative also rationalizes overlooking

inequality. Further, comedians have the added rationale that these "abuses" are occurring

in jest given the presumed non-serious nature of comedy work.

There are numerous examples of micro aggressions or subtle reminders of

difference but there are also moments of overt and targeted harassment. These latter

moments required more work on the part of marginalized comedians to look the other

way. Take Barb's experience, as she recounts her decision to remain silent after

witnessing instances of online harassment towards her fellow comedian friend:

> It sucks though. You see these things they [male comedians] write on the internet
> and then you've got to go to these shows and see them in person and they've said
> some hideous things about female comedians and some of your friends and then
> you see them at shows and they are like, "oh hey [Barb] how's it going," and I'm
> like "oh hey how are you?" I feel like crap because there are some women in the
> community who will stand up and say that's not right you shouldn't be doing this
> and then they just get attacked by every male comedian in that group but they still
> fight for it, they get blacklisted, they can't get on anyone's shows […] I feel like
> such a wimp and an idiot because I keep my head down and just kind of say hi to
> everyone and am nice. (Woman, White, Queer)

This quote highlights the tension between wanting to be true to your own values while

also ensuring that you remain appealing to those with clout in the comedy community.

On the one hand, remaining silent and continuing to be nice to fellow comedians provides

more security in work but it can also cause feelings of guilt and shame for compromising

convictions in the process. This quote also highlights the challenges and consequences of

resisting the status quo.

Processes for negotiating these tensions require a lot of emotion work

(Hochschild 1983). In the quote above, for example, Barb engages in emotional labour as

she maintains her kindness towards those that harassed her friends online and attempts to

grapple with her guilt around being kind to the aggressors. As was previously shown, the

need to get along with other workers and industry actors in the comedy community is

paramount to success and therefore speaking out against the norm can have negative

consequences for securing work in the community. As the quote above illustrates, for

some comedians this means biting their tongues. This takes the form of surface acting in

front of the comedians who have demonstrated inappropriate behaviour but also deep

acting in order to avert the internalization of the discrimination (Hochschild 1983).

Some comedians discussed making efforts to become immune to the

discriminatory content that occurs around them. Developing this kind of guard could be

seen as a form of acquiescence. Kendra explains that this was particularly difficult when

she was starting out but that she has succeeded in becoming calloused over time:

> Like those comedians I don't know like if they want to do a set about their dumb
> girlfriends, talk about how they're just a bunch of holes you know that's sure, go
> ahead. I mean that won't affect my set at all. I think if they're talking about me
> which does happen sometimes like comics will reference other comics in the
> room or they'll talk about the host or stuff like that, that is different. If they're
> targeting a specific event then I can handle myself, it doesn't make it right, it's
> definitely not right. I think as a newer comic it was a lot harder to like follow guys
> talking about titty-fucking some prostitute. I mean it's just, that was a bit more
> work. Now I am so acclimatized to the environment that it's less shocking. But I
> can see, I think the problem is newer comics who are affected by it. (Woman,
> White, Queer)

Stacy, also finds that she is less likely to consciously register the problematic nature of

comedic content the more that she is exposed to it:

> What I think the most sad thing about it is, that you can go to so many of these
> shows and you just become immune to it. It's like yeah another rape joke. And
> it's not until say my brother comes to a couple of these shows and it's until I sit
> next to him and he's like "oh my god!" Then you really notice it's like oh yeah
> I've just became used to hearing so much about rape. (Woman, White, Straight)

Many marginalized comedians have developed strategies to shield their own vulnerability to the discourses in these spaces in order to temper the impact of what they perceive to be a toxic environment.

In order to continue to participate in mainstream comedy, many marginalized comedians are complying to environments that they would otherwise reject. Jeff, a queer comic who for a while ran his own specialty show consisting of only women and gay male comics, explains that he would rather exclusively participate in those kinds of shows:

> I mean if I'm doing what I want to yeah… like [my specialty show] would be my chosen demographic where I can do whatever I want to and that would be a lot of professional women and gay men I guess. But I can do anything now because out of necessity I've had to right. And that's the complicated thing about comedy it's just like you know I don't agree with everything that happens out there but also this is where I'm making my money now so it's a job. (Man, White, Queer)

Here we can see that Jeff justifies acquiescing to parts of the comedy world that he may not agree with because he knows that it is necessary in order to continue securing work opportunities.

Some of the straight, white, male comedians that I interviewed acknowledged that there were advantages and privileges attached to their positions in comedy. Moreover they understood that there were challenges and barriers to those who fell outside of these demographic categories. However, despite the acknowledgment of these power dynamics these comics did not mention actively trying to change these systems and for the most part seem perplexed or ambivalent about their role in the matter. Take Mark for example:

> Those [specialty] shows are good in the sense that they expose that type of like they expose female comedians or they expose black comedians or like my buddy

does a Filipino tour but yeah I think for now that's good but I'd like it to just be more like just funny people you know. And not like separated into groups but I think that's the problem, they feel like they need to do that. They feel like they need to separate themselves to show that they're there and they're important and funny. But yeah I wish that wasn't the case, I wish everyone could just see funny for funny. (Man, White, Straight)

By virtue of their position in the hierarchy, those more socially aware comics who fit the "ideal" type noted the power differentials but did not need to explicitly acquiesce or change their behaviour in order to continue performing.

The process of justified acquiescence is exemplified in the experience of Christina Walkinshaw, a Canadian comedian who was sexually harassed while performing at *Casino Niagara*. Using some of Walkinshaw's own words I will recap this story at length as I think it demonstrates the negotiations processes that occur in the minds of those applying this approach. In May 2013, Walkinshaw booked a four night show at *Casino Niagara*. In her re-telling of this event, Walkinshaw explicitly states that she does not say "no" to any show but that this one was particularly exciting because it was a paid gig. During paid gigs at casinos, comedians are considered to be an employee of the casino and as such they are required to abide by similar rules. Thus, Walkinshaw signed an agreement that included:

the use of profanity, name calling or abrasive comebacks towards hecklers should be strongly avoided. If you feel hecklers are not being handled in a proper manner during your show, please voice this to the management. (Memo from Casino)

During her first show on Thursday night, a table of ten intoxicated men began repeatedly chanting, "show us your tits." Their synchronized chanting was very loud and disruptive of the entire show so Walkinshaw assumed someone would intervene:

> Surely at this point of disruption, a manager or bouncer will come over and tell these drunk idiots to shut up, or get out. But nobody did. So I stared out into the blinding lights, and just finished my set. I did my full time too. […] I felt gross, but oh well. Some sets are amazing, and some you just have to learn from. (Christina Walkinshaw)

This serves as an example of when a comedian is confronted with a problematic scenario during their work but chooses to ignore it so as not to cause an interruption or seem "difficult." It would also require a lot of surface acting to ensure that the audience does not detect the extent that the commotion is distracting and potentially hurtful.

Although she did not say anything during her set, after some careful consideration she decided to communicate with the manager of the club:

> Before I left that night, I approached the woman running the club. I'm terrible at confrontation. The worst. I'd rather put up with a little shitty behavior, not just as a comedian, but as a human being, than start a conflict. I'm the queen of saying things like, "It's okay," "I'm alright," or "Don't worry about me." I don't mean to sound pathetic. I'm actually a very happy person. (Christina Walkinshaw)

The woman running the club explains that she thought she enjoyed the heckling. To which Walkinshaw clarifies:

> I endured it, but I didn't like it. Still, I like to keep my relations with comedy clubs drama free. […] I consider cancelling my Friday and Saturday shows, but I don't. I need the money. Every comic does. I went back Friday and Saturday and had great sets. I shrugged the awful Thursday off. So what? I had put up with a little sexual harassment from drunk casino folk. (Christina Walkinshaw)

The "justified acquiescence" approach that Walkinshaw is utilizing to make sense of this situation is palpable. She was not required to continue with this strategy as the booking that she had with *Casino Niagara* the following month got cancelled due to the night with the "unruly crowd." Her reaction to this news was:

> I tried to shrug it off. I thought to myself, "Oh well. Traffic would have been bad anyway. Plus the highways are always under construction in the summer. It will

> probably be more peaceful to just stay home…" It's not easy for me to "say something." I don't like to rock the boat. I'm not insecure. I just don't want to upset other people. I hate being the center of attention. Correction: I hate being the center of negative attention. (Christina Walkinshaw)

Eventually, Walkinshaw decided to go public with this story since it was obvious to her that this establishment was no longer going to be a viable place of employment. That said, throughout this entire ordeal she demonstrated a great deal of emotion work in her attempts to dismiss sexual harassment in her workplace so as not to be seen as difficult and compromise chances of future employment. Importantly, Christina was not consenting to sexual harassment at any point but was instead acquiescing to the work conditions until the terms of work were changed, namely in that she was no longer getting paid by the venue. This marks an important difference in the term consent versus acquiescence. Consent implies permission or agreement whereas acquiescence is reluctant acceptance which is most often justified in these cases by getting paid and wanting to garner mainstream work opportunities which provide chances for broad exposure.

While "justified acquiescence" shows further cases of self-management by comedians, in these cases it determines their opportunities to participate in mainstream comedy and access avenues for broader "success." Thus, "justified acquiescence" is the product of carefully considered and negotiated actions in response to a toxic work environment. The precarity within this cultural industry reinforces the appeal of the "justified acquiescence" approach. However, for some, the price of this emotion work is unduly high, leading some comedians to engage with the alternate strategies explored below.

6.4 Opt-Out

As mentioned above, previous sociological research in the area of work has explored the

phenomenon of workers making the "choice" to opt out. Much of this research revolves

specifically around women's employment patterns and shows that opt-out occurrences

tend to be a result of individual choices that are shaped by gendered expectations,

structural barriers and constraints (Hakim 2006; Stone 2007; Williams, Manvell, and

Borstein 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2014). The argument that decisions about work

are made through a combination of external constraints and personal values and

preferences is echoed in my data as well. That said, there are several characteristics that

make the case of stand-up comedy unique when it comes to discussions about opting-out.

Firstly, since a disproportionate amount of the work in stand-up comedy is poorly

compensated, few people are exclusively dependent on income from comedy work for

survival. This means that whether comedians can afford to opt-out or not from a financial

perspective does not merit the consideration it would require in decisions involving

traditional jobs. Secondly, as is the case with most work in cultural industries, the work

itself plays a dual role of a *job* as well as *craft*. Thus, the decision to opt-out of comedy

work requires the pronouncement to not only leave the work but also exit the art or craft.

Exploring the phenomenon of opting out is particularly important when it comes

to work environments where there is a clear dominance of a white, heterosexual men

such as that found in mainstream comedy. Analysing who is opting out and why can offer

insight into how these ratios and social inequities are maintained. Because my focus was

on active comedians, I do not have data from people who no longer practice comedy.

Therefore, it is not my intention to make claims about people who have left comedy;

however, I do believe there is insight to be gained from understanding comedians'

perspectives on why people leave the industry. In opposition to the "justified

acquiescence" approach there were some comedians in the community who felt like

Heather, "I definitely think that if you are trying to make it then maybe you have to

swallow more bile than I choose to" (Woman, White, Queer). Again, this shows

recognition of the existing inequalities in stand-up, as well as the agency to make

decisions about your own trajectory within that environment.

Obviously, the more that marginalized comedians decided to opt-out of comedy

work the less chance there remains of changing the demographics that comprise

mainstream comedy spaces. As Isaac observes, women tend to opt-out in the early stages

so there are less to choose from as comedians move up the ladder of success and the pool

becomes narrower:

> I also think that as far as women go there's fewer women who start, a lot of them get discouraged by that whole thing and so you sort of have this like narrowing of…if 50 women start maybe 25 of them are good, same proportion as males, but if 15 of those quit than you've got maybe 1 good one and 1 bad one you know whatever the ratio is as the levels go up it gets thinner and thinner. (Man, White, Straight)

It is common for workers who occupy marginalized positions and wish to opt-out to do

so early in their careers. This is part of what justifies the rationale that there is less

diversity in the upper echelons of occupations because there are fewer people to choose

from. This supports the illusion that people who occupy marginalized positions are not

going into these jobs in the first place and masks the fact that many may have chosen to

leave because of the existing inequality. These narratives help maintain the idea that there

is no diversity problem in comedy and allow the status quo to continue unchecked.

The safe spaces offered by specifically curated shows, discussed below, can offer

a helpful starting point to ease comedians from marginalized positions into the realm of

comedy. Nevertheless, some would argue that if you want a chance at mainstream

success or want to make headway in changing matters you eventually need to participate

in shows that are meant for a broader audience. Take for example Jeff, who offers advice

to younger gay comics who are attempting to enter the scene:

> Well the big thing that I always tell like young gay guys, you're probably not
> going to be doing this in a year. You probably will quit. Also, the big thing is like
> diversify, get every genre, do not stick to your safe space. The first thing is don't
> expect a fucking medal. Cause they all expect a medal, like I'm gay and I'm
> doing stand-up comedy and it's like no one cares, you are not going to get any
> affirmative action. (Man, White, Queer)

This quote also suggests that many who start in comedy will end up opting-out within the

first year and perhaps this is especially true if these comics do attempt to leave their

comfort zones and perform for mainstream audiences. Further, this quote highlights the

idea that some comedians from marginalized positions may enter comedy, or other

cultural industries for that matter, and expect there to be similar policies and regulations

in place that they can rely on in standard employment. The *Employment Standards Act*

and initiatives such as equal opportunity employers have been in existence long enough

now that many young workers may come to expect these kinds of regulations in their

workplaces. The effectiveness of these initiatives in making work more equitable is

debatable but it is possible that their existence provides some comfort and therefore the

absence of them may be startling as the quote above suggests.

The kind of feedback comedians receive from audiences also dictates whether

comics chose to opt-out, either permanently or temporarily. As previously mentioned,

those in marginalized positions tended to be keenly self-aware when it comes to live

performance and also are more likely to engage in self-blame. Therefore, if a set goes

badly, it is not uncommon for marginalized comedians to question whether or not they

ought to continue with comedy. Jeff explains that his initial strategy to perform a

rehearsed set worked out well by fluke for the first few audiences he performed in front

of but eventually he learned the importance of reading and playing to the audience:

> Like it was very rehearsed and it just so happens I guess that the first couple of
> times I had done it, it was just able to fit in there and it just flowed. Like wherever
> it was dropped in the show I was able to go on stage and it just worked it just
> worked with the vibe of the show at that moment. So I was very lucky that it just
> kind of glided along. This one I was on first and I was a very unpopulated room, it
> was a Sunday night show so it was just basically comics. So I just ran on stage
> doing that to seven minutes of silence. Like just of silence of people staring at me
> and I never experienced that before. And it was mortifying. It was mortifying.
> (Man, White, Queer)

Jeff went on to discuss the fact that this experience caused him to take a several months

leave from comedy and he contemplated never returning at all. Eventually, in his case he

did return but the self-blame after "bombing" is so strong with some comedians that they

decide to permanently opt-out. Similar to the example above, this reasoning for opting-

out tends to happen early in a comedian's work trajectory. The experience of bombing

seemed almost universal for comedians but it tended to be especially common when

people started doing comedy since logically, they are less experienced at that point. Isaac

discusses this idea:

> I was saying the hardest part to learn in the beginning is to be on stage and not be
> funny and that's the ultimate form of rejection. The audience doesn't like what

> you're doing, they find you boring and a lot of people give up at that point, they
> never get through the fact that they're not getting laughs. (Man, White, Straight)

Again, the decision to give up or not is related to social identity. Here, Adam offers a

gendered hypothesis about this issue:

> So like between men and women I think men are more susceptible to constant
> rejection which is what stand-up is until you get good. And I don't mean that as
> an insult or anything I just think that women are smart enough to go like I'm not
> good at this, I'm not going to do this anymore. (Man, White, Straight)

The decision to opt-out or not, based on negative feedback, is symptomatic of the degree

of self-awareness and self-doubt that a given comedian possesses.

There are some comedians in the "ideal" category who choose to opt-out of

comedy but interestingly many of the people I interviewed had examples of white,

straight male comedians who were consistently bombing and yet continued to perform.

As Heather remarks:

> I will say and this is not to be condescending whatsoever but being in comedy
> there are some people that have no self-awareness that they're not funny and they
> don't quit. They keep doing it for years and years. And sometimes they get better
> but mostly those particular people and it's a small amount I would say maybe 5 or
> 10 percent of the people they're just never funny. (Woman, White, Queer)

I observed this phenomenon myself, seeing comedians perform and receive little to no

positive feedback from the audience yet remain seemingly unfazed. Mark discusses

having seen this phenomenon as well when he says:

> a lot of people that do bomb constantly, I've seen them come on stage and they'll
> be like well that wasn't so bad and I'll be like are you high right now? Do you
> see, like as much as I want to be like that fucking sucks, you still want to be a
> human being and be like well there's some things you can work on. (Man, White,
> Straight)

I see this lack of self-awareness or disregard as an extension of the general privilege that accompanies being in the majority, "ideal" category.

Aside from these early rationalizations for opting-out, the main reason for those occupying a marginalized position to opt-out is attributed to the unwelcoming and hostile environment. As we have already heard from comedians, the message that they are unwelcome can come in overt ways through violent reminders that they do not belong or through subtle actions that clearly demarcate those who are in the "club" and those who are out. Several comedians had stories of comics they considered to be funny who decided not to pursue comedy. Take Mark for example, who explains that he would try and explicitly encourage funny females to stick with it but was often unsuccessful in his efforts:

> I started with a bunch of really hilarious female comedians and I would always support them. I would be like please be out more. You're so funny. If you want to like joke jam, or write some jokes, just keep going, keep doing it. And they ended up quitting. A lot of the female comedians I started out with ended up just quitting because they were like, 'oh I don't really like it.' And it could be the fact that it just saturated with guys and that's intimidating which I totally understand but why that is I don't really know. (Man, White, Straight)

In a similar vein, Joy hypothesizes that the comedy environment causes some comedians to stop participating in comedy all together, contributing to the dominance of a particular demographic:

> Like I see people who are super funny and I wish that they came out to open mics but they don't because it's not the environment that they want to perform in which is understandable because it's not a great environment but at the same time how are we going to change that if we're not out performing. (Woman, White, Straight)

Ironically, the minority status in the work culture of comedy is what causes some to leave but in so doing this strengthens the demographic majority so that those who could disrupt the status quo are self-selecting out.

While the first section shows the legitimacy behind the decision to stay in the working world of comedy and acquiesce to the discriminatory environments in the hopes of mainstream success the decision to opt-out under these circumstances is also logical. Some comedians took a liberal approach in arguing that in order to change the dominant culture there needs to be more diversity in the makeup of the workforce in comedy. This may be an important initial step but more modifications will need to accompany this initiative in order to change the deeply rooted and cemented discourses currently in comedy.

6.5 Curated Spaces

Creative work like stand-up comedy is not formally regulated in a manner akin to more traditional forms of paid labour. In stand-up comedy the regulation comes from other sources including members of the community, the audience, and industry leaders. These sources then establish the parameters of appropriate behaviour in this particular creative labour market. Given that there is no formal regulation, there are no effective formalized processes for complaints or resistance within the limits of the dominant club scene. Conversely, traditional workplaces often have institutional supports for employees in the form of processes and procedures for protests, as well as supports put in place that involve access to managers, colleagues, union stewards, human resources departments

and the like who are trained to handle work-related duress. None of these resources exist in stand-up comedy; therefore, grievances and efforts to resist the status quo become the responsibility of creative workers themselves. Consequently, comedians who are upset with the existence of discriminatory environments within comedy are held solely responsible for coming up with strategies to solve these issues. Creating a "safe" space with deliberate decisions about who can participate and what kinds of jocular content will and will not be tolerated is one such strategy used by some comedians. These "alternative" performance spaces tend to manifest themselves in specific theme nights that are organized around identity markers, such as "women only shows," "black only shows," or "queer only shows."

Comedians also take to the internet to express frustration with the current stand-up comedy culture as a form of resistance. Again, where traditional workplaces will likely have opportunities where large numbers of employees come together, whether through a conference meeting, a company retreat, or a union general membership meeting, stand-up comedy has no such space and therefore the internet becomes the medium by which the greatest number of comedians can come together at the same time. At times, comedians use their established social media pages to post criticisms about inequalities they have observed though their work. Others have blogs or other writing forums to create conversation about issues of equality in comedy. These can be posts that feature general statements about the culture of comedy, such as the article about rape jokes by Lindy West while others are provoked by specific events. For example, Christina Walkinshaw wrote articles depicting her experience, outlined above, and Jen

Grant, wrote about her experience being sexually harassed while performing at a corporate gig discussed in the previous chapter.

These efforts help initiate public dialogues which include other comedians but when comedians want to bring up points of contention within the comedy community specifically they often turn to the "Toronto Comedians" group that exists on *Facebook*. This virtual space was created in an effort to make up for the lack of physical spaces to dialogue about work issues. Originally formed to advertise comedy shows and open mic opportunities around the city, the site has evolved to also house an open forum about work and other issues in the Toronto comedy community. Much like other virtual based discussion boards, debates tend to quickly descend into harassment and name calling. Since the work structure of comedy is determined by the status quo, it is difficult to gain any traction when suggesting changes given that you are speaking to the very people who constructed the space to their liking or are privileged by the space as is and therefore have little, to no, incentive to change it. Therefore, these online discussions about work that oppose the current working order tend to incite micro and macro aggressions that disproportionately plague comedians occupying marginalized positions. As Heather, who has been the target of several online attacks, notes:

> Let's say person "A" posts on their own *Facebook* or on one of the stand-up related groups "hey I was at a show and a fellow comic threatened to kill me. I don't want anyone to talk to this person anymore or be nice to this person anymore." You'll get you know your close circle of friends will respond in support but beyond it really depends on what level of esteem they have within the community. (Woman, White, Queer)

She further argues that while there is little support generally for these kinds of endeavours the reputation of the colleague who is being called out tends to determine the

gravity of the directed attacks. Indeed it is often the very strategy of attempting to call out

workplace issues online that can lead comedians to the other strategy of revolt which is to

remove themselves from those spaces entirely. This is exactly what happened in the case

of Heather who shares:

> I operate as far removed from those systems as possible because I choose not to
> put myself in situations but again that is also still an extension of my own
> privilege and it doesn't help anyone else except for I guess the people who
> perform on the shows or on one another's shows. And I have to do a few years of
> hard time being in unsafe spaces where there was a lot of you know unchecked
> violent language and attitudes which if I had not exposed myself to for a short
> time I wouldn't be able to do any of this in the first place. (Woman, White,
> Queer)

Heather's trajectory shows that the categories outlined in this chapter are not mutually

exclusive, and comedians will likely temporally move between them. It is common for

comedians to only come to realize that they would prefer to curate their own spaces after

passing sometime in the mainstream comedy scene and recognizing the barriers in

resisting the toxic environment. It is also often necessary in order to meet enough

comedians to be able to create and participate in safe comedy spaces. In the case of

Heather, she began her comedy career by applying the "justified acquiescence" path and

followed that by briefly opting out of the industry before re-entering by curating her own

safe spaces to perform comedy. While the online spaces are curated, the network

continues to include perpetrators of discrimination and therefore, it is not necessarily a

curated space where marginalized comedians feel safe and supported. The safe, curated

spaces happen offline in the form of "specialty" shows.

    As Heather describes, the difficulty in changing the status quo has led some like-

minded comedians to create an avant-garde community:

> When you are asking for any similar concessions within racism, homophobia, whatever, sexism there is no incentive to behave other than there has been traditionally. Because there is a very long standing tradition of racism and homophobia and misogyny within comedy. […]So on an individual level there really is no means of revolt or existing from outside of that structure and that's sort of where I found myself now. […] there is a group of people you know, a lot of… for example older, or queer people, or people of colour, who have found themselves in means by which they can control their own performance space and they have a list of friends that they can turn to to get on their shows and that's what I do. (Woman, White, Queer)

Heather has run several "speciality" shows, most often organized as women identified only shows or else "queer" shows. These themed or "specialty" nights tend to operate on a similar reciprocal basis as the general comedy scene except that in these cases stage time is being exchanged among a much smaller circle of like-minded individuals, all interested in safe, exclusive spaces.

It is important to point out that these speciality shows were often held either as special one-off shows, as low frequency shows, or else as a reoccurring show at a venue that was not traditionally known for comedy. This means that it would be extremely difficult to garner mainstream success by exclusively participating in these themed shows. These fringe shows also provide less opportunity for regular, secure, paid employment in comedy. So contrary to the "justified acquiescence" path, one of the sacrifices in performing exclusively in curated spaces is the opportunity for broad exposure. Relatedly, as Heather's quote above alludes to, it is unclear if the existence of these spaces does anything to disrupt the inequities of the mainstream. These spaces serve a purpose to the folks who choose to participate but they do not challenge the traditional discourses in comedy and in fact may work to segregate the workers who are critical of the status quo inequities in comedy.

The defining characteristic of the curated space is the specific parameters regarding who can perform at the shows. Some comedians who organize these shows take it a step further by dictating a set of rules about the space. For example, some shows explicitly describe themselves as anti-racist and therefore do not allow any material that may be deemed racist. It is common for many of these shows to highlight intersections of potential discrimination even if the focus is on a particular marginality. One show that I attended had a list of rules and expectations that the Master of Ceremony read to the audience and performers prior to the start of the show. Ergo, many of these specialty shows could generally be described as socially conscious safe spaces, serving as the antithesis to mainstream comedy environments.

Some comedians did not even specify a particular kind of speciality show that they found appealing but found that any show where the space was explicitly rid of the white, straight male comedians created a more comfortable atmosphere. As Ruth began listing her favourite shows, she realized that the only requirement for an enjoyable show was one with a reprieve from comedic bigotry:

> I know that I really enjoy doing this one show that's an all women and LGBT and black comic's room, basically just no white straight males. It creates a space where people don't need to worry about their gender or sexuality or race being an issue because they're not going to see a white cis straight man go up and tell jokes that are offensive to them that are going to make them feel uncomfortable. (Woman, White, Queer)

As Ruth's quote exemplifies, some comedians are craving these spaces but the majority of comedians would argue that this represents a form of censorship and therefore disrupts one of the main purposes of comedy which is to express unfettered and uncensored ideas.

As Danielle explains, she has considered creating parameters around future shows that

she produces but is hesitant about the decision as she anticipates backlash:

> I would go as far as to ban rape jokes. I've thought about it and I've said that to
> my husband because it's just unnecessary and it's I don't know... I would get
> probably a lot of flak both to my face, maybe some to my face but a lot of it
> behind my back if I actually made that rule. […] It depends because you'll see
> you may have a very intellectual crowd and they'll laugh and I'm just sitting there
> being a stick in the mud because I am like "guys there's nothing funny." (Woman,
> White, Straight)

Again, this highlights the lack of support and personal judgement that comedians who

attempt to make changes to the status quo must confront.

Not only do these curated spaces explicitly set the tone and performer parameters

for the show but they also implicitly prescribe a particular audience, usually people with

similar identity characteristics as the show. Again, this would be an example of the

homophily effect. Several of the comedians spoke about how this allowed for less self-

refection when they performed as they were more confident that those in the audience

could relate. As Roger explains:

> Like everyone wants to perform for their peers and people who are more like-
> minded with them because they're going to find your stuff the funniest. I
> remember there was like a special about *The Nubian Show* [all-black comedy
> show] that used to air on comedy network and like one of the guys was saying
> like apparently like before *The Nubian Show* went on he's like yeah man how am
> I supposed to do my shit if no one understands what I'm talking about. It's not
> like I'm not funny it's like what I want to talk about these people haven't
> experienced you know so they just can't relate to me but if I had like black people
> here they know what I'm talking about you know. So we definitely need rooms
> like that. And its beneficial, it gives you more confidence too because especially
> in comedy too like it's so subjective so like when you make it big like you just
> want to find people who like are more like you to perform to you know. Like I
> obviously wouldn't want to limit myself to a certain group but if I had more
> exposure then like more people would notice who are more like-minded and want
> to come to my shows and stuff like that. (Man, Black, Straight)

In another example, Barb, discusses the benefits of performing in gay spaces:

> Yeah I think it's nice to have those spaces, especially the gay ones. I like those shows because it's usually in a gay part of town and they're a gay audience and they like it. They like seeing gays telling jokes and we're talking about the things that we know about it and it's good. (Woman, White, Queer)

So not only do these spaces allow for comedians to have more control over the overall environment but it also means that audiences have a better idea of what to expect. As discussed in chapter four, audiences' appreciation of the show is paramount for success and many audiences have come to expect that comedy will reflect dominant discriminatory values in society. For some critically minded audience members these kinds of environments felt alienating as Greg explains:

> I know a lot of queer people who are like I don't go out to clubs because I know I'm going to hear some stupid homophobic humour and I'm not, like it's not fun. So when there is a queer night they're like okay this is going to be fine, we'll come out, we'll have a good time. And same with the all-female shows, there's a lot of people that would go to the club if they thought they were going to see a certain type of humour on stage. But the clubs still have definitely the reputation of being a boys clubs and a straight boys club and a white boys clubs and some of the audiences are like "nah, I don't want to go." (Man, White, Queer)

Therefore these curated spaces not only offer respite from mainstream invidious environments for comedians themselves but also so audience members who are critical of the status quo.

The industry side of comedy has also realized the potential of appealing to particular demographics of audience members. For this reason, they have been known to host "speciality nights." For example on the last Sunday of every month *Yuk Yuks* puts on an all-black comedy show entitled *The Nubian Show* or the *All Black Comedy Review*. When the industry side makes spaces for the "special nights" it becomes a simultaneous

process of renouncing dominant categorizations but also re-inscribing dominant positions

as neutral and universal by virtue of deliberately naming and curating spaces around

identity markers. The idea that having specialty themed shows actually reinforces the

dominant category of comedian is a debate within the community as well. On the one

hand, some comedians see these spaces as helpful as Eric asserts:

> like I'm a gay comic so as a gay comedian I always feel weird doing gay jokes in front of a crowd that is probably mostly straight. They probably won't find those as funny. And probably the same for women and people of colour as well so those are really great atmospheres just because there might be a different kind of support system and they know the audience is probably fans of that kind of humour, not that women is a type of humour I just mean that you know it's just refreshing to see something different in comedy. So a show of all women or a show of all people of one ethnicity, gender or sexuality it's refreshing and different which is always good because it helps push the boundaries as well. (Man, White, Gay)

As mentioned above, it is unclear if these shows do help in pushing the boundaries given

that they are purposefully operating outside the mainstream. That said, they seem to be

helpful spaces for certain individuals. As Barb illuminates:

> I think it does more good because like I don't really feel like this but there are some female comics who won't do other shows. Because they go to these shows with male comedians who go on stage and. Like I have a friend who a guy went up on stage like she had just come off stage and he just calls her a fat slut, this sort of thing. So she'll only perform at these female shows because she's sick of male comedians. (Woman, White, Queer)

Thus, for comedians like the women mentioned above, these spaces offer a means to

continue performing comedy.

Some comedians took the opposing position and questioned the very need for

these kinds of shows in the first place. This tension was evident in the story of a debate

Laura had with a fellow male comedian:

> But then I was talking to [name] who is a comedian in Toronto who is like
> amazing and super funny about comedy classes that are just for women and he
> goes well I think that's bullshit and I was like super defensive and was like well
> why you don't think women are funny and I got on my feminine horse. And then
> he was saying no I just think it's stupid because it perpetuates this idea that
> women aren't funny and they have to be segregated so that they can be funny and
> if they're going to come see a show with women it had to be all women you have
> to warn the audience that it's women you know what I mean. And then I was like
> that's a good point too because why can't we just be people who are in a comedy
> and sometimes it's guys and sometimes it's women and sometimes it's black
> people and sometimes it's white people why can't it just be people who are funny.
> (Woman, Black, Straight)

In this quote Laura highlights the potential for these spaces to contribute to and reify the

status quo. In other words, these curated spaces are not just different from the mainstream

but importantly they are also not equal in that they are seen as outside the mainstream.

Greg observes that "specialty" status can be imposed on shows that have multiple

marginalized comedians on the bill:

> if there's a show that has four straight white males on it's just a comedy show but
> if it's got three women, then it's a speciality show, or if it's got like three black
> guys then it's a specialty show, or a gay show, like you can't just have three gay
> guys doing a show and just have nobody commenting on it. (Man, White, Queer)

Again, this demonstrates how the dominant demographic in comedy remains neutral.

Several of the women I interviewed also participated in an exclusively female

comedy training program entitled *Comedy Girl*. This is a class run by a local female

comic where she teaches how to write and practice a five minute set over several weeks.

The comedians then get to perform the set they have worked on in front of friends and

family for their final class. One comedian I interviewed, Martha, enjoyed it so much that

she took the class three or four times before trying comedy outside of that setting. Similar

to the debate above, some comedians felt as though these types of classes created a buffer

for women to enter into spaces where they could enjoy mainstream success. The concern

is that these safe spaces may provide so much shelter that marginalized comedians do not

gain the experiences necessary to perform in mainstream spaces, limiting their

opportunities for more work and notoriety. Joy puts it this way:

> I don't like seeing and I see this a little bit with women that take the courses that
> are like oh this is the girls how to do stand-up and it's the girl's course. If you
> need a course that's fine if you need that extra boost and you want to do whatever
> and you have the extra money to do that, but what is goal with this? Like what is
> your goal with doing stand-up comedy? Like do you want to go and just perform
> to an audience that are going to be supportive or do you want to go have an
> authentic experience and see what it's really like out there? Do you know what I
> mean? So I feel like that is what I was saying before it gets kind of insular. It's
> kind of like only ever performing for your parents and your family. (Woman,
> White, Straight)

Her use of the term "authentic" to describe mainstream spaces implies that "safe" spaces

are inauthentic and not necessarily reflective of the organic comedy scene. The same

comedian who runs the classes also runs open mic shows as a follow up to the class. She

charges a fee and then watches you perform stand-up in a safe environment and gives you

feedback afterwards. Another comic, Andrea, felt like this could be considered

exploitative of a population that is apprehensive about performing in mainstream settings:

> But basically she's charging people $10 to do an open mic and I think she's
> taking advantage of the fact that some of these girls are like maybe a little like
> they wanted to like try it out in a safe environment and I think you know if you
> really want to do comedy you cannot stay in a safe environment. Part of doing it
> is being not in a safe environment and that's how you know you get good.
> (Woman, White, Straight)

Again, these classes and open mics represent efforts at being inclusive and helping

certain populations into what can be described as an intimidating environment but they

simultaneously keep these same populations out of the mainstream where they would

have more opportunities for gaining success in the industry.

In sum, curated shows are currently needed in order for some comics to continue

to be able to practice comedy particularly because exclusive spaces for marginalized

people can be empowering. So while these are viable strategies and negotiations for

comedians themselves, there does not yet appear to be enough of a critical mass to create

a substantial sub-culture that challenges the current status quo in comedy. Thus, it is

important for these spaces to exist but their ability to subvert the inequity in mainstream

comedy remains to be seen. Consequently, these shows do little to disrupt the serious

barriers of precarity and underpayment for marginalized comedians.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the dominant patterns or ideal types of negotiated work for

comedians. As Banks (2007) notes, cultural "workers have been shown to work, not

necessarily because they are forced to, but because they choose to – albeit within a

prescribed discursive and practical framework that part determines and mediates that

choice" (p. 64). While these frameworks for stand-up comedy have been acknowledged it

is important to show that they have real consequences when it comes to decisions about

work and ultimately opportunities for work.

Similar to the differentiations in how frameworks are internalized based on social

location, there are also differences in options and choices based on social location.

Marginalized comedians contend with three dominant strategies. If comedians are willing

to engage in additional forms of emotional labour, they can employ the "justified

acquiescence" approach. If comedians cannot contend with the negative feedback or toxic

work environments commonly found in comedy, they can decide to opt out. Finally, if

they are willing to forego mainstream success in exchange for comedy spaces that are

safe and more equitable, they can curate their own spaces. Each of these options is

highly influenced by a combination of the work culture, the way that self-management

has been internalized, and the negotiations of the individual comedians themselves. In

other words, the inequality within stand-up comedy is made up of the practices cultivated

through the mechanisms of rule, the actions, based on the differing self-management

strategies, and the meanings reflected in the varying work decisions. Further, this analysis

displays how inequalities in this work get legitimated and recreated. Specifically, the

work decisions outlined above ensure that white, heterosexual, men remain the norm in

mainstream comedy and that marginalized comedians who choose to continue to work in

mainstream comedy circles face many pressures to conform to the status quo. Thus, the

dominant demographic in comedy tends to stay the same which means there is little

change to the culture of work and to the way that culture gets internalized by workers,

showing the mechanisms by which inequalities reproduce themselves.

        Opportunities for work are arguably the most important indicator of the

dominance of a particular demographic in work and therefore important areas of study.

Patterns of difference in work options also help to highlight the inequality present within

a work environment. This chapter has reinforced the necessity of considering subjectivity

and social location when exploring case studies of work. Workers negotiate their work

circumstances and actively respond with strategies that are dependent on their

positionality. In this case, it meant that some marginalized workers engaged in emotional

labour in order to justify their continued involvement in the industry, some decided to

opt-out entirely, and others curated their own safe spaces to perform. These findings can

also help inform work patterns that are found in precarious work positions more

generally.

SEVEN

Conclusion

7.1 Dissertation Overview

Our economy has been riddled with various work transformations in recent years and in many cases cultural industries and creative work have been at the forefront. Based on decades of sociological research, we know that inequality is created and perpetuated through work. Yet, much of the empirical research on workplace inequality has taken place in traditional and standard workplace contexts. Thus, there is less information on how inequality is maintained in non-standard work contexts. Additionally, prominent narratives associated with creative work, such as autonomy and flexibility, help evade and displace important questions about the potential for inequality in these spaces. Given the increase in precarious and cultural work it is imperative that we understand how inequality permeates these work contexts. Further, with few exceptions (Stokes 2015), studies that have explored inequality in these contexts have generally employed a unifocal analysis, focusing on one specific axe of difference (ie. gender). This research provides an empirical analysis of workplace inequality in a cultural industry using multi-identity frameworks, focusing specifically, on gender, race, and sexuality.

Using the case of stand-up comedy, I show that modes of inequality continue to emerge and persist in creative work, albeit differently than in traditional work settings.

Throughout the dissertation I paint a picture of how inequality gets perpetuated in stand-up comedy through processes related to the work culture and subjectivities of the workers themselves. I begin (chapter four) by describing the dominant work culture in comedy and highlighting the processes related to that culture that uphold the standard of an "ideal worker." Despite not having a formally regulated work organization there are intersubjective mechanisms of rule that conspire to reinforce and cocreate a neutral portrayal of a comedian, invisibilizing the social location of that worker as a white, heterosexual man. After establishing the ways in which the "ideal worker" in comedy is maintained I then explore (chapter five) how workers who do not fit this "ideal" are forced to regulate themselves in response to it. Finally, I show (chapter six) how marginalized workers varyingly comply and resist the dominant culture of work and the kinds of consequences this has for their work opportunities. In short, the dominant culture in comedy, as well as the ways in which marginalized comedians self-regulate and negotiate where and under what conditions to perform strongly influence *who* is more or less likely to get work opportunities in stand-up comedy and in so doing these processes uphold the status quo while perpetuating workplace inequality.

7.2 Filling Theoretical Gaps

This research explores how social inequality is maintained and reinforced in the cultural industry of stand-up comedy. Sociologists have long established work to be a site of inequality based on intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, education, region, and ability (Acker 1990; Beck, Reitz, and Weiner 2002; Ehrenreich

2001; Kanter 1979; Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch 2011; Milan and Tran 2004; Prince 2004; Reskin 1993; Stasiulis and Bakan 2003). Nevertheless, some researchers suggest that cultural industries offer a novel work context that can operate away from traditional barriers of inequality (Florida 2002, Howkins 2001, Smith 1998). With this in mind, this dissertation brings insights from research on inequality in traditional workplaces and organization to bear on literature about creative work and cultural industries.

To do this I begin by taking Joan Acker's (1990) concept of the "ideal worker" and apply it to creative work. Acker's theory of gendered organizations is based on the premise that inequality is built into work organizations and gendered ideals get reproduced through five processes, the division of labour, cultural symbols, workplace interactions, individual identities, and organizational logic Several researchers have applied Acker's theory of the "ideal worker" and gender organizations to a variety of new cases of work with similar work structures (Tienari, Quack, and Theobald 2002; Shelley, Morabito, Tobin-Gurley 2011). Others have tested Acker's theory in new economies to see if the theory remains valuable. For example, Williams, Muller and Kilanski (2012) apply Acker's (1990) theories to women geoscientists on the oil and gas industry as an example of a job within a new economy characterized by work that is precarious, relies on teams, career maps and networking. Many cultural industries operate outside of formalized bureaucratic settings and therefore they are not governed by organizational logics or the organizational characteristics governed by new economies. Thus, there is a gap in understanding how "ideal workers" are sustained outside of organizational logics in formal and new economies. This research fills this gap by exploring the ways in which

intersubjective mechanisms of rule replace formal work logics but continue to sustain constructions of "ideal workers."

Next, I push theories of self-management and self-regulation when it comes to work in cultural industries to consider the role of social location. Research shows that in the absence of formal workplace evaluations or rigid hierarchies, there tends to be more of a focus on self-management and regulation (Banks 2007; Gill 2010). Put simply, since work parameters are not coming from external sources workers in cultural industries often impose standards on themselves through internal logics. While the research in this area is compelling with some creative workers arguing that they are "never off duty," there is no consideration of how processes of self-regulation around work happen in conjunction with general self-management strategies, primarily employed by those who do not share the privilege of being a member of the majority. Thus, there is a need to more fully and with nuance understand processes of self-management, especially considering that several scholars argue that there is an increase in self-management in our contemporary economy as work continues to undergo transformations.

Burawoy's (1979) research was instrumental in incorporating worker subjectivity into discussions about work. That said, he was criticized for overgeneralizing his findings from primarily men's experiences to all workers (Davies 1990). Further, Burawoy's analysis of "making out" does not adequately account for the complex interplay between compliance and resistance and the ways in which these decisions shape work opportunities. Additionally, scholars have explored why women tend to leave work positions and whether their exits could provide some explanation as to why some jobs

remain dominated by men (Hakim 2006; Stone 2007; Williams, Manvell, and Borstein 2007; Williams and Dempsey 2014). Much of this research focuses on whether women choose to opt out, are pushed to opt out or leave based on a combination of push and pull factors. All of this research is based on traditional work contexts and therefore it is unclear if these circumstances play out in the same way in cultural industries My research fills this gap by using a case study of creative work to consider what strategies and negotiations marginalized comedians use in relation to their work and what impact this has on their work opportunities and the overall culture of the work environment.

Overall, this research also fills a gap of providing a multi-identity and intersectional framework to discussions about inequality in creative work and cultural industries. Much of the current literature on inequality and creative work focuses primarily on a single identity marker. This research provides a more holistic understanding of how marginal identities and intersections of gender, race, and sexuality shape inequality as they relates to workplace culture, self-regulation and compliance/resistance. While overall, this analysis uses an intersectional lens, because of how the project evolved, the sample, and the specific history that comedy has in relation to gender, there is a somewhat disproportionate emphasis on gender throughout.

7.3 Summary of Findings

This dissertation provides an overall picture of the context of work in stand-up comedy with a specific focus on inequality. Specifically, the findings show that (1) in the absence of formal organizational structures, an "ideal worker" is constructed and embodied, (2)

while self-regulation is common in creative industries, workers who fall outside of the "ideal worker" must self-regulate in relation to the work *and* to the "ideal worker", (3) marginalized workers use various strategies to comply and resist their work arrangements but these strategies do little to disrupt the mainstream organization of stand-up comedy work. Taken together, these findings show that work in stand-up comedy advantages white, heterosexual male comedians while creating barriers and more onerous working conditions for those who fall outside of that norm through one or multiple identity markers.

In *The Maintenance of the "Ideal Worker" in Stand-Up Comedy* (chapter four) I show that despite not having an "organizational logic" constructions of an "ideal worker" in the form of a white, heterosexual man prevail. The chapter goes on to outline the intersubjective mechanisms of rule that govern stand-up comedy in place of a formal work organization that reproduce the "ideal worker" and the status quo. The first mechanism of rule is "diversity logics." "Diversity logics" is similar to tokenism (Kanter 1977) but rather than focusing on gender alone, this concept speaks to the contemporary pressures of having a "diverse" workforce, representing a variety of axes of difference. "Diversity logics" reinforce the ideal type because they highlight who is not considered to be part of the "ideal." In short, tokenism can only possibly exist if there is an established norm to be a "token" in relation to. Data showed that tokenism in stand-up comedy is often openly discussed in relation to hiring practices and is common enough to be the norm. The second mechanism of rule is "compulsory networking." The need to network in order to be considered for hire and promotion is familiar in a variety of work

environments but in stand-up comedy it is the only way comedians can garner work

opportunities. Data showed that networking in comedy favoured "ideal workers" since

many of them were able to combine their social lives with networking opportunities in

ways that many marginalized comedians could not or did not feel comfortable doing.

Further, networking encourages workers to conform to the status quo and limits

opportunities for resistance. The third mechanism of rule is "creative license." "Creative

license" upholds the status quo and therefore the "ideal worker" by encouraging

intersubjective policing from audiences, fellow comedians, and industry leaders to

regulate the material and creative processes for comedians. Overall, this chapter

highlights that even in the absence of formal organizational structures, creative industries

find ways to create and sustain inequality in work.

In *How Social Location Shapes Self-Management in Stand-Up Comedy* (Chapter

five) I show that we cannot fully understand self-regulation in work without considering

the social location of the person who is managing them self. My analysis shows that self-

regulation is happening in a particularly scrutinized way for marginalized workers in

response to the differing gender, race and sexuality based evaluations embedded in this

work. Specifically, marginalized comedians are required to be particularly aware of their

self-regulation when it comes to their comedic content, their appearances, and their

emotions. Findings showed that marginalized comedians needed to apply particular

attention and self-awareness to their content in order to be considered funny because

topics that are being joked about are evaluated in conjunction with the identity of who is

doing the joking. The findings also showed that marginalized comedians tended to

require self-management when it comes to their appearances in order to put the audience at ease because of the ways that women's, non-white, and queer bodies are interpreted in proximity to the "ideal worker." Finally, in relation to emotions, marginalized comedians require a particularly thick skin in order to deal with all of the disparaging comments about non-normative identities that are so common in comedy work environments. In sum, marginalized comedians need to be especially aware of how they do or do not fit into their work culture and use that awareness to cultivate a response in the form of self-management.

Finally, in *Compliance and Resistance in Stand-Up Comedy* (Chapter six) I explore three strategies that comedians use to negotiate the workplace culture. These strategies impact where and under what conditions comedians work. Importantly, these factors also influence whether they perform in mainstream or periphery comedy venues, impacting opportunities for exposure. The first strategy I explore is called "justified acquiescence" and refers to comedians who are aware of the inequities of their work environment but comply to them as much as possible in order to secure work in mainstream venues with more opportunities for broad success. For many comedians this compliance or acquiescence meant that they needed to bite their tongues or compromise their principles in order to secure mainstream work opportunities. Secondly, I consider the "opt-out" strategy where comedians decide to leave comedy work all together. Lastly, I consider the strategy termed "curated spaces" which refers to comedians who seek out specific alternative comedy shows that ensure a safe space. Several marginalized comedians spoke of their preference to perform in these spaces but it often came at the

expense of not getting as much exposure as would happen in a mainstream show. Thus,

curating an alternative space can be seen as a form of resistance to the dominant work

culture in comedy and an opportunity for empowerment but does not necessarily provide

an avenue for change in the industry as a whole. Ultimately none of these strategies serve

to heavily disrupt the status quo.

7.6 Theoretical Contributions

Overall, this research contributes to the body of sociological scholarship that seeks to

better understand the relationship between work and inequality. First and foremost this

research heeds the call for more empirical research on inequality in cultural industries. In

doing so, it also lends itself to debates about the potential for creative work to offer more

egalitarian working environments. Specifically, the findings from this research side with

scholars who argue that many of the features associated with creative work actually lend

themselves to increased chances for exploitation rather than more autonomy and

flexibility for workers.

Additionally, this research extends several key theories in the sociology of work

to provide a more well-rounded understanding of how inequality is reproduced and

enacted in cultural work settings. Acker's (1990) theoretical contributions when it comes

to examining inequality in work have been widely and successfully applied to a variety of

empirical work settings. That said, this theory has not been applied to the increasingly

more common work environment that is void of formal organization. With that in mind,

this research extends Acker's theory of the "ideal worker" to show that even in the

absence of a formal work organization there exists implicit constructions of "ideal workers" which have real consequences for workplace opportunities and conditions for those who fall outside that "ideal." Thus, this research builds on Acker's (1990) earlier work by shifting the focus away from organizational structures to uncovering the intersubjective processes that create the "ideal worker" in non-standardized creative industries. Further, this analysis refutes the construction of creative jobs as egalitarian and neutral, instead showing that even in non-standard work, conceptions of "ideal workers" are produced through intersubjective mechanisms of rule.

Much of the literature on cultural industries and precarious work has highlighted the role of self-management in response to the lack of formal work evaluations and top-down hierarchies. While this is an important feature to consider in relation to creative work my research builds on these ideas, showing that we must consider social location in relation to self-management in order to fully understand how processes of self-regulation unfold. Specifically, workers who are not considered part of the "ideal" need to manage themselves in relation to their work *and* in response to the "ideal worker." In other words, marginalized workers must engage in additional labour due to their proximity to the "ideal worker." This extension allows the theory to better address the relationship between social location and individualization and autonomy in work in order to further understand processes of inequality. Simply stated, this theory extension is necessary because self-regulation in relation to work should not be treated as an abstract concept since self-regulation works differently for differently situated workers.

Contemporary research in the sociology of work highlights the important interplay between how work is organized and the ways in which workers themselves respond to that organization. In other words, literature on work often considers both the objective and subjective factors at play for workers. In this vein, my research has considered the processes that maintain the culture in stand-up comedy work, how that culture is internalized by the workers themselves and finally how this relates to compliance and resistance when it comes to engaging in comedy work. In so doing, this research has extended theories on the subjectivity of work to show that strategies and negotiations of compliance and resistance are complex and entangled with broader considerations of societal contexts. Indeed, the complexity of these negotiations requires an intersectional analysis in order to appreciate the factors that are being negotiated. Moreover, my analysis adds a creative context to explore these debates and showcases a novel strategy of resistance to the status quo by curating separate spaces of work. Ultimately, this research affirms that the culture of work and the way it is internalized has real consequences for job-related decisions. These findings contribute to the cultural/creative work and inequalities literature by demonstrating the importance of analysing how strategic engagement with unequal work environments contributes to or challenges inequality. Further, this research reveals the processes and conditions that make resisting inequality in informal work contexts difficult, thereby confirming the deep fixity of inequality in the work culture itself that mirrors that of traditional work environments. Conversely, these findings also highlight the solidarity and empowerment that can come from the resistance in these curated spaces.

7.7 Future Research

Future research should consider other contexts of cultural industries, particularly those

that are known for having a homogenous workforce. For example, many tech and start-up

industries have been criticized for employing primarily white men. What are the

processes related to these work environments that are sustaining a homogenous

workforce? Building on contributions made by this research, future research could

explore the maintenance of "ideal worker" types, processes of self-management in

relation to social location and nuances of compliance and resistance in these other

contexts.

Further, within the next few years the outcomes of the cities that have attempted

to take on more of a "creative" model in order to boast their economies will become more

apparent. Thus, research can analyze how these initiatives have played out and

importantly identify who has benefited most from these initiatives. Similar to this case

study, any future research should look at multiple and intersectional axes of difference in

order to have a full understanding of the ways that work is organized.

Future research could also look into creative work that has more of an organized

base for workers. For example, how does a labour union such as *The Alliance of*

Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) impact workplace inequality

in creative work? A content analysis of workplace grievances that have happened through

ACTRA would help shed light on specific elements of creative work which can lead to

inequality. Additionally, examining the criteria needed in order to become a member of this union may illuminate who does and who does not have access to these avenues.

In building on the theme of work transformation in the economy and how this impacts the experience of workers, future research could focus specifically on how the term "precarious" is being used in relation to work and how workers themselves are making sense of these narratives. Precarity is a common feature of cultural industries and creative work but there have been predictions of a general increasing shift towards precarious employment in the coming decade and therefore precarity in particular deserves more attention. Thus, it would be interesting to analyze the narratives that push neo-liberal agendas by suggesting that new generations of workers will benefit from precarious conditions. This could be achieved by employing a content analysis of how precarious work is being framed in public discourse, followed by an ethnographic study of workers in a variety of sectors who participate in precarious work.

In a slightly more tangential way I think that questions raised in chapter six bring up some fruitful opportunities for thinking about social change. Comedians who curated their own spaces in order to perform comedy the way they wanted to paradoxically, created a more egalitarian, safe and inclusive environment but did little to disrupt mainstream comedy or the status quo. This leads one to ask under what conditions does it make sense to push from the inside or break off into smaller groups? These questions can be applied to a variety of burgeoning contexts in contemporary society. For example, the *Toronto District School Board* has recently opened up "alternative" schools. They currently operate an Afrocentric school where the curriculum is presented with an

Afrocentric lens and a Triangle Program school with a focus on curriculum with a gay, lesbian and transgender focus. Similar, to questions that arose in this study, some of the dialogues around these schools have been a mix of positive support and negative backlash. On the one hand these seem like important initiatives but on the other it allows general curriculum to remain euro and hetero- centric. Thus, future research could ask what are the possibilities and limitations to a separate but equal logic?

Finally, future research could build from the findings here by exploring more of the "backstage" dynamics related to comedy work. While I attended many comedy shows, I was there as an audience member and therefore did not get to see firsthand observations of the interactions that occurred in "performer only" spaces in the venues. These observations would likely add insight into the culture of comedy and the ways in which inequality is reproduced and maintained.

7.8 Study Limitations

While this research identified how inequality is perpetuated in cultural industries, it only explores the specific cultural industry of stand-up comedy. Considering that one of the features of cultural industries is that they often lack a specific or formalized structure, it would not be surprising to have some difference and nuance between work contexts. Additionally, some of the findings noted above apply specifically to stand-up comedy. Thus, this research is limited in that it cannot necessarily be generalized to all cultural industries. That said, several of the broad patterns and contributions about work in stand-up comedy highlighted in this research can be used as a framework for future research on

other cultural industries or creative work contexts. For example, they could consider how

mechanisms of rule within each industry contribute to sustaining the "ideal worker",

analyze processes of self-management in relation to social location and consider the

marginalized workers negotiations of the workplace and how that impacts their work

opportunities and the workplace culture.

While there has been a recent boom in cultural industries, some of the specific

jobs that fall under this umbrella have been around for much longer than the current

trend. Stand-up comedy is one of these jobs and therefore already has an established

history outside of the current cultural industry push. This history influences the current

culture. So while it is an example of a cultural industry, it would not be considered one of

the novel creative work settings popularized in the current economy.

Another limitation of this study, one that I am not sure if any study of the social

world can currently escape, is the pace at which social change is occurring. For example,

all of the data for this research happened prior to the "Me Too" movement which put a

spotlight on sexual harassment at work, particularly in relation to performance-based

work. Notably as part of the movement Gilbert Rozon, the founder and head of *Just For

Laughs*, the largest comedy festival in Canada, stepped down from his position after nine

women came forward with allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault. While

several of these women were famous actors it was not clear how many of them were

specifically comedians. That said, the "Me Too" movement is being credited with

shattering a culture of silence, a culture I found to be prominent within my data. Thus, it

is possible that these current societal changes would shape how marginalized comedians

decide to negotiate their silence in relation to complying or resisting their workplace

culture.

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Appendences

Appendix A - McMaster University Research Ethics Board Certificate

MREB Clearance Certificate   Page 1 of 1

McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Application Status: New ☑ Addendum ☐ Project Number: 2013 020

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

Funny Females: How Women are Negotiating Careers in Comedy

Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Gillett	Sociology	27424	gillett@mcmaster.ca

Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
R. Collins-Nelsen	Sociology	905-929-9178	collir2@mcmaster.ca

The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:

☐ The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification.

☑ The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification.

☐ The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below.

COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.

Reporting Frequency:	Annual: Apr-10-2014	Other:

Date: Apr-10-2013   Chair, Dr. B. Detlor / Vice Chair, C. Anderson:

Appendix B – Interview Guide

Stand-Up Comedian Sample Interview guide

1. How did you get started in comedy?

2. How often do you perform a month?

     a. How often would you want to perform ideally?

3. Do you notice a difference between those who have had formal training and those who have not?

4. What sort of strategies do you employ when trying to get hired for comedy work?

5. Do these strategies change depending on the comedy work (open mic, gig, club, etc.)?

6. Have you encountered any challenges in booking gigs throughout your comedic career?

7. How did you build up your network?

8. How do you feel about getting paid for some shows and not for others?

9. Do you find your comedy appeals to a specific demographic?

10. Do you choose your material based on presumptions about the audience?

     a. Do you change your set on the fly if you feel like you are not getting the responses you hoped for?

11. What is your writing process for stand-up comedy?

12. Have you ever bombed on stage?

     a. If so, how did you cope with that?

13. Do you think that there are certain topics that ought to be off limits in comedy?

     a. If so, who should be the people in charge of monitoring this?

14. What is the relationship between stand-up comedy and being authentic?

    a. Do you think your material is received better if you are more "yourself" on stage?

15. Do you produce your own comedy show?

    If yes :
    a. What do you look for when booking a comedian?
    b. How do you make decisions about who to book?
    c. Are there specific characteristics that make comedians standout?
    d. How do you decide where to place comedians in the line up?
    e. Who do you perceive as the target audience for your comedy show?
    f. How do you hear about new comedians?

16. What does it take to be a good comedian in the Toronto scene?