

The Processes and Politics of Trust at Work

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ABSTRACT

Americans report high levels of interpersonal trust at work despite a documented proclivity toward distrust outside the workplace. Why do people trust coworkers and employers, particularly given widespread job insecurity, labor market inequality and workplace discrimination and harassment? This dissertation draws on fourteen months of ethnographic workplace observations and 122 in-depth interviews with workers and managers to examine the paradoxical case of trust at work. Contending that a prolonged, cross-organizational managerial discourse orients people toward trust at work, I reveal how people “do” trust – and to what end – in four distinct service-sector settings: a restaurant, a marketing firm, a high-tech consulting start-up and the NYC ride-hail circuit. Workplace actors, I find, creatively mix and match disparate symbols to construct meanings of trust that align with their lived realities – a process that enables the expression of trust across a wide range of work relationships and situations. Findings further demonstrate how the ability to trust and be trusted at work conveys moral worth, making successful performances of trust a highly valued accomplishment within the workplace. Through processes of trust, people access workplace resources and rewards, establish social connections and inject meaning and purpose into their work. These dynamics of trust, however, also motivate people to embrace uncertainty, rationalize and reframe incivility and exert unrequited effort while drawing attention away from the profound vulnerabilities and inequities that define modern work arrangements. Moreover, as the accomplishment of trust is moderated by existing workplace “inequality regimes” and ingrained cultural beliefs about gender, race and ethnicity, women and people of color must work harder to express and receive trust. Interestingly, even though these workplace groups are less likely

to enjoy the benefits of trust at work, their extended efforts lead them to become more heavily invested than white men in relations of trust, disproportionately exposing them to the risk of malfeasance and the burden of obligation such relationships can entail. I conclude that trust has emerged, within a context of deinstitutionalization, as a powerful, informal structure organizing and stratifying contemporary work.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Mary T. Farren, who taught me how to think critically and to communicate effectively.

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CHAPTER 1

THE CURIOUS CASE OF WORKPLACE TRUST

There is growing concern about the state of trust in America. In the context of rising political and social tensions, extensive economic volatility and the spread of fake news, media headlines and public figures have declared a “crisis of trust.”¹ In her 2016 Democratic National Convention speech, then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, warned the American people that the “bonds of trust and respect are fraying.” Data from national surveys confirm the decline of trust. As Figure 1 illustrates, only 32% of 2016 respondents to the General Social Survey said they trusted others, “generally speaking,” down from 46% in the 1970s when the question was first posed. Also in 2016, confidence in three key institutions – the federal government, financial markets and the media – fell below 15%.² It would appear, as the political scientist Robert Putnam has argued, that Americans are increasingly “bowling alone,” hesitant to rely on one another or on dominant social institutions for support.

Yet against this backdrop, the workplace seems to stand out as a bastion of trust. In 2014, more than four out of five people said they trusted the managers at their organization, and approximately 90% reported that they could rely on coworkers and were generally treated with respect at work.³ These relatively high measures of trust in American workplaces seem contradictory, especially when considering the degradation of work over the past several decades. Cost-cutting managerial practices and technological innovations, in a context of deregulation and union decline, have significantly undermined job stability and pay.⁴ Most workers can no longer expect to achieve

economic security and upward mobility through employment within a single organization, occupation or even industry. Moreover, discrimination and harassment within work environments continues to be widespread,⁵ as evidenced, for example, by the many allegations that have come to light as part of the #MeToo campaign.

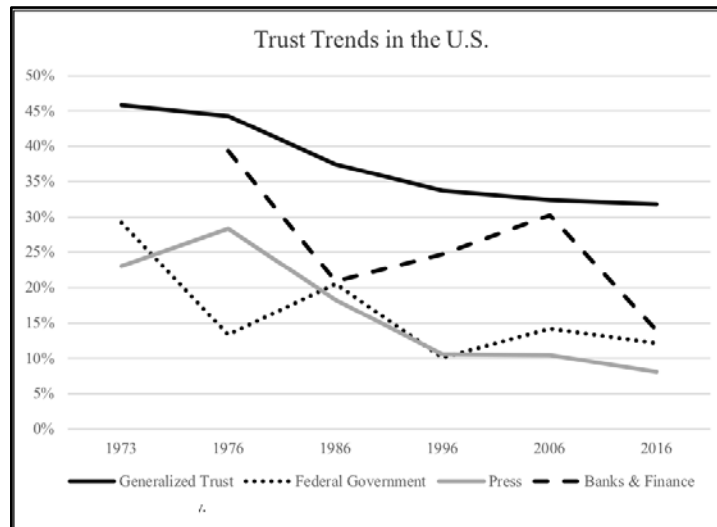


Figure 1. Trust Trends in the U.S.

Constructed by the author from General Social Survey data.

The persistence of trust in the modern workplace is the puzzle that motivates this dissertation. What are we to make of Americans' willingness to open themselves up in an environment that seems likely to betray them, especially since they are not apt to extend that trust across other institutions and relationships? Through this dissertation, I seek to explain the social and cultural processes through which trust is collectively and creatively achieved and sustained at work and to reveal how processes of trust organize and stratify contemporary work. While this case – the paradox of workplace trust – is specific and unique, I argue that it maps onto an enduring question that has beleaguered sociologists for over a century: how can work be both a site of injustice and oppression *and* a site of meaning and dignity?⁶ In unraveling and demystifying the case of trust, this

dissertation contributes new answers to – and generates new questions surrounding – this age-old enigma of work in America.

Trust as Workplace Commodity

The history of work in America is a dialectic of strife and reconciliation. For example, labor tragedies of the early twentieth century, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and the Ludlow Massacre of striking Colorado coal miners, triggered public admonishment of employers, as well as threats of unionization and regulation. In response, burgeoning corporations launched a system of “welfare capitalism” that provided employees with company-sponsored social benefits in order to buttress their image as socially responsible institutions.⁷ In the 1930s, when this “compassionate capitalism” failed to provide for U.S. workers, labor unions and federal work regulations re-emerged to address worker needs.⁸ These oversight bodies, in turn, receded in the context of a booming post-war economy and the labor-capital accord.⁹ During this period, an employer-employee social contract – through which employers promised job stability and upward mobility in return for worker loyalty and acquiescence – materialized for a substantial portion of the working population.¹⁰ Recently, this social contract, too, has eroded – even for some of the most privileged in the labor market – in the face of global market pressures, increasing automation and weakened labor power, among other things.¹¹ I argue that a discourse of trust is the enduring, although not inevitable, legacy of this dialectic; it is the sedimentary substance of prolonged and deliberate capitalist efforts to mollify resistance within American employment relations.

The seeds of this discourse are found within early corporate campaigns for “industrial democracy,” in which corporate leaders promoted creeds of employee-

employer mutualism and worker participation. For example, in his address to the Denver Chamber of Commerce in 1915, following the Ludlow incident, the prominent capitalist John D. Rockefeller Jr. asserted:

in the further development of the organization of labor and of large business, the public interest, as well as the interest of labor and capital alike, will, it seems to me, be best advanced by whatever stimulates every man to do the best work of which he is capable; by a fuller recognition of the *common interest* of employers and employed; and by an earnest effort to *dispel distrust and hatred* and to *promote good-will* (*emphasis added*).

In this precursor to the current discourse of trust, Rockefeller Jr. sought to construct the image of an amiable, mutually beneficial relationship between capital and labor, eschewing any sense of distrust from the work environment.

In the decades since, the lexicon of trust has been deliberately cultivated within the workplace through managerial text and practice.¹² Beginning in the 1920s, the human relations paradigm stressed interpersonal harmony in the name of productivity, making trust-building a central focus of the workplace and optimizing relations of trust through improved communication, empathy and conflict resolution.¹³ Mutual trust and reciprocity between employers and employees undergirded the social contract of the post-war era.¹⁴ More recently, trust has become a central tenet of workplace cultures, with employers harnessing the concept to deepen worker commitment and collaboration while simultaneously facilitating increased autonomy and flexibility.¹⁵ The contemporary managerial literature is rife with titles such as, “The Simple Equation Every Manager Needs to Build (Or Repair) Trust” (*Fast Company*), “Trust is Essential to Any High-Performing Team. Here’s How to Build it” (*Inc.*) and “How to Build Trust with Colleagues You Rarely See” (*Harvard Business Review*).

Notably, the discourse of trust has survived even as other managerial strategies designed to quell discord, such as welfare capitalism and the labor-capital accord, have largely eroded around it. Pulling together insights from cultural theorists of work and modernity, I suggest that the resilience of this discourse is due to the fact that trust has become a workplace commodity, valued more for its ability to bolster employee performance than for its relational qualities. The commodification of trust within the workplace is driven by three related and overlapping factors.

First, in the context of uncertainty, trust serves as an important resource for navigating risk.¹⁶ Trust brackets doubt and reduces complexity, enabling social action, connection and exchange in the face of limited or contradictory information.¹⁷ In other words, trust helps people to accomplish a sense of “normalcy” in unsettled times and to continue “as if” it were possible to predict unfolding events or to rely on the probity of others.¹⁸ In this way, trust is a valued social resource in today’s work environment, which is fraught with instability and risk.

Second, trust has been framed as a project of the self, making it somewhat decoupled from the workplace conditions and relationships in which it materializes.¹⁹ The individualization of trust within the workplace was borne out of the human relations paradigm, within which dissatisfaction and conflict – viewed as obstacles to productivity – were reframed as *personal* deficiencies: a lacking of social skill or emotional intelligence.²⁰ Filtered through this framework, trust and distrust serve as individual signifiers, reflecting personal value and worth. As Eva Illouz observes, “what is at stake [in the modern workplace] is building up social capital or trust, in the sense that the objective is to increase others’ trust in oneself but also to make oneself trust others”

(2008: 91). Maximizing trust – both in oneself and others – has become critical, in and of itself, to success in the workplace.

Third, trust confers status not just to individuals, but also to workplaces. For example, the Great Place to Work Institute, a consulting company, offers certifications for companies assessed to have strong, positive work cultures – an assessment that they claim “all comes down to trust.” A TrustIndex™ Survey is the major component of the certification process, and the Institute partners with *Fortune* magazine to publish an annual list of the “100 Best Companies to Work For.” The increased value of trust as an indicator of positive work culture motivates employers to incorporate trust into their business objectives. Yet, this goal can only be achieved through employees’ expressions of trust. Thus, I suggest that displays of trust have become a new form of emotional labor, required to maintain good standing within the workplace regardless of whether or not one actually feels trust.²¹

* * * * *

The deliberate cultivation of a lexicon of trust through managerial text and practice and the commodification of trust within the workplace help to explain *why* trust persists at work. However, these trends do little to explain *how* interpersonal trust at work is sustained, how it is understood and experienced or how processes of trust shape the organization of contemporary work. In essence, what does the persistence of trust at work mean for American workers? The answer to these questions constitutes the focus of this study.

My dissertation reveals that trust is coerced, but far from predetermined. Workplace actors do not simply trust or distrust, as if turning a light switch on and off.

Instead, they are like sound mixers, amplifying some meanings and tempering others within a repertoire of trust until they settle on a cultural creation that resonates with dominant narratives, as well as their lived realities. This process allows people to enact some agency as they engage in the collective project of workplace trust—a project associated with an array of symbolic and material rewards. Yet, as a social and cultural process, trust also influences how people perceive of their work experiences, relationships and opportunities and has the ability to shape work-related behaviors.

I argue that trust represents a perilous compromise between workers and managers, allowing them to maintain working relationships despite the liminality of contemporary work. At its best, trust offers comfort and hope within a precarious work landscape. Indeed, throughout the following chapters, I show how people employ trust in ways that allow them to find meaning, purpose and social connection amidst workplace adversity and uncertainty. At its worst, trust serves as an internalized mechanism of control, recruiting workers to participate in their own exploitation and encouraging them to jeopardize hard-won structural protections. As I demonstrate, a collective orientation towards trust obscures conflicts of interest and forges fragile agreements that put individuals at risk, often while benefiting the capitalist institutions they inhabit.

Bringing Power Back In

The dynamics of trust at work have attracted substantial scholarly inquiry. In turn, the resulting body of literature has produced a number of conceptual frameworks for trust, contributed key insights regarding the conditions that foster trust at work and identified a number of workplace benefits, such as improved performance and employee satisfaction, associated with high levels of trust.²² Yet, in approaching trust as a workplace resource

and modeling its optimization, this research takes for granted ideological assumptions about trust as a social good. As a result, this scholarship remains bound to a market logic that impedes a critical, and ultimately more comprehensive, understanding of the concept. In this way, the research on workplace trust, which is largely published in managerial *not* sociological journals,²³ follows a broader trend in work and organizational studies of the “slow but unmistakable disappearance of any sustained concern for the role that power and domination play within work organizations today” (Vallas and Hill 2012: 166).²⁴

Historically, labor process theory has provided a valuable theoretical framework for analyzing relations of power and control in the workplace. Grounded in Marxist foundations, labor process theory challenges the inevitability of existing work conditions, investigating how specific ways of organizing work come to be. In addition, labor process theorists reject the ostensible neutrality of work relations, viewing the workplace as a site of conflict and division, where workplace actors continually vie for power and dominance.²⁵ Recently, however, scholars have begun to question the theoretical purchase of labor process theory within a post-industrial context where the fracturing and decentering of traditional work structures threatens long-held assumptions about the organization of work. In particular, changes in the landscape of work have reignited critiques against the theory’s dichotomous portrayals of employer-employee relations and its under-theorization of worker subjectivities.²⁶

In a recent article, Vallas and Hill (2012) suggest that insights from Foucault’s theory of governmentality can help to extend understandings of power within the post-industrial work context. As opposed to an organization-centered view of power, Foucault locates power in diffuse, societal-level discourse, illuminating how discursive practices

shape individual subjectivities.²⁷ I take up the authors' call here, integrating labor process theory's emphasis on the politics of work with Foucault's focus on how power becomes embodied in everyday life. In doing so, I harness the analytic strengths of both to reveal how interpersonal trust serves as a powerful, yet malleable, structure of modern work.

* * * * *

Through my research, I observe a work landscape in which people are strongly oriented toward trust. Approaching this empirical reality from the perspective of labor process theory, I would expect two related observations. First, I would expect processes of trust to be limited to horizontal relationships, as trust and power have generally been considered orthogonal to one another and thus not feasible within asymmetrical relations.²⁸ Second, as a form of emotional labor that enables workers to sell themselves as productive and resilient employees and organizational collectivities to sell themselves as great places to work, I would expect performances of trust to represent a detachment from genuine emotion and thus be a deeply alienating experience.²⁹

Yet, instead, I observed the emergence of trust not only within peer-to-peer relations but also within the relations between managers and workers. Indeed, managers in my study professed a strong desire to both trust and be trusted, and when they failed to build trust among workers, they experienced professional difficulties and personal dissatisfaction. Furthermore, I did not find a repressed workforce, cynically engaging in the collective project of trust and feeling emotionally detached or confused as a result.³⁰ In contrast, the participants in my study often expressed a sense of fulfillment, social connection and even individual empowerment when they were able to successfully forge and maintain trust with others at work.

I contend that these findings highlight an enduring weakness of labor process theory. Due to its Marxist underpinnings, labor process theory tends to only superficially examine the normative dimensions of work life, viewing culture as ultimately reflective of material conditions. Normative aspects of work are only understood within material hierarchies, resulting in the consistent interpretation of these processes as a form of top-down labor control and workers as complacent, although sometimes ambivalent, followers of managerial orders.³¹ Moreover, this line of thinking assumes an inherent binary whereby authentic emotions and relations can only truly exist outside of the economic sphere—a binary that scholars in the sociology of work and in economic sociology have elsewhere disputed.³² Thus, we end up with a view in which the normative dimensions of social life are highly sacred but ultimately inconsequential.

Following Foucault, I argue that it is necessary to take culture seriously in order to fully understand the dynamics of power at work. I assert that economic and emotional life are integrated within and through broader discursive practices. Thus, trust and power are not contradictory – a stance that relies on a culture/economy binary – but instead they are mutually constitutive and irreducible to one another.³³ Trust is an expression of power in that it binds people in relations of obligation; without power, it is merely rhetoric. Yet, power requires acquiescence, which relies on legitimacy and trust. Without some form of trust, power cannot be enforced. Thus, in promoting trust at work, managerial discourse has constructed a workplace environment in which workplace actors have become self-regulating subjects. In other words, trust serves as a technology of the self, permitting workers:

to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1982).

Thus, the accomplishment of trust at work feels productive, not repressive. Through the accomplishment of trust, I observed workplace actors validating themselves as morally responsible and instrumentally competent people. As opposed to feeling emotionally “crippled” by this process,³⁴ they felt a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Moreover, both managers and workers were vulnerable to stigmatization and degradation when they failed to accomplish trust, making both groups highly invested in the collective project. Thus, an understanding emerges in which power at work is not simply a zero-sum contest between two opposing groups, but something much more nuanced and complex.

While the discourse of trust exercises influence across different groups of workplace actors, this does not mean that trust is experienced similarly across groups. As scholars such as Judith Levine, Sandra Smith and Cecilia Ridgeway have previously shown, the accomplishment of trust requires a degree of social privilege.³⁵ I found, for example, that white, managerial men were better able to accomplish trust than their counterparts who were women or people of color. In addition, the benefits and risks of trust are not equally distributed across social groups. Managerial men, for instance, often enjoyed greater autonomy as a result of trusted relations, while for managerial women, trusted relations often motivated their engagement in additional coaching and mentoring work. Thus, relations of trust shaped all workplace actors, but they were shaped differently.

Studying Trust in Contemporary Work

Is there a “there” there?

Embarking on this project, I was asked the same set of questions over and over: “but what do you *mean* by trust? Are you sure you are actually studying trust?” This led me to confront the conceptualization of trust early on, although as I expected, my understandings of trust at work shifted as the study progressed.

More often than not, trust is believed to indicate the quality of a relationship: trust demonstrates a healthy bond, while distrust suggests dysfunction. This perception of trust as a measure of relational quality has helped make it a valuable concept within a work landscape that is increasingly interested in measuring, categorizing and optimizing human thought and behavior. Yet, like all measures, trust is neither natural nor objective; it is socially constructed.

While this observation may seem obvious (of course trust is socially constructed, it occurs within social relations!), it has not always been the default assumption within business organizations or within sociological research. Among business practitioners, trust is typically viewed as inherently positive, as evidenced by the steady focus, within managerial advice publications, on maximizing employee trust.³⁶ Social scientists, on the other hand, have generally treated trust as an underspecified mechanism of other social processes. Sharing in the assumption of trust as a social good, some of these studies highlight the role of trust in efficient exchange and job mobility.³⁷ Others point to distrust as a mechanism of social exclusion and bias within the workplace.³⁸ Here, too, scholars take for granted the reliability and validity of trust as a positive indicator of

social relationships and overlook direct inquiry into the social processes through which trust *has become* an agreed upon measure of relational quality.

I set out to rectify this oversight—to understand how interpersonal trust, as a concept and as an indicator, is socially constructed within the workplace. In other words, what do people *mean* when they say they trust others at work, and how do they come to these meanings? What do people *do* to demonstrate their own trustworthiness or to establish trust in others? And finally, how do people *feel and respond* to stated or perceived trust?

A View from the Inside

To understand how trust infuses and informs contemporary work, I went into four different workplaces: a restaurant, a marketing firm, a high-tech startup and a ride-hail circuit (i.e., drivers for and other associated actors with companies like Uber and Lyft). My project originally consisted of only two sites – the restaurant and marketing firm – but as my research progressed, I became increasingly curious about how the dynamics of trust I was observing might play out in work environments that had more fully embraced new organizational forms—forms ostensibly designed to decentralize power and improve worker autonomy and flexibility.³⁹ In total, I conducted fourteen months of ethnographic research across these four sites, including 122 in-depth interviews with workers and managers.

An ethnographic approach was necessary as my interest was not in simply discerning who trusts or is trusted at work and to what degree, but in developing an account of how trust emerges within workplace relationships and contexts, and how these processes define contemporary experiences of work. Such a project required full

immersion into American workplaces. I could not simply rely on people's decontextualized claims of trust, though important; I also needed to embed myself in workplace relationships to see and experience how trust happens at work. In some of my sites, this meant participating in the work environment as a paid employee or unpaid consultant, while in others it meant joining in and observing the everyday lives of my participants without an official role. Across all sites, my experiences were deeply embodied. I personally felt the hope of trusting, the duty of being trusted, the fear and shame of being distrusted and the pain of betrayal, and these experiences helped to shape my understandings of how trust "works" at work.

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation forges new directions in the study of work in two ways. First, I shift the paradigm for thinking about trust in the workplace. I approach trust as a cultural-relational process, revealing how trust *emerges within* concrete relationships and contexts as opposed to being a purely psychological entity or merely a product of social structures.⁴⁰ As a result, I provide a fluid and dynamic account of trust at work that avoids the reifying tendencies that have previously led to overly sanguine or overly deterministic understandings of this workplace phenomenon.⁴¹

Second, I identify trust as a powerful new structure organizing contemporary work. I contend that trust defines and normalizes the moral properties of work. As a currency of worth, trust is levied to demonstrate value and justify power. In this way, processes of trust contribute to and shape the distribution of job rewards.⁴² As a collective workplace project, trust binds all workplace actors in relations of obligation, driving a commitment to work that far exceeds the benefits they are likely to receive – an

equation that is most detrimental to those without the social and material resources to buffer against hard times.

In chapter 2, I introduce my four work sites in more detail. I describe how I selected these sites and the often-tortuous process of negotiating access. I then present my *modal sampling* strategy, a novel solution for addressing the problem of sampling in intersectional research. I note how a commitment to observing intersecting axes of power and inequality can prompt sample sizes that are unmanageable for qualitative research and can inadvertently reinforce reified social categories. To address this problem, modal sampling pulls insights from grounded theory to derive a sample design that is informed by the salient characteristics within a particular setting.

I denaturalize trust in Chapter 3, demonstrating how my participants became oriented toward its construction within their work relationships. I then examine how trust is produced at work, identifying five dominant logics that constitute the cultural *repertoire of trust* available to American workers. As I reveal, workplace actors then mix and match these logics to create an understanding of trust that *resonates* with their workplace realities.

In chapter 4, I illuminate how work “crises” serve as an important opportunity for trust-building. Through *communions of crisis*, workplace actors come to embrace work adversity as a source of meaning, purpose and social connection. This process helps workers to inject meaning into their work lives, but it also reinforces understandings and patterns of workplace interactions that perpetuate the status quo.

I delve into the inequalities of trust in Chapter 5, mapping how trust manifests differently within and between three distinct relationship types. I suggest that managers

do trust “down” through *maverick management*, while workers do trust “up” through *neoliberal fealty*. Within peer-to-peer relations, workplace actors engage in *squad solidarity*, which requires a mastery of several “interactional currencies,” in order to build trust. I demonstrate how certain performances are elevated or constrained by one’s social location, and I identify several tensions of trust that expose overlapping axes of power and inequality.

In Chapter 6, I employ trust as an analytic tool to understand the meanings and implications of worker consent. I theorize three relational packages – of groups that I call *troopers, martyrs and prisoners* – that influence workers’ understandings of their consent. I suggest that these relational packages exist within an *economy of consent* that values some approaches to consent more than others and that can make relational mismatches more likely. I conclude that relations of trust serve as an *emotional leash*, making it hard for workers to reject employer requests.

In chapter 7, the final empirical chapter, I describe the manifestations of trust within my two “new economy” sites: the tech startup and ride-hail circuit. I examine whether trust is feasible when workers are physically dispersed, communications are technologically mediated and contract work is more prominent. Focusing on cases of articulated and prolonged betrayal, I outline how trust manifests differently in these contexts and how this relates to worker power.

I use the concluding chapter to summarize my findings and consider their implications within today’s fluid, insecure and increasingly deinstitutionalized work environment. I weigh how trust benefits workplace actors by allowing them to enact agency, negotiate dignity and cope with difficult working conditions with how it

legitimizes hierarchies and binds people in relations of control. I end by considering how future research and policymakers might make use of these insights.

Conclusion

Returning to the quandary of work as a site of fulfillment *and* domination, this dissertation suggests that perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that these two social experiences are not mutually exclusive. Specifically, power does not always feel repressive; indeed, subordination can, at times, be quite seductive, especially if a boss is seen as worthy. Trusting others at work does make Americans more vulnerable to malfeasance and betrayal, and given the current individualized rendering of trust, many people blame themselves when things go south.⁴³ However, the individual accomplishment of trusting in others at work— despite numerous reasons not to — can also feel morally satisfying, a sign of enduring hope and resilience and a means of forging social connections within what might otherwise be viewed as a “heartless” world. Similarly, being trusted — despite the associated burdens of duty and responsibility— *feels good*. When people trust us, they depend on us, allowing us to make meaningful contributions to the world. Thus, from the case of trust it is possible to see both the pain and pleasure of control at work, providing further insight into the mechanisms through which power and inequality continue to be sustained.

CHAPTER 1 NOTES

¹ A small sampling of this includes *Politico Magazine*'s 2013 article, "America's Crisis of Trust" and *The Atlantic*'s 2018 article, "Trust is Collapsing in America." The blog, *FiveThirtyEight*, posted in 2016 that "Americans Don't Trust their Institutions Anymore," and a 2017 *Washington Post* article argued, "everything about modern life works against community and trust." Concerns about trust have also been a frequent topic of discussion in public forums like TED Talks and the Aspen Ideas Festival.

² Other national surveys and polls mirror the GSS findings. For example, the Pew Research Center (2017), reports that, in 2017, only 18% of Americans trusted the government in Washington all or most of the time, down from 53% in 1972. According to Gallup's annual Trust in Institutions survey, Americans' confidence in banks declined from 60% in 1979 to 30% in 2018, while confidence in Congress went from 42% in 1973 to 11% in 2018, and newspaper confidence declined from 39% to 23% over the same period. Gallup further reported that, in 2016, Americans' average confidence in fourteen different institutions was only 32%. Finally, a report by the communications marketing firm, Edelman, argues that Americans' trust in government, business, NGOs and the media is at its lowest point since the company began its global online survey in 2001 (Edelman Trust Barometer 2018).

³ In 2014, 82% of GSS respondents agreed with the statement, "I trust the management at the place where I work," 92% agreed that "at the place where I work, I am treated with respect" and 89% reported that it was somewhat or very true that "the people I work with can be relied on when I need help." In another workplace survey, the 2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce, 76% of American workers agreed that "I can trust what managers say in my organization, while 93% agreed that "I have the support from coworkers that I need to do a good job," and 81% agreed that "I have support from coworkers that helps me to manage my work and personal or family life." Finally, 79% of U.S. respondents to the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer survey reported that they trusted their employer.

⁴ Kalleberg 2011; Smith 1997; 2001

⁵ Bell and Nkomo 2001; Bernhardt et al. 2008; EEOC 2017; Roth 2006; Uggen and Blackstone 2004

⁶ For example, classical theorists talked about work as both a "calling" (Weber 1905) and as a site of exploitation (Marx 1867).

⁷ Welfare capitalism provided workers with benefits such as health insurance, pensions and paid time off (Jacoby 1996; Machand 1998; Tone 1997).

⁸ Cornfield 1991

⁹ Burawoy 1979; Fantasia 1988

¹⁰ Bowles and Gintis 1982; Rubin 1996

¹¹ Davis 2009; Kalleberg 2011; Smith 2001

¹² See Bendix 1956, Barley and Kunda 1992, Guillén 1994 and Wren and Bedeian 2009 for more through reviews of the history of managerial ideologies.

¹³ Mayo 1933

¹⁴ Rubin 1996

¹⁵ Kunda 1992; Osterman 1994; Piore and Sabel 1984; Powell 2001

¹⁶ Beck 1986; Giddens 1990; 1991; Beck et al. 1994; although cf. Cook, Hardin and Levi 2007; Williamson 1979 on the institutionalization of trust in insecure times

¹⁷ Luhmann 1979; Giddens 1990; Giddens 1994; Fukuyama 1995; Barbalet 2009

¹⁸ Goffman 1967; Giddens 1991

¹⁹ Giddens 1991

²⁰ Illouz (2008) makes this argument quite convincingly in her chapter "From *Homo economicus* to *Homo communicans*."

²¹ For the literature on emotional labor see Hochschild 1983; Wharton 2009.

²² Colquitt, Scott and Lepine 2007; Dirks and Ferrin 2002; Fulmer and Gelfand 2012; Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; McAllister 1995; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard and Werner 1998

²³ Surprisingly, sociologists of work and labor have been largely absent from scholarly discussions on workplace trust, engaging only at the periphery by examining how trust, as an aspect of social capital, stratifies labor market outcomes (Smith 2005; Smith 2007; Marin 2012; Levine 2013) or how trust influences broader economic exchanges that can occur within and across specific workplace contexts

(Granovetter 1985; Uzzi 1997). As a central point of inquiry, however, workplace trust has been largely overlooked by sociologists (see Fox 1974; Hodson 2004 and Mizrachi, Drori and Anspach 2007 for important exceptions).

²⁴ See Gorman (2014); Morrill (2008); Suchman (2014); Vidal (2008) for similar arguments.

²⁵ Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Edwards 1979

²⁶ Hodson 1995; Knights and Willmott 1990; Storey 1985; O'Doherty and Willmott 2001

²⁷ Foucault 2007

²⁸ For example, Granovetter states, "horizontal relationships may involve trust and cooperation, while vertical relations involve power and compliance" (2002: 36). See Cook 2005 and Mizrachi, Drori and Anspach 2007 for similar observations.

²⁹ Hochschild 1983; Kunda 1992; Leidner 2006

³⁰ This is distinct from Kunda's (1992) finding of cynical workers who became alienated from their sense of self through their construction of an organizational self.

³¹ Barker 1993; Graham 1995; Kunda 1992

³² McClure and Murphy 2007; Nelson 2006; Zelizer 2002

³³ See Möllering 2005 and Reed 2001 for related arguments.

³⁴ Hochschild 1983

³⁵ Levine 2013; Ridgeway 1997; Smith 2007

³⁶ Just during my fieldwork, for example, the *Harvard Business Review*, published over twenty articles focused on trust, including titles such as, "The Neuroscience of Trust," "Building Trust Between Your Employees and Freelancers" and "If Employees Don't Trust You, It's Up to You to Fix It."

³⁷ Fukuyama 1995; Granovetter 1985; Putnam 2000; Uzzi 1997

³⁸ i.e., Kanter 1977; Ridgeway 1997

³⁹ Osterman 1994; Piore and Sabel 1984; Powell 2001; Schor and Attwood-Charles 2017

⁴⁰ By referring to trust as relational, I mean to ground the analysis in the diverse and fertile framework of relational sociology (i.e., Abbott 1996; Emirbayer 1997; Tilly 1998; Zelizer 2012).

⁴¹ For example, functionalist theories have tended to offer an overly sanguine view of trust (i.e., Putnam 2000), while cultural hegemony theories of trust are based on deterministic assumptions (i.e. Kunda 1992).

⁴² Vallas and Cummins 2014

⁴³ Lane 2011; Pugh 2015; Sharone 2014

CHAPTER 2**STUDYING TRUST: FRAGMENTATION AND COMMONALITY**

My interest in trust as a social process required a methodological approach that could attend to multiple levels of analysis. Individual accounts overemphasize the psychology of trust, overlooking the ways in which social politics and systems of inequality are reflected within and operate through processes of trust. The experience of trusting or distrusting, for example, is not simply a product of one's psychological orientation but also their exposure to things such as discrimination or malfeasance.¹ Yet, to view trust solely as an outcome of social conditions risks universalizing the experiences of a few² – usually the most socially dominant – and ignoring individual agency and collective creativity. To avoid these fallacies, I approached trust as a locally situated, relational process,³ employing ethnographic methods to observe and interrogate trust across different levels of social life. I centered my inquiry on trust within interpersonal interactions, examining how trust emerged through these interactions to shape individuals and relationships, as well as how institutional contexts and individual positionalities constrained and enabled trust within interactions.

I began with two overarching research questions: (1) how is trust collectively defined and negotiated within local work contexts; and (2) what is the role of interpersonal trust in how workplace actors assess work situations, engage in work-related behaviors and develop work relationships? To answer these questions, I conducted a comparative ethnography of four contemporary work sites: a corporate restaurant, a marketing firm, a high-tech startup and a ride-hail circuit. These four sites

are distinguished by the social status associated with the work conducted at each and by their degree of alignment with “new economy” practices. In total, I conducted fourteen months of ethnographic observation and 122 in-depth interviews with workers and managers across these four sites.

Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to approach social life as something that is continually “in progress.” Rather than accept taken-for-granted meanings, the ethnographer examines how those meanings are produced through interactions among individuals, within and across social groups and between social actors and their surrounding environments. Thus, ethnography was the appropriate method for this study, and through my data collection and analysis, I provide a rich, holistic and contextualized account of trust in the workplace.

Finding Work

Institutional Contexts: Trust as Salient but not Guaranteed

As argued in the introduction, the American workplace represents an interesting site for studying the production and negotiation of interpersonal trust given the reported persistence of trust – in the face of multiple challenges – among American workers.

While I was interested in processes of trust, and in particular what these processes might look like under pressure, I avoided selecting work sites where trust was guaranteed. To do so, I feared, would be akin to “sampling on the dependent variable.” Thus, I did not select my sites based on where I thought trust would be most likely (i.e., family-run businesses); instead, I employed a purposive approach to sampling, selecting cases where I expected trust to be salient. In other words, I wanted to find work sites where trust mattered, but where it was not necessarily certain.

I selected my two primary research sites on five criteria that I argue bolster the importance – but do not ensure the materialization – of interpersonal trust. *First*, I sought work sites located within the service sector. As previous research has documented, the dynamic quality of service work makes it difficult to monitor and regulate.⁴ Further, the addition of customers and clients within the relational geography of service work introduces new potential alliances and conflicts in the labor process.⁵ Given the interactive character of service work and its distinct relational dynamics, the presence or absence of trust can play a significant role in how this work is organized and experienced. *Second*, I sought sites requiring a high level of interdependence, coordination and collaboration to get the work done, as such conditions increase the pertinence of trust. *Third*, as social heterogeneity introduces uncertainty and can challenge taken-for-granted assumptions – both of which raise the question and importance of trust – I selected sites with notable variation in workforce demographics. *Fourth*, I selected sites with some degree of internal hierarchy, as differences in power and authority are legitimized through trust. *Fifth*, and finally, I selected work settings with the presence of some institutional “safeguards,” such as worker surveillance and contracts, but where those safeguards did not, in themselves, fully define the labor process. In sum, I selected sites where trust mattered and its presence or absence could have consequences, but where the potential for distrust remained.

As with most ethnographies, generalizability was not the primary goal of this study; rather, I sought a rich, nuanced understanding of the processes of trust within organizations. Nevertheless, in selecting my primary research sites, I selected work settings that were fairly typical so as to understand the ways in which the majority of

Americans might encounter trust within the workplace. While the location of all of my sites in one fast-paced, metropolitan area represents one of several important limitations to the generalizability of my findings, I purposefully avoided extreme cases in terms of average earnings (i.e., elite or poverty-stricken organizations), organizational innovations (i.e., total institutions or flat, porous institutions) and levels of risk and insecurity (i.e., fire houses or hedge funds). Instead, I selected sites where people could, and usually did, earn a moderate-to-good living, where market pressures and technological innovations disrupted the labor process but had not resulted in a complete restructuring in the organization of work and where risk and insecurity were present but not extreme.

Researchers have highlighted the error in overgeneralizing the experiences of any one segment along the employment spectrum, noting a growing polarization of jobs.⁶ In particular, lower-status workers tend to be more vulnerable to negative work conditions than their higher-status counterparts.⁷ In order to take this polarization of work into account, I selected one site representing higher-status, professional service work and another representing lower-status, interactive service work. These decisions within my research design help to increase the theoretical generalizability of my findings, even though my primary objective was depth and not breadth.

In pursuing organizational ethnography, I am extending a storied tradition within the sociology of work. From my predecessors, I knew that one of the first major hurdles – and one that could make or break the study – would be to gain entrée into my sites. In a few better known examples, it took Robert Jackall (1988) ten months and thirty-six rejections to gain access to the large bureaucratic organizations he studied for his book, *Moral Mazes*. Calvin Morrill (1995) toiled for eighteen months before gaining research

access to his first organizational site, and Vicki Smith (1997) faced a series of ups and downs while negotiating her access to study temporary workers in a technology firm. In addition, I had a more personal sense of the potential difficulties in gaining access to work environments. As a kid, I watched my father struggle, sometimes unsuccessfully for months at a time, to find work after he graduated from college, and I myself had applied to over fifty different jobs to no avail a few years before embarking on this study. Finding work is difficult in itself, never mind convincing people to also let you research their work environments.

To increase my chances, I moved in June of 2016 to New York City, where during the previous year over four million people had been employed within the service sector.⁸ Unlike other large metropolitan areas, New York City's economy is bolstered not just by higher-status industries, like finance and technology; the city also boasts booming hospitality, retail and transportation markets, which source lower-status service jobs.⁹ Manhattan is also one of the most racially/ethnically diverse major metropolitan areas in the United States, with 32% of its population identifying as White, 29% as Latinx, 24% as Black and 14% as Asian.¹⁰ I expected that these realities of the city would increase my opportunities for locating and gaining access to work settings with the characteristics I desired.

I also worked in New York City prior to graduate school and hoped that my familiarity and networks might improve my chances of accessing different workplaces. I narrowed my search to industries with which I had some degree of familiarity. Previously, I worked in a Madison Avenue advertising agency, where trust had certainly been salient but not guaranteed. In college, I worked for five years as a server and

bartender at a corporate restaurant chain, and I knew that restaurants, especially larger, busier restaurants, met my criteria. Researchers have long debated the value of being an “insider” versus an “outsider” within communities of study, and the overlap in my personal biography and my research sites came with benefits and drawbacks. As a partial “insider” within these fields, I suspected that it may be easier to gain trust and legitimacy among both gatekeepers and participants. I also expected that my own knowledge could help drive, and even expedite, a deeper sense of understanding within my research settings. However, familiarity with my selected industries also threatened my ability to see and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and biases within my sites, something I hoped my training in academia might help guard against. I continually negotiated these dynamics throughout my fieldwork.

Within two weeks of moving to New York, I secured an interview at a regional chain restaurant, initiating my journey within the lower-status site. Access to the marketing firm proved more difficult. This follows a pattern in which researchers have experienced difficulties in gaining access to higher-status individuals and settings, especially as compared to lower-status settings. This is described as a result of greater suspicion, hesitance and institutional resources (like legal teams) among higher-status actors, as well as relatively few privacy protections for lower-status members of society.¹¹ After approaching thirty-eight professional organizations with my one-page proposal and my resume, engaging in email exchanges with nineteen and phone meetings with another six, I made headway.¹² An organization was willing to let me come into their office to observe and attend meetings every day for three months, as well as conduct interviews with individuals across different levels of the company. While I ultimately

gained access to this site, I was not able to work for pay in this setting, meaning I did not engage in full participant observation there.¹³ In what follows, I describe each of my primary sites in more detail, outlining my entry, normalization and exit from each.

*The Jones*¹⁴

With its tile floors, reclaimed wood and large, airy windows, The Jones feels like a medley of neighborhood diner, cozy ski lodge and Parisian café. The company was founded with a single restaurant in 2001. It has since become one of the most popular casual dining restaurants in the city, with five locations dispersed strategically across various neighborhoods. The Jones boasts its appeal for almost any occasion – tourist lunches, boozy brunches, birthday bashes, date nights, business gatherings and family dinners – and, at least at the location where I worked, we generally seated the building to capacity (approximately 200 people) at every shift. The company plans to expand nationally in the coming years.

Growth has made The Jones more bureaucratic. There is a corporate team that sits in a small downtown office. Each restaurant has a clear organizational hierarchy, with the general manager at the top, followed by chefs, floor and kitchen managers, servers and bartenders, cooks, food runners and bussers, hosts, food preparation workers, dishwashers and the home-delivery team. The restaurant group employed approximately eight hundred people in total at the time of my study. My location employed between one and two hundred people. Despite its corporatization, company documents, managers and even workers boast a “family-like” culture, where everyone works together to create a great experience for guests. Staff members enjoyed “family meals” – made by the kitchen staff – before and after most shifts, and many people developed friendships, and

in some cases, romantic relationships within the company. During shifts, orders were placed digitally, through “micro” computers, by front-of-the-house staff, and the digital system communicated directly with the back of the house. It, along with closed-circuit televisions, allowed managers to monitor the ongoing activities within the restaurant. While there was this overall system of surveillance, staff generally worked fairly autonomously from managers, managing their particular “station” or “section” as its own entity.

I was referred to The Jones by a woman I waited tables with in college. Since then, she had worked in a number of different hospitality jobs in New York, and she was well connected within the industry. She connected me with Kevin, who currently worked as a chef at The Jones, and Kevin in turn, put me in touch with Paul, the general manager at one location.¹⁵ Paul, who reminded me of a grown-up Dennis the Menace, with his boyish face and blonde hair, interviewed me two days later. We talked about my last restaurant, and he asked if I had been required to learn the menu. I recalled making flash cards to prepare for my menu test. At this, he warmed up, noting that many of his servers did the same to prepare for The Jones’ menu test. After a few more questions, he noted that I seemed “positive and upbeat.” He then warned that The Jones was a “high-volume” restaurant and asked whether I maintained the same energy and persona when I was stressed. When I replied that I would, he was satisfied. He told me to come back the next day to complete paperwork and organize a training schedule, explaining “we do everything above board here.” I was in and out within twenty minutes.

The training and onboarding process was much more involved than the interview. My first day, I received: (1) a 17-page welcome packet outlining the company history and

core values; (2) a 15-page training manual detailing twenty-one “steps of service” and a training plan; and (3) a 32-page menu guide describing the ingredients of over two hundred menu items, including twenty specialty cocktails. Over the next week and a half, I worked seven training shifts, during which I trailed – or later in the training, was trailed by – a more seasoned server. At the end of each shift, my trainer signed off on my progress, and I met with the manager on duty for about twenty minutes to debrief.

I used this training period to introduce my study, as I would not be officially hired until after my training was completed, and I had passed the menu test. One floor manager named DJ was very excited because he had been a sociology major in college. Paul was also eager to help, but he did not formally consent until he got approval from the corporate office. Most of my coworkers were slightly befuddled but generally intrigued by my inquiry, with many noting they would be happy to do interviews when the time came. Finally, after my seven training shifts, two intense days of menu memorization and the successful completion of the menu test, I was officially a server at The Jones.

DJ, who was in charge of the schedule, informed me that they expected “open availability,” especially on the weekends. I agreed and kept my schedule open for breakfast/brunch, lunch and dinner shifts every day of the week. I quickly realized, however, that the schedule, once issued, initiated a flurry of emails and texts among servers, as everyone worked (often to the dismay of DJ) to swap shifts and arrange their schedule to their own preferences. In the end, I ended up working about four shifts every week, which was typically between twenty-five and thirty-five hours per week. After a number of shifts, I would go to the nearby bar with my coworkers to chat about the job,

as well as our non-Jones lives. I also attended official Jones' gatherings, such as town hall meetings, new menu rollout meetings and the annual holiday party.

During shifts, I would constantly make "jottings" of key interactions and observations in my server notepad, which also contained all of my guests' orders. While out with coworkers, I would text small notes into my phone. Each night, I would pull upon these jottings to write a more detailed description of the days' events. Given my positionality as a server, my view was primarily from the "front of the house," and my findings speak mainly to the experiences of servers, bartenders, food runners and bussers. Interactions with chefs and other back-of-the-house employees were from the perspective of a server, not as member of the kitchen team. Further, kitchen conversations happened through a mix of Spanish, French and English, limiting my ability to fully capture all of the interactional dynamics. Nevertheless, I made an effort to observe back-of-the-house dynamics and to speak with kitchen employees whenever possible.

Throughout my time at The Jones, I was particularly attentive to moments when trust seemed to matter. I watched what happened when people made mistakes, whom people went to when they felt overwhelmed or vulnerable, who shared secrets with whom and under what conditions. I also paid attention to what was emphasized – and minimized – by managers during our daily shift meetings, and through official communications. I made constant comparisons across these moments in order to identify patterns in how trust unfolded.¹⁶

After six months, I started observing similar patterns and felt I was at the point of saturation. Leaving was difficult for several reasons. First, I was continually negotiating my relationships with participants. Some had come to feel like friends, and this could, at

times, be a difficult boundary to navigate. I generally tried to be as genuine as possible, while also continually reflecting on my own positionality and its influence on the study. As I exited the site, I wanted to honor the relationships I had made, while also slowly distancing myself from The Jones in order to gain perspective. In the end, I stayed in touch with several participants, reconnecting with them every few months. My second concern was in regard to my commitment as a worker. Had I been there long enough to justify the time and money they spent on training me? In this way, I found myself ensnarled in some of the very trust dynamics I sought to study. Ultimately after an additional two weeks, I decided that, as others had come and gone during my tenure (some voluntarily and others not), I had worked long and dutifully enough to justify the company's investments. I gave my two weeks' notice, and while my managers and coworkers were sad to see me go, they respected my need to move on. Unfortunately, on the morning of my last shift, I caught a stomach bug. Again, tethered by feelings of duty, I went into work, but I ended up leaving after only thirty minutes. After a long nap, I woke up to a touching "goodbye" video the team recorded during the shift, as well as several warm goodbye emails and texts from my colleagues.

DTC Communications

My access to DTC Communications also began with a referral. Through LinkedIn, I reached out to a woman, Jill, with whom I had worked before graduate school. Although we had not worked together directly, she remembered me. She was now a senior executive at DTC Communications and she offered to connect me with Lola, who worked in human resources. Lola said my timing was perfect. A recent employee survey had revealed low scores at the company in areas like inclusiveness, leadership and

communication. She was currently developing a managerial training program to help address these issues, and she thought my study might be a nice supplement. We scheduled a meeting for the following week, during which we hashed out the logistics of consent and timing. She also asked that I sign a non-disclosure agreement covering proprietary information. I arrived for my first day a few weeks later.

DTC's New York office is located within a high-rise building in lower Manhattan. As I stepped off the elevator, a receptionist smiled warmly at me through the glass doors and pressed a button to release the locks so that I could enter. She directed me to a seating area, complete with armchairs and magazine-lined coffee tables, to wait for Lola. From there, I was able to glimpse the rest of the office space. There was a large bar, with beer taps, bottled alcohol, glassware and a sink, along one of the walls near the front lobby. A number of employees would later tell me the bar was the first thing they recalled seeing when they interviewed at DTC. Beyond the bar, the office was modern and clean with white walls, ceilings and tables. Wood paneling created a walkway down the center of the office, surrounded on either side by grey carpeting. There were very few closed-door offices, and those that existed along the edge and in the center had transparent glass walls. Everyone else was seated in open-style workstations. The office design matched the collaborative and innovative culture the company professed on its website.

DTC moved to this space in 2014 as part of an aggressive growth trajectory. The company was founded in 2003 as a small marketing startup-up. Since then, it had grown substantially, and in 2014, it was purchased by MAC, a large holding company. MAC owned a number of marketing, advertising and media agencies, and the acquisition

allowed DTC to expand into a global network. At the time of my study, the DTC brand boasted thirty-two offices around the world and a workforce of 16,000 full-time and 7,000 contract employees. There were five offices in the U.S., with New York serving as both a regional office and corporate headquarters. Approximately 125 full-time and contract employees worked in the New York office during my tenure, and they were employed across different focus areas such as client services, creative execution, production, finance and human resources. The global executive team, including the CEO and founder, Adam, was also stationed within the New York office. Like most marketing agencies, the company had a formal hierarchy that ranged from junior-level positions to senior management, and promotions and raises occurred through annual reviews.

Lola encouraged me to set up my laptop at any open table or desk, and I often switched locations from day-to-day, sometimes working in a desk, other times in the open area at the center of the office and still others at the bar. Constructing fieldnotes was much easier than the hurried jottings I had made at The Jones, as I – like most people in the office – always had my computer or phone nearby. Not being an employee, however, made my entry less seamless than it had been at The Jones. Due to a technical issue linking email addresses to paychecks, the human resources team said they were unable to provide me with a company email. This meant that, unless someone forwarded them to me, I missed the emails that went out to the full team. This could, at times, make me feel out of touch with what was happening, although over time, many of my participants would share important emails with me. I also felt hyper-visible and slightly intrusive as I walked up to various groups introducing myself and asking if it might be possible to sit in on upcoming meetings. I joined the company softball team, and a few

people invited me for lunch or drinks outside the office. This helped with the transition, and later into my tenure, I started receiving uninitiated invitations to various meetings around the office. At DTC, I was very mindful of the visibility of my relationships with senior management and workers. I wanted to understand the relationships and inner workings of both groups, but I did not want to be viewed as a spy for management nor as a rabble-rouser among employees. Thus, I worked hard to connect and build rapport with people across different levels of the organization.

As at The Jones, I was particularly attuned to moments when trust was salient within the office. During formal meetings, I watched who was willing to speak up and when. I observed, whenever possible, who met informally before meetings to strategize and align and who met afterwards to rehash. I paid attention to the people that took risks and those that were visibly acknowledged and rewarded within the company. I observed not only official managerial communications, but also how those communications were received and discussed among workers. I watched how people collaborated with others outside of their team and how they interacted with the Human Resources department – ostensibly an institutional node of trust. I made constant comparisons between moments within this site, and with my findings at The Jones, to identify overall commonalities and differences.

My exit from DTC was predetermined from the start, making it easier in some respects. During my last week, a number of employees asked to grab coffee or lunch to say goodbye, and many sent goodbye emails expressing an appreciation for my interest and companionship over the three months. Yet, in exiting this site, I struggled with how to share insights from my findings with the company. The management team was

ostensibly eager to learn from my study, and many of my participants had expressed hope that the study might bring about positive changes at the company. I was less hopeful. I had raised the issue of gender inequality, for example, in a one-on-one meeting with a senior manager only to have the topic dismissed as a current anomaly explained away by recent turnover within the management team. Moreover, DTC was undergoing substantial change and restructuring during my observation period, and I sensed a growing wariness among some senior managers regarding my presence during this tumultuous period. I expressed my concerns to Lola during my last week. She agreed with my assessment, and sighed, saying “honestly, when we first spoke, I was in a place where I had more hope.” Now, she had come to the conclusion that management was aware of many of the issues and was actively avoiding the pursuit of meaningful change. In fact, she had just received an offer at another company and was planning to leave DTC herself within a few weeks.

In the end, I provided a professional ten-page report to the management team, presenting the overarching patterns in my data. I raised issues of communication, leadership and gender inequity, while also highlighting areas of strength. In the final section, I offered three sets of evidence-based recommendations for change. The executive team expressed substantial gratitude, but they did not invite further discussion about my findings.

Talking Trust

In addition to immersing myself within these environments, I also conducted in-depth interviews with ninety people across the two sites. These interviews were valuable in that they offered access to a different type of information than my observations. Through

my interviews, I explored how people thought, felt and talked about trust – not just how they enacted it in different situations. Thus, interviews helped me to understand the “mental maps” people used to navigate their worlds: in other words, the cultural schemas and frames they pulled upon to make sense of their workplace experiences and relationships.¹⁷

Modal Sampling: Difference within Context

As described above, I selected work sites where I expected trust to be salient. However, I also expected that trust, when it manifested, would look and feel distinct across relationships and individuals within each site. I was attentive to how organizational position influenced the ways in which workplace actors interpreted, experienced and employed trust. Additionally, previous research has demonstrated trust differences across social status characteristics, such as gender, race/ethnicity and class.¹⁸ Thus, I sought to understand how such social categories influenced processes of trust within the workplace, particularly when they intersected with organizational hierarchies.

An interest in intersectional research designs is driven by the fact that social status categories are not mutually exclusive but instead overlap and shape one another.¹⁹ The experiences of all women, for example, are not universal; they vary due to intersecting axes of power and inequality that shape their identities, experiences and relationships. The experiences of a young Muslim woman, for instance, are likely to be quite distinct from those of an older, white woman. With this in mind, intersectional research seeks variation *within* social categories to ensure that the experiences of a small number of people are not used to stand in for a larger, more heterogeneous, social group.

The challenge of intersectional designs is that they can lead to unwieldy sample sizes. Take, for instance, the researcher interested in how gender and sexuality intersect in ways that influence perceptions of marriage. Assuming a minimum of three gender categories (man, woman, gender fluid) and three sexual orientations (same-sex, heterosexual, bisexual), this creates nine “cells” that need to be filled with participants. If the researcher desires a minimum of fifteen people in each group, they would need to recruit at least 135 individuals into their sample—a task that can be both difficult and time-consuming for the qualitative interviewer seeking an in-depth understanding. This approach also requires the researcher to define which social status characteristics matter *a priori*. Yet, social identities are complex and the salience of identity categories varies across contexts. In superimposing a particular demographic framework onto the data, the researcher risks the reification of social categories as well as the possibility that there may simply not be enough individuals in a given setting that qualify for each pre-identified group.

To address these challenges, I adopted a novel sampling strategy that I call “modal sampling.” As opposed to defining the sampling parameters prior to entering the field, modal sampling is done once one is in the field, allowing salient status categories to emerge from the data. In my case, I knew that I was interested in how organizational and social status categories overlapped, but I did not know beforehand which social categories (i.e., race, gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality) were likely to matter most within each setting. Thus, I waited until I had been in each setting for several weeks and then used dominant social status categories as “sensitizing concepts” to help me identify the key parameters of my sample.

Once salient social status categories are determined, modal sampling is then driven by the institutional order of the research setting. Specifically, modal sampling requires identifying numerical majority and minority groups within a given context and designing the sample to represent those characteristics. For me, that meant identifying the dominant social group among managers and among workers, separately, for each site. This allowed me to discern how race and gender – the salient status characteristics within my sites – overlapped with organizational authority.

Sampling in this way enables an understanding of relevant social groups *in relation* to one another. For example, I was able to compare dominant and tokenized experiences *within* each setting and role, as well as tokenized (and also dominant) experiences *across* roles and organizations. Thus, I was able to analyze how experiences of numerical dominance at the managerial level compared to experiences of numerical dominance at more junior levels. Similarly, I was able to identify similarities and differences in the experiences of managerial tokens across my two organizations.

While this strategy enables the researcher to intentionally capture a range of perspectives, it is not without limitations. Most notably, modal sampling risks reproducing the status quo by reflecting existing organizational arrangements. As opposed to other sampling strategies, which may seek to elevate the voices of the marginalized through oversampling, the voices of dominant groups are most represented within this approach. Nevertheless, modal sampling does allow for a variety of voices, while also mapping the dominant narratives back to the social and organizational hierarchies within each organization. In this way, modal sampling facilitates an examination of how structure shapes culture within a given organizational context.

Employing modal sampling at The Jones, I first identified the salient social demographics at junior and senior levels of the organization. At the junior level, one of my interviewees, Cheryl, articulated the social demographics in a telling way:

There was a moment actually, I looked around and I was like, "there's a lot of brunette, white girls!" (laughs) And not that it mattered, but I was like, "oh, I guess a restaurant can sometimes have a type." And that was interesting and funny. Um, but actually, recently, I looked around, and I was happy to see more colorful you know, just an array of folks. It just ... and it's something that I don't really, I don't really notice it until I sit back and notice it. You know, which I think is cool.

Cheryl, herself a white woman, was correct; most junior-level workers at The Jones – especially within the front-of- -house staff – were white women. White women were not only numerically dominant, but as staff members with the greatest degree of guest interaction, they also served as the “face” of The Jones.²⁰ I based my junior-level sample around them. For managers, my sample emphasized white men. The dominance of white men was amplified the higher up one went at The Jones. Among floor managers at my restaurant, half of the managers were women or people of color. Among general managers (one level up) and at the corporate level, there were less than a handful. In total, I conducted thirty-nine interviews with people at The Jones, and this sample included twenty-four workers and fifteen managers. The majority of these individuals were front-of-the-house workers and managers, but I also interviewed some kitchen staff and managers, as well as corporate-level executives.

Like The Jones, DTC was a gendered and raced organization, with whites being the numerical majority across all levels, and men dominating senior – but not junior – roles. A number of my participants described DTC as a “boys club,” given the prominence of men at the top and a strong cultural embrace of dominant heteronormative masculinity within the agency. The male-dominance of the environment was particularly

striking one day, about two weeks into my time at DTC. A young man in his early twenties came in. I watched him casually walk in and out of the managers' offices, greeting the CEO and other executives with high fives and hugs. He stood by the bar, chatting about baseball and soccer, before eventually joining the CEO, Adam, and another senior executive in an office. I later found out this young man was a former intern who stopped by to say hello, and I could not help but compare his reception with the low visibility of junior women within the company.

In the end, my sample at DTC was comparable to my Jones' sample, with white men as the dominant managerial category and white women as the dominant junior-level category. Nevertheless, at both sites, but especially at DTC, it is important to highlight that the manager/worker binary is constructed, and that in reality, this line between managers and workers is more fluid, particularly within middle management. There was also variation in the age, sexual orientation and nationality of my participants, but these categories did not emerge as particularly salient – especially in how they interacted with organizational hierarchy – in either organization. The details of my final interview sample are below.

Table 1. Interview Sample Breakdown

	The Jones		DTC Communications		Total
	Managers	Workers	Managers	Workers	
White Men	6 (<i>Dominant</i>)	2	14 (<i>Dominant</i>)	3	25
Men of Color	3	4	3	2	12
White Women	4	15 (<i>Dominant</i>)	6	15 (<i>Dominant</i>)	40
Women of Color	2	3	2	6	13
Total	15	24	25	26	90

As evidenced in the chart above, white male managers at The Jones were less willing to speak with me than other groups. This is, in part, due to the fact that the majority of white, male managers worked within the corporate office, and my opportunities to forge connections with them were thus limited. In comparison, for example, I interviewed all eight managers who worked at my particular Jones' location. However, the only three individuals within the corporate office who were *not* white men did sit for an interview. It may be that managerial white men felt they had greater power to deny my request, or it may be that these men were more suspicious of my study and/or protective of their privacy. My access, through management, to DTC helped to avoid a similar problem of access in that setting.

Safe Conversational Spaces

The creation of safe conversational spaces is critical to any interview. Ethically, this helps to ensure the rights of participants. In creating a safe space, researchers seek to underscore the voluntary nature of interviews, creating an atmosphere in which participants feel empowered to deny or withdraw consent, and to minimize participant risks by addressing sensitive issues such as confidentiality. Epistemologically, a sense of comfort can improve rapport and facilitate researchers' access to the meanings, symbols and feelings that people use to think through and process a given topic. In my study, the need to create safe conversational spaces for interviewees was heightened by two things. First, workplaces are insular environments characterized by substantial power differences. People may be justifiably concerned that sharing candid experiences and thoughts about their workplaces and employers could jeopardize their employment. Second, the topic of trust can trigger sensitive beliefs and feelings, such as one's sense of

entitlement within the workplace or the sting of betrayal. Thus, it was essential that I, as a researcher, build credibility and trust with my interview participants.

I took a number of steps to create safe conversational spaces for my participants. First, at The Jones, I approached my participants with the interview request around my time of departure from the site. At that point, I had developed substantial rapport with my participants and would also be more distant from the workplace, potentially making it easier for participants to share concerns or disclose sensitive information. In particular, waiting until after I submitted my notice helped to create a dynamic where I felt managers would be less constrained by workplace power differentials and conflicts of interest. At DTC, where my relationships were less shaped by my employment status, the delayed timing was less feasible. As a result, I had to approach participants early and build rapport *during* these interviews. Across both locations, I invited interviewees to choose a location where they would be most comfortable chatting with me, and many chose nearby cafés or restaurants for our meetings. Being away from the office provided an environment in which people felt more at ease to talk about workplace dynamics. In addition, I carefully took participants through the consent process and the steps I would take to ensure confidentiality (as well as the risks) before each interview. During the interview itself, I approached the conversation as a curious and compassionate listener, acknowledging and clarifying comments, following the conversation while also gently directing it and sharing in my participants' expressed emotions. Most interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, but a few lasted for several hours. During a number of these conversations, people expressed appreciation for the opportunity to talk with someone and to express their emotions, with many likening it to a therapy session.

Several people also explicitly articulated a strong trust in me, while others showed it in small ways. For example, Jonathan, a mid-level manager at DTC, asked me at the beginning of the interview if he could wait until the end to complete my written questionnaire, which asked some sensitive questions, such as information about salary. Throughout the interview, Jonathan became increasingly expressive, opening up about his thoughts, feelings and experiences at DTC, and I felt that I had earned his trust at the end when he responded to every query on my written form.

Questions of power and reflexivity are ever-present for the qualitative researcher, and there were a number of times throughout my study that I was particularly attuned to my own positionality. I was aware that people often thought I was about ten years younger than I was, and in many cases, I think this was disarming and led people to speak more openly with me. Yet, it also probably limited how some of my older participants approached the conversation, with some taking the tone of a mentor at times. As a woman, I believe my gender made it easier for other women to confide in me about things like sexual harassment and discrimination, and many did, perhaps because of our common exposure to these patterns of oppression. It was trickier to build rapport with men, who would sometimes treat me in stereotypically gendered ways, either explaining why my study was – or was not – important or sometimes subtly flirting with me. I observed this behavior, but I avoided drawing attention to it so as not to alienate or embarrass my participants in what, in many ways, was a vulnerable setting for them. Among my most powerful male participants in particular, such as the CEOs of The Jones and DTC, I became acutely aware of my own vulnerability, and I believe this awareness was a result of the stance these men took within the interview. They often sought to

control the interactional setting – asking me questions, redirecting the conversation and setting limits on our time together. To the extent that I feared they might be able to terminate my study, I succumbed to these dynamics, not pushing too hard on certain topics and trying to show deference in regard to their time, and as a result, I may have missed out on valuable information. I am less certain of how my race influenced the research. My white participants were often quick to acknowledge their racial privilege when I would bring up discussions of race in the workplace, displaying an honorable identity that Smith (2019) calls “woke whiteness.” It is unclear if my sociological background triggered this response or not, although it is worth noting that these statements were often short and devoid of substantive consideration of how their racial privilege was sustained by them and others at work. I had more in-depth conversations about race with my participants of color, although I am not sure if this was a reflection of the rapport that we built or the fact that they confronted racial dynamics continually within their everyday lives.

Trust in the Future of Work

As my research progressed, new questions emerged. I was intrigued by the way trust manifested similarly across my two research sites, and I wondered to what extent these same patterns might hold in environments that aligned more strongly with “new economy” trends, predicted to define the future of work. This resulted in the addition of two supplementary research sites: a technology consulting start-up and the NYC ride-hail circuit. These sites are characterized by an apparent decentralization of power, the predominance of contract-based employment relations, the physical dispersion of employees and a dependence on technologically mediated communications – all trends

that appear to be shaping the future of work in America. In addition, they reflect similar status differences as my two primary research sites, with technology consultants typically viewed as higher-status professionals and ride-hail drivers as lower-status interactive service workers.

Disruption

Disruption was a small technology consulting company founded in 2012. Fourteen people worked at Disruption during the time of my research; three of these individuals constituted the “operations team,” which was a euphemism for management within an organization that prided itself on being “flat.” The other eleven workers were consultants – some full-time workers and others independent contractors – whose expertise varied from coding to software development to website design. These consultants were often embedded in off-site client offices, where they worked for weeks, sometimes months, at a time to build technological solutions and to train client teams on their use. When consultants were not at a client’s office, they were “on the bench,” meaning that their hours were non-billable and thus did not directly contribute to company profits. Typically, workers used bench time to recharge, focus on professional development and contribute to company initiatives, such as internal processes or marketing communications. The team was male-dominated with ten men in total, although there was limited diversity. Four white women – two cis-gendered and two trans-gendered – and three men of color were employed at Disruption. The three-person “operations team” was fairly diverse, consisting of one Asian-American man, the founder, one white woman and a Latino.

The operations team and benched consultants worked in a shared space in lower Manhattan. The space housed numerous entrepreneurs and new business owners, as well as remote employees from bigger businesses and independent contractors. There was a pay-as-you-go coffee and juice bar, a yoga and meditation studio (with ongoing classes) and a nap room within the shared space. Disruption rented a small, glass-walled office with seats for six people, and their office had a small window overlooking New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty. The vibe in the office was eclectic and laid back with games and musical instruments scattered around the office.

Disruption was one of several dozen start-ups I contacted as potential research sites within the New York City metro area. They responded to my initial query within the hour. I met with Reid and Logan, who were both on the operations team and had “VP” titles. They told me that the company was going through a rough period. A few years ago, they experienced substantial growth, and Shane, the founder and CEO, brought in another guy to run the company. The new CEO was more profit-oriented than the rest of team, often prioritizing client interests above all else. Morale plummeted, and eventually, Shane decided to “phase out” the new CEO. He stepped back in to lead the company, and the now smaller team was in what Logan and Reid called a “healing stage.” They were excited for my study because they had been working on rebuilding trust within the company, and they thought that my presence would further demonstrate their level of effort and care. After our meeting, they met with the full team to discuss my proposal, and I was invited in shortly after.

I observed Disruption for a period of two months, during which time I also interviewed all fourteen people, including Shane, Logan and Reid. Given the frequent

dispersion of the team across client sites, they frequently communicated through a digital platform known as “Slack.” They used this largely in place of emails or even text messages. I was granted access to the platform for a period of six months, two months while I was there and four months afterwards. While the team was very welcoming, it took me some time to learn the technical language of programmers and to catch some of the references in their offbeat humor. For example, in my first several weeks, I was continually googling terms like “API,” “git-flow” and “refracting,” as well as popular culture references, from sources like the Star Wars films, The Elder Scrolls video games and Japanese anime. During my second month, I began to feel more comfortable, even joining for a “team night” consisting of dinner and karaoke in Korea Town. My experiences in sharing insights with this company were much different than at DTC, with the team inviting me back a few weeks after I left to facilitate a discussion of my findings during an “all hands” meeting. My presentation of findings was well received, sparking both introspection and lively debate.

NYC Ride-Hail Circuit

The New York City ride-hail circuit includes individuals associated with app-based personal transportation services offered by companies like Uber, Lyft, Gett/Juno and Via. Workers in this arena – more specifically, drivers – are typically considered part of the “gig economy.” The gig economy is ambiguously defined, but generally it refers to the exchange of task-focused work provided on demand through a digital marketplace. If defining the gig economy is difficult, estimates of its size have proven even more challenging. In 2017, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that approximately ten percent of Americans work in “alternative work arrangements,” which includes app-

based workers, freelancers and people employed through temp agencies.²¹ In the same year, the Federal Reserve reported that approximately one-third of Americans work in the gig economy.²² Breaking this down further, the Fed estimated that sixteen percent of Americans work in *online* gig markets. Regardless of the size of the gig workforce, the gig economy is a prominent feature in the public's imagined future of work. The gig economy has been both celebrated and bemoaned for its influence on employment. Proponents describe gig jobs as a safety net available to people when other employment arrangements fall short and as a means of achieving autonomy and flexibility in one's work. Critics note that, as independent contractors, gig workers lack benefits, paid time off and guaranteed work, and they are personally responsible for business-related costs.

Importantly, the New York City ride-hail circuit – which launched with Uber in 2012 – represents a somewhat unique market compared to other geographic areas across the United States. First, app-based, ride-hail services represent one of the biggest employers in the city. According to one report, Uber alone would be the city's largest for-profit, private employer if drivers were classified as employees.²³ In 2017, 130,000 drivers were employed in the New York City ride-hail circuit.²⁴ An overwhelming majority of NYC drivers are men (97%), most of which were born outside of the United States (91%). Half of these drivers have children and approximately 54% are the breadwinners for their families. Unlike some other markets, most drivers in the city drive full-time, and two-thirds do not have an additional source of income. Specifically, almost 60% of drivers in this area work at least thirty hours or more each week and slightly over 20% work more than fifty hours each week.

Second, the local regulatory and economic context in New York City leads drivers to incur greater expenses. In the city, the industry is regulated by the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC), and drivers must register their vehicles, obtain a license and complete several training sessions to begin driving. These total upfront costs average around \$1,500.²⁵ In addition, there are recurring costs in the form of commercial insurance, car payments, fuel and car maintenance. Conservative estimates suggest that drivers must pay at least \$20,000 each year just to get and stay on the road, and for drivers seeking to work for premium-priced fares that require luxury vehicles, these costs are typically much higher.²⁶

Third, New York City is one of only a few areas in which drivers have attempted to organize. In particular, the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG) has become a prominent platform for organization efforts in the city. The IDG, which is not a traditional labor union, calls itself a “solidarity union.” Led by a staff of labor organizers associated with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), IDG has pushed a number of initiatives for drivers, including a mandated tip option on the app userface and improved bathroom access around the city.

Originally, I planned to conduct research with drivers, as well as representatives of the major companies within the arena, such as Uber and Lyft. However, I quickly found access to full-time corporate employees at those companies to be largely blocked. Locating contact information for employees through company websites, LinkedIn, news articles and my personal network, I reached out to a number of people requesting interviews. Most ignored my request. A few responded with interest only to back out later. For example, one woman replied to my LinkedIn request for an interview, saying

“strictly confidential, would love to,” but then messaged again three minutes later saying, “Never mind. It is probably a bad idea. Thanks.” Another full-time employee in the industry agreed to an interview but never showed up and would not answer my phone calls. At one point, I initiated contact with one company’s “People Analytics” team, but they declined to let employees participate in my interviews due to privacy concerns. I also visited “driver hubs” – warehouse-style office spaces where drivers could meet with company representatives in person. I was able to get into one of these hubs, which was guarded by what looked like bouncers, by saying I was there to meet a friend. However, after about thirty to forty-five minutes, when no one else showed up, they spotted me amongst the crowd and began asking me about where my friend was and when they might be arriving, at which point I left. In many ways, these barriers to access were not surprising, as the industry was under some scrutiny for worker rights issues and bad corporate behavior at the time of my study. In the end, I was able to secure two interviews with full-time, salaried employees of these companies, but the bulk of my data in this site focuses on drivers.

In 2017, I began attending TLC meetings and initiated contact with the Independent Drivers Guild. This led to two interviews with IDG staff members and fourteen interviews with ride-hail drivers: ten men and four women. Ten of my drivers were immigrants, and all but three were people of color. In particular, I became very close with one driver: a man named Fahad. Fahad, who was born in Pakistan, had driven for taxis and black car services for over two decades, although now he works almost exclusively through the ride-hailing apps. He is passionate about improving drivers’ working conditions, and he is an active member of the IDG. In addition to our interview,

Fahad and I spoke regularly on the phone – sometimes several times a week – and he helped introduce me to other drivers. In this way, he served as more than simply a participant in this site, but also as an informant.

Fahad shared much about his perspective on the inner workings of the industry and the politics of IDG and the TLC, and he would sometimes accompany me to TLC meetings or to driver hangouts at the various New York City airports. At the hangouts, we would go around chatting with groups of drivers who were waiting, sometimes for hours, for their next paid fare. In a sense, it was as if these drivers were locked in by a digital fence. If they left the designated areas within the airport parking lots, they would be taken out of the queue within the ride-hailing apps on their phone. As airport rides into the city were of longer distance, the earnings potential for these rides could, at times, make the wait worthwhile. However, these potential earnings had to be weighed against the unpaid wait time.



Figure 2. Food Truck at Driver Hangout near NYC Airport

Fahad also invited me to a group chat among drivers on WhatsApp, where I was able to observe group texts among drivers. In addition, I surveyed press articles, company websites and driver forums to gain a more holistic sense of the industry dynamics.

Conclusion

The story presented in this dissertation emerged from an ongoing interplay between observation and analysis. At the end of my data collection, I had approximately 150 hours of recorded interviews and 600 pages of single-spaced fieldnotes, in addition to recorded online communications and company documents. After transcribing the interviews, I uploaded all of my data into NVivo and began the iterative process of open and focused coding and memoing.²⁷ Early on, I noticed that my participants were employing trust in myriad ways, sometimes within the same breath. Through constant coding and reflection, fragmented themes began to pop up, themes such as “authenticity,” “battling,” “duty,” “venting” and “betrayal.” Over time, some of these themes coalesced into broader categories such as “doing trust” or “bonding moments.” In other cases, like with “meanings of trust,” they became more segregated and specific over time. I also focused on particularly salient moments that seemed to magnify broader themes – what Arlie Hochschild refers to as “magnified moments” – writing detailed memos to elaborate on potential interpretations and draw out theoretical implications. Throughout the data analysis process, I would continually return to the data to ask new questions, verify hunches and make comparisons.

In the end, I found that this was not just a study *of* trust, it was also a study conducted *through* trust. At each stage of the data collection, I found myself working tirelessly to build trust with my participants. I needed them to trust me in order to gain access to their lives, and I needed to trust that they were not maliciously providing me with a false representation of their thoughts and behaviors.²⁸ During data analysis and writing, I was forced to forge a new relationship of trust: with myself. I had to trust that I

had developed the right research design to answer the questions I was asking, that I effectively captured the dynamics in the field and that the story that emerged was an accurate depiction—and this trust is one that bleeds into my relationship with readers as well. Indeed, much ink has been spilled recently about our ability to trust qualitative researchers.²⁹ Thus, like my participants, I became oriented toward the construction of trust, producing trust with every observation, interview and analytic memo.

CHAPTER 2 NOTES

¹ Levine 2013; Smith 2007

² This risk is due to an assumption that all individuals encounter social structures and experience social processes similarly.

³ See Abbott 1996; Desmond 2014; Emirbayer 1997; Tilly 1998 and Zelizer 2012 for helpful reviews.

⁴ Adler 2001; Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993; Macdonald and Sirianni 1996

⁵ Leidner 1993; Sallaz 2002; Vallas 2006; Lopez 2010

⁶ Kalleberg 2011

⁷ Clawson and Gerstel 2014; Lambert 2012; Presser 2003; Ticona *forthcoming*

⁸ New York State Department of Labor 2018

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ United States Census Bureau 2017

¹¹ See Cousin, Khan and Mears 2018 for discussion.

¹² As researchers have noted (Burawoy and Lukás 1992), this difficulty in gaining access is itself a finding.

¹³ I came close to securing this option at one professional advertising agency. In fact, after several email exchanges and phone meetings, I was invited to meet face-to-face with the head of Human Resources for a holding company that owned several prominent agencies. During the meeting, we discussed the senior executive's concerns about the temporary nature of my employment, about employee consent to the research and about the uses of my findings. Our biggest obstacle, she said, was my employment. She was concerned about the cost of training, given my plans to leave within a year, and we discussed options such as working as an intern or perhaps even slotting in as a "temp" during someone's parental leave. As the meeting came to a close, she tentatively agreed to help me, noting that she would also talk it over with the rest of the team. After a follow-up email that week, she forwarded my request to another executive who promised to help me find a place within his agency. Unfortunately, after three months of emailing back and forth, this opportunity ended unceremoniously when he emailed to tell me that, unfortunately, the timing would not work out for the team. He ended his email with a definitive close, "I pushed but struck out. Wish I could have been more help!"

¹⁴ All company names and individual names – except for ride-hail companies which I did not study individually and through which I was not granted internal access – are pseudonyms.

¹⁵ Later, Kevin would tell me that, other than his brother, I was the only person he had ever referred to the company. He was usually hesitant to put his reputation on the line, but he really trusted my friend.

¹⁶ Glaser and Strauss 1967

¹⁷ Luker 2008; Pugh 2013

¹⁸ Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Levine 2013; Smith 2010

¹⁹ Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991

²⁰ See Williams and Connell (2010) on aesthetic labor and social inequality in the workplace.

²¹ Perhaps because the Bureau of Labor Statistics did not include gig workers who were supplementing other forms of employment, this estimate is lower than some (Boro 2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018).

²² Approximately forty percent of all gig workers in their sample reported their work as "side jobs" that supplemented income from main jobs (Federal Reserve 2018).

²³ Parrott and Reich 2018

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Strauss and Corbin 1990

²⁸ As Pugh (2013) argues, complete honesty in interviews is not necessarily the goal, and she outlines four types of information that can be gleaned from interviews, some of which provide insight less into individuals' "true" feelings and experiences and more into how they think they should feel or act. My trust was not focused on whether participants were being completely accurate in their depictions, but that they were approaching the interview without strong cynicism or a desire to sabotage the process.

²⁹ See Pugh (*unpublished m.s.*) and Reyes 2018 for more in-depth discussion on this.

CHAPTER 3**A BIG WORD: MIXING AND MATCHING MEANINGS OF TRUST**

“The organization man seeks a redefinition of his place on earth – a faith that will satisfy him that what he must endure has a deeper meaning than appears on the surface.” – William Whyte

“Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined.” – Toni Morrison

“Trust is a very big word.” Sebastian raised his eyebrows as he looked at me from across the table. I had just asked if he trusted his coworkers. The Latino manager, who had been at The Jones for less than a year, smiled coyly as he contemplated the question. “I trust that they can do a good job,” he said; “I trust that they are committed to the company.” Chuckling, he added, “I trust that they want to further themselves in life.” Recalling one colleague in particular, he remarked, “I trust *him* blindly because in the seven months that I’ve been here, I have had a lot of successes. And a lot of those successes I attribute to [his] willingness to help me succeed.”

As I continued my research at The Jones and DTC, Sebastian’s comment reverberated in my head. Many of my participants struggled when I asked them to define trust. Sharon, who worked at DTC, responded:

In the context of work...what does [trust] mean? Well, I think it means a lot of different things. I think that the word as, like, itself and its, like, pure definition, I think in a workplace, um it's kind of up for interpretation and may have like different translations or levels or layers. Because there are a lot of things that ladder up or back to trust, but might not be directly trust or look like trust right at the beginning, right? Um, I think it's super important.

Within the span of a five-minute conversation, Donnie, a white manager at DTC, pondered if trust was too precious for work, proclaimed that trust was critical to business relations and suggested that, like “truthiness,”¹ we might now live in a world of “trustiness.” Shannon, at The Jones, told me:

I feel like in a way [trust] means friendship, especially at work, like work friends, whether or not it's outside of work. So, I think friendship is definitely something that it means, and it means that I'm confident that they're gonna say what they say they'll do. And if I tell them not to, like if I tell them something that I don't want anybody else to know, I'm sure that they'll keep that to themselves. Um, I think it means that I value them as a person, and I hope the same goes for them. Yeah.

In one breath, Shannon rattled off several definitions of trust with diverse connotations, such as intimacy, consistency, loyalty and respect. I also observed participants differentiating among workplace relations through various meanings of trust. For example, when I asked Jenna, a server at The Jones, if she trusted her managers, she organized them by different types of trust:

I trust Donele even though sometimes it feels like she's making decisions for the wrong reason. She's fairly an open book and, like, you can always have a conversation with her, and you always know why she's doing some, I mean, it's always for the restaurant or whatever. You know?...I trust Ashley because it's like, it's like she is you. You know what I mean? And she treats you just like we're just like, we're just two people doing the same job function. And she's like on top of her shit. (snaps) I trust Paige too, but a little bit, I feel like Paige just says what you want to hear. She'll always commiserate with you... So I did, like, trust her, but well, I guess trust in the sense of I can talk to her, but, like, trust her to like make things happen for me, maybe not quite as much as, like, an Ashley-type, where I feel like she's like fighting for you a little bit. Um, Paul, I trust as a, on a human level. I definitely don't trust him to do things like, you know, like mess with the side work if you needed to fix the side work ...I don't trust him to take an order at a table. I don't trust him to, like, I don't even trust him, like, if I have a conversation with him about things that need to change.

Jenna described trusting Donele as a consistent manager, Ashley as an advocate, Paige as an empathetic listener and Paul as a good person.

Given these patterns, I began to think of trust as a symbolic vessel devoid of essential meaning and capable of being filled with particular symbolic content, as needed. While, at first blush, this would seem to render trust a vacuous, inconsequential expression, I argue that the assumption that trust has a stable “essence” across time and space ignores the internal variability of the concept and limits its explanatory power.² Pulling insights from relational sociology, I argue that, like other social constructs, trust is influenced by individuals’ knowledge, values and experiences and by the structural and

cultural context in which it unfolds, but it cannot be reduced to nor fully isolated from either.³ Thus, in practice, trust acts as a symbolic short-hand that enables comfort and dependency and provides value, even as its meaning shifts across people, relationships and contexts.

This understanding of trust is distinct from that which dominates much of the extant literature. Like my participants, scholars have grappled to define trust, resulting in a plethora of conceptual frameworks that distinguish different dimensions, institutional bases and temporalities of trust, as well as different modalities of trust (i.e., trust, trust propensity and trustworthiness).⁴ These frameworks have been useful in providing detailed renderings of the concept. They have also helped inform the optimization of trust in work environments by demonstrating how certain aspects of trust vary with social and institutional variables and how trust may be associated with work-related outcomes, such as performance and employee satisfaction.⁵ Nevertheless, the field has remained fractured – both across disciplines and across empirical contexts – creating incompatibilities and redundancies while ignoring the fluid, dynamic and indeterminate nature of trust.⁶

To be fair, it is difficult to model trust as an active, continually shifting concept. As the trust scholar Guido Möllering has pointed out, “the hermeneutic quality of human experience makes definitive models [of trust] ultimately impossible and requires agents to ‘uncover’ reality for themselves” (2001: 413). We therefore need a model not of what trust is, *per se*, but how it is *lived*: in other words, how people perform, interpret and experience trust in everyday work life. And this object – *lived trust* – requires a

framework that can manage symbolic heterogeneity, polysemy, fragmentation and inconsistency.

In a contribution that has been underutilized, Mizrachi and colleagues apply Swidler's (1986; 2001) "repertoire" theory to the case of trust, arguing that this framework adequately captures and makes use of the continually shifting nature of the concept, while also incorporating dynamics of agency and power.⁷ I concur with their assessment, and I follow them in adopting – and expanding – a "repertoire of trust" approach. As this framework views different cultural elements of trust as "implements of varying shapes that fit the hand more or less well, are not always easy to use, and only sometimes do the job" (2001: 24),⁸ it is well poised to capture how workplace actors construct trust in creative and pragmatic ways that both liberate and constrain them.

While the "repertoire of trust" framework is therefore useful in understanding trust in the contemporary workplace, its analytic power has thus far suffered from two limitations. First, in their study of Israeli and Jordanian managers working within a multinational corporation, Mizrachi et al. rely on two overarching forms, or logics, of trust – what they refer to as calculative and normative – and assume that each nationality group relies primarily on one logic at a time. By ignoring the ways in which these two logics of trust may be used in combination with one another, the scholars inadvertently reify each logic and reinforce the very mutual exclusivity of instrumentality and normativity that economic sociologists have long questioned.⁹ Second, they follow Swidler in assuming that cultural innovation – in this case, alterations or adaptations in how trust is defined and employed – occur primarily within heightened moments of unsettledness. Specifically, Mizrachi et al. highlight how Israeli and Jordanian managers

switch logics of trust during a period of intense political unrest. Yet, I contend that unsettled times may not be as isolated within specific time periods and geographic locations as previous research has assumed. I suggest that unsettledness is a dominant feature of everyday life, with people continually oscillating between settled and unsettled moments and contexts. In the course of everyday life, people constantly navigate events that threaten their sense of stability: family members and friends fall ill; employers announce restructuring initiatives; consequential mistakes are made; romantic relationships end; incidents of mass violence come into awareness; valued colleagues are terminated or move on to new opportunities. These moments can be overwhelming and all-encompassing, yet they are also routinely compartmentalized, as people seek to continue with daily life. Thus, I suggest cultural salience and innovation occur in a more quotidian fashion than repertoire theory has previously assumed.

In this chapter, I offer a means of overcoming these shortcomings. First, I specify five logics of trust that were routinely pulled upon – sometimes in isolation and sometimes in combination – during participants’ performances, interpretations and experiences of trust. After detailing my participants’ logics of trust, I then connect repertoire theory to McDonnell, Bail and Tavory’s (2017) reformulation of resonance theory to describe how and when different logics are employed in the context of contemporary work life.

Repertoire of Trust

Through my interviews and observations at DTC and The Jones, I discerned five dominant logics that made up participants’ repertoire of trust: legible, versatile, intimate, allied and righteous (see Table 2). These logics are distinct from sources, bases or

mechanisms of trust. I am not presenting these logics as the psychological underpinnings of trust – my data cannot support that. Instead, these logics represent the cluster of symbolic resources (frames, vocabularies, symbols) that people use to think about and talk about trust at work. They are compressed stories about what it means to trust and be trusted. As sense-making heuristics, they help people navigate their work lives. My participants pulled upon these different logics, individually and jointly, to understand, evaluate and justify workplace actions and relationships. In considering “lived trust,” I argue that trust is therefore a process that relies on this repertoire for its performance.

Table 2. Repertoire of Trust

	Logic	Associated Vocabularies
Legible	Trust is about comprehension	Consistency, veracity, transparency
Versatile	Trust is about cooperation	Flexibility, creativity, negotiation
Intimate	Trust is about acceptance	Non-judgment, tolerance, empathy
Allied	Trust is about loyalty and fairness	Reciprocity, advocacy, confidentiality
Righteous	Trust is about morality	Integrity, ethic, responsibility

The *legible* logic portrays trust as an ability to comprehend actions or events, typically based on common routines or a shared logic. Legible trust is often future-oriented, associated with expectations and the prediction of behaviors and events. As Mizrachi et al. (2007) highlight, the emphasis in this logic, which they refer to as calculative trust, is on reducing uncertainty.¹⁰ A number of people employed this vocabulary, telling me they trusted people “for what you expect them to do” (Jonathan, DTC) or “to do what I know they’re gonna do” (Russell, DTC). Matilda, a junior-level employee at DTC, offered a particularly detailed expression of legible trust:

You know, my idea of trust is like, I almost, I think when you figure someone out and like, for example I'm late a lot of the time. [laughs] So like, people just know that and they kind of, but I don't think it's, like, they're not gonna trust me because of that. It's just also knowing people. There's trust and there's knowing people and trusting in that ... no one's gonna go out of their way to deceive you because everyone's really busy and just wants to be who they are. And I think you can just trust people with what they're showing you. Does that make sense?

Here, trust is about being able to rationalize what others do and say. Abigail, at The Jones, ran through a number of people that she trusted, employing a logic of legible trust that accounted for both positive and negative behaviors:

I trust that, like, if I were to tell like Cecilia something, she might tell it to...Amanda and Elsa and Chelsea, which I would also be okay with 'cause I have that expectation that like, that could happen...I also trust DJ to freak out when it's busy. Or I trust Donele to micromanage when she's stressed...I trust that, you know, Paul won't do three of the voids that I give him that night. And so it like affects my relationship with how I work with them differently...Like, [working in a restaurant] is the same thing day in and day out, so if, you know, like A plus B equals C, then A plus B is not gonna equal D the next day, it's gonna be C again... I don't know...where prediction and trust lies, but I think that you can choose who you go to for particular things because, based on past experience.

Abigail's trust in this case was not explicitly imbued with moral judgment or affect. In a largely unpredictable environment, trust simply meant that she could discern patterns in others' behavior that allowed her to anticipate their actions.

Legible trust could, at times, be bolstered by a sense of professionalism, which increased the expectation that people would conform to workplace norms, or by a sense of competence, which increased the perceived likelihood that others *could* follow through on things they had said. Alena, at The Jones, told me she trusted a lot of the veteran servers to cover her tables if she had to go to the bathroom because she knew they could handle it if things became really busy. At DTC, Sean described trusting one of his direct reports because she communicated in a professional manner and was very competent. He felt confident that she would address any issues that came up in a way that aligned with company and industry expectations.

The logic of *versatile trust* focuses on cooperation. In particular, this logic emphasizes flexibility and negotiation over rigid procedures, standards and roles, portraying such versatility as a means of managing tensions between outdated or unrealistic structures and everyday realities. Jenna, for example, recalled one manager at The Jones, whom all of the staff greatly trusted, but who had since left the company. Describing the trusted manager, she said, “he was like one of those people that’s like a leader, not a boss...he’d always let you break stuff down [at the end of the night] when it made sense. He was always doing what made sense.” By referring to “what made sense,” Jenna did not mean that it made sense in legible terms – as in it followed a steady logic and could be predicted – but rather that it aligned with a given situation.

Versatile trust often meant that one was willing to “think outside of the box” when the situation required it. Ryan, a bartender at The Jones, described trusted managers using the logic of versatile trust: “people who are less corporate, more reasonable, more flexible.” He identified Paige, in particular, as a manager that he trusted because she seemed willing to stray from restaurant standards. Indeed, Paige described herself, saying “I just have never been a person to be, like, steadfast on the rules. Like, there’s so much grey area, that it should be considered.” She believed this quality increased the staff’s trust in her, in part, because it allowed her to incorporate workers’ perspectives into her process. Constance, a mid-level manager at DTC, also emphasized communal and interactive decision-making, saying, “I think there has to be a level of inspiration, collaboration. I think there has to be a level of dialogue where you feel like you’ve been heard.” Versatile trust was about demonstrating individuality and adaptability in a corporate and data-driven context that could sometimes feel quite rigid

and unforgiving. For example, Edith told me that even though her new boss, Robin, was not a subject-matter expert in their department, she trusted her a lot because “she’s willing to have a conversation with you. Like, there’s nothing off the table. She’s flexible, and that means a lot to me.” Robin’s flexibility was particularly important now, as Edith was pregnant and contemplating various potential scheduling arrangements for the future.

However, the logic of versatile trust was not limited to descriptions of managers. Mario, at DTC, told me that he trusted Rose, a white woman who reported to him, because she was flexible with her schedule. He noted, “it’s terrible to even say this, but in general as a person, in terms of her life, she’s not married, doesn’t have any - those obligations are not there...I need somebody who’s going to be flexible.” Valerie, a junior level worker at the company told me that she thought others trusted her because she was willing to step in and do things that were beyond her particular job description: “even if it’s not my job...if I have a couple seconds to help, I will help...I try my best to really help them, and I feel like they do the same for me.” This willingness to help out, even when not formally compelled, came up at The Jones as well. Bussers told me about trusting servers who would clear empty plates from their tables, and servers described trusting food runners who would handle guests’ one-off requests (i.e., extra ketchup) directly rather than just relay it to the server, even though it was technically not their job.

The logic of *intimate trust* was distinct from legible and versatile trust, as it was more personal and involved a sense of validation and approval from others. When I asked Conrad, the stern, middle-aged Vice President of Finance at DTC, how people earned his trust, he responded in surprisingly personal terms, saying, “I have to feel that,

uh, they like me as a person...they see who I am.” Similarly, Rosaline, who was originally from Puerto Rico and had just started working at DTC within the past six months, described trust as “opening up to someone and trusting them to accept me for who I am...when I express myself how I want to express myself, would you see me in a negative term? Do you have a label on me? Do you see me just for Rosaline? Or am I just a girl with big hair?” Intimate trust emphasized the affirmation of one’s humanity and dignity.

In this way, intimate trust created “safe spaces” in which people could allow one another to be human, to be fallible. As Donnie, a manager at DTC, told me, with trust, “people are more comfortable. In a way, it’s like breathing. Like, can I actually breathe for a little bit? So, that’s natural.” He described trusting another senior manager at the company using the language of intimate trust, saying:

Like now Casey and I, I think we're good friends. I mean, we've golfed together, we've hung out together. We've had a laugh together. Um, doesn't mean we completely see eye to eye. My wife thinks he's a chauvinist pig and, and he thinks he's a chauvinist pig, but he's not really. Like he is just, he, he's he's just a goofball, and he thinks that's funny, and it's not funny. It's not funny to be big and to poke at people who are smaller. Like, you know, he, he doesn't mean it to be that way. But I think there is, I trust him...in a friend way, in a very *human*, outside of work way.

The logic of *allied trust* was also more personal. Allied trust, however, was less about how trust facilitated a sense of comfort within a given relationship and more about a belief that the other person would honor the terms of that relationship. Thus, allied trust emphasized things like reciprocity, confidentiality and loyalty. The language of allied trust could vary in intensity. In some cases, it was simply about reciprocating effort or favors. At The Jones, Shay told me she trusted other servers, like Liz or Lynn, because they were fair. If she picked up a shift for them, they would do the same for her at some

point. Ashley, a manager at The Jones, described a similar dynamic with another manager, David. She noted:

I definitely feel like David trusts me. We're always texting and it's like if I forget to do something I'm like "I totally forgot to do this, can you please take care of it? I'm so sorry. I know it's like an extra task for you." And he's like "it's totally fine. I'll let you take all the credit." You know and then like he'll do the same for me like, "Hey I need this to get done, and I'm not there," and I'm like, "don't worry about it. I got it."

In other cases, the language of allied trust was less focused on fairness and reciprocity, instead emphasizing loyalty. Shari at DTC described trust by saying, "it encompasses: can I talk to you and it stay with you if I ask it to? Or if something goes wrong, will you stand up and take the bullet? Absolutely, I would do that for my team. And they know that. If they send something, and it's wrong, I will take the heat for it." In employing the logic of allied trust, Shari expressed that she would be loyal to members of her team, even when they were in the wrong. While this stance entails a degree of acceptance, it is less about whether or not she would judge her team members and more about whether or not she would stand up for them against others. A number of people described trust as having someone's "back." Kevin, a black chef at The Jones, told me that he trusted one of his supervisors, Evan, because he "always, *always* has my back. He always defends the things that I do." He recalled, as an example, how Evan had pushed strongly for his recent promotion. Zoe employed a similar degree of intensity describing her own trustworthiness within her past relationship with her boss, Russell:

So he was literally never in the office for the months of March and April, which became a bigger issue because there were complaints that he got promoted into this role, and he wasn't there. So in turn, everyone was coming to me. Now I had his back 110%, and I defended him in every sense of the word. (taps table for emphasis) I was like, "Nope. This is what he's doing. This is when he's checking in..." literally, I defended him like I would my husband.

The logic of allied trust was about demonstrating allegiance to the relationship, and defending and/or advocating for the other, especially when they were not there to do so themselves.

The final logic I observed, that of *righteous trust*, focused less on relational dynamics and more on moral evaluations. People employed righteous trust to indicate whether or not they thought someone else was a good person. Jonathan, at DTC, employed this logic of trust when describing a certain “class” of people: “you have a lot of people that are empathetic, and they want to help others. They have a firm belief that, you know, that's part of their purpose in life, is to be a good person, and to be forthright and proactive about helping others, and also to be somebody that can be trusted.” Al, at The Jones, pulled upon righteous trust as he told me about how he really trusted Mateo, another bartender, because he was an all-around “great person.” Liz, also at The Jones, told me she trusted people based on her level of respect for them. She explained that she trusted another server, Janice, noting: “I respect her work ethic.” She added, that she trusted me after observing me at work: “Like *you* were awesome. I was like, I really respect this girl. I saw how hard you worked, and you were just very open, like okay sure, let's do it. You were so optimistic and great and hard-working. I was like, I respect this girl.”

This logic of trust often relied on observation from afar. Ronald, a manager at DTC, told me trust was about “how you carry yourself...do you have that integrity that you can carry yourself through, and you're true to your thought...like what are your intentions? If they're malicious or they're good.” Kent, at DTC, recalled how he came to trust a coworker, Leonard, by watching him in a meeting.

Leonard literally, on the other hand, I was simply watching him in a client meeting as he spoke, knowing that he was communicating with the clients on their level about their brand better than anybody in creative had done during the meeting...literally, he went out on a tightrope and brought in information he had gained on his own over the month of this proposal period and despite his attempts to share this information with creatives who "oh, we know this all, we don't need this." He realized they missed the mark...and he just saved it. So I was like, okay, this guy could have done a number on [the creative team] by going "okay, I gave you this information and you didn't use it, and at this point, I don't care if we lose the job." But he was not going to do that. He was like "I can save this." And he didn't do it to save it for himself. He did it for the team, which was phenomenal to see.

Kent trusted Leonard from that point forward because he thought he was a smart, hard-working individual without a personal agenda.

These five logics – legible, versatile, intimate, allied and righteous – form the building blocks of trust at work. They are not mutually exclusive; for example, a firm dedication to relational principles, as emphasized within the logic of allied trust, also entails a degree of rationality and virtue, key elements within the legible and righteous logics. Nevertheless, each logic contains a discernably distinct account of what it means to trust, and my participants used logics both separately and in combination to fill the concept of trust with meaning.

The Will to Trust

As argued in the introduction, managerial discourse orients individuals toward the production of trust at work. My participants described *wanting* to trust, *needing* to trust and *having* to trust their coworkers, supervisors and reports.¹¹ Shannon, a bartender at The Jones, told me that she trusted her manager despite her reservations about his leadership abilities. A passion in her voice, she said, "I *want* to trust Paul [her manager]. And I, I do." Paul, in a separate conversation, commented to me, "I think the staff *needs* to trust management, that management has their best interests at stake...if they have no trust in management, then everything kind of falls apart." Kevin, who was a kitchen manager at The Jones, said it was equally necessary for managers to trust their staff, "in

order to be really successful, the people that...work with you or under you, you *need* to trust them. You need to know they would do right by you every time, and if you can't have that 100%, you can't sleep at night." When I asked Diane, at DTC, why she trusted the people who reported to her, she responded, "I think it's because I have to...I *have* to trust that my team, that I hired the right people, that they're doing what I ask of them, and that they have the best intentions." Lastly, in describing his relationship with Donnie, his supervisor at DTC, Jonathan told me, "he's my mentor at the agency. So, like for me, I *have* to trust him. You can't have a mentor that you don't trust. It just doesn't work that way. That's not a mentor. That's somebody that you're kissing ass to."

The language of trust, cultivated through managerial discourse, provides workplace actors with the available vocabulary for communicating with and relating to one another. Simultaneously, the structure of collective bargaining agreements and the cultural valorization of teamwork and collaboration limit alternative pathways and resources through which workplace actors can express substantive critique and/or negativity.¹² Whether individuals feel a deep sense of trust in their colleagues and employers or not, displays of trust are valued within the modern workplace. In this section, I first outline the dominant "template" for workplace relations and discuss how this template orients actors towards trust at work. I then pull from conversations with my participants to demonstrate how people are both pulled and pushed toward the accomplishment of trust at work.

The Template of Contemporary Work Relations

The human relations paradigm, which became prominent within the American workplace during the early twentieth century, serves as a foundation for the dominant template of

workplace relations in the U.S. today.¹³ Two features of this template are key to the argument here. First, this framework casts worker dissatisfaction and conflict as a problem to be eliminated. This can be seen, for example, in the writings of Elton Mayo (1922:16):

we must solve the problem of industrial peace or be crushed by circumstance. It is obvious that the worker, generally speaking, is not facing the tasks which present and future hold with courage and determination; on the contrary he views the part allotted to him with suspicion and dislike. This attitude of dislike, suspicion and fear must be eliminated.

Notably, as others have observed, Mayo reframed discontent not as a symptom of broader social problems but rather as an individual deficit or pathology.¹⁴ Thus, discord became a problem that should be fixed at the individual level – by workers and by managers – as opposed to the level of the organization or society.

Second, the template proposes open communication, emotional control and relationship management tactics as the means for overcoming unwanted discord and achieving personal and collective success in the workplace. Communication is lauded for bringing conflict into the open, while emotional and social intelligence and skill are valued for their utility in resolving workplace tensions.¹⁵ Trust, as a conciliatory mechanism, is a critical component of these templated solutions. As previously argued, trust has emerged – through managerial discourse – as a workplace commodity, with status and value conferred to those who trust and are trusted, and to workplaces where trust is deemed to be prevalent.¹⁶

In summary, this template of work relations, produced through managerial discourse and practice, eschews prolonged conflict and critique and motivates trust as an individual and collective project at work. In Foucauldian terms, it is a powerful regulatory apparatus, providing a map for workplace sociability that not only shapes

immediate action but also the field of all possible work actions and relations, and in the process, produces particular workplace subjectivities. Notably, individual actions molded by this discursive template are seen through the lens of individual agency and choice,¹⁷ making trust a potent and malleable form of power that is particularly well-matched to the post-Fordist landscape.¹⁸

Resilience and Performativity: The Pull and Push of Trust at Work

Lanie and I met in a dimly lit café on a surprisingly chilly spring morning. She leaned in as we talked, her long, wavy, brown hair cascading over her shoulders and her hands cupped firmly around her coffee. DTC was her first professional job after college, and she had been there for three years. She confessed to growing increasingly dissatisfied at the company. Historically, DTC had produced excellent marketing campaigns, yet in recent years, she felt as though leadership was more interested in business growth than in creating quality work. On a more personal level, she had experienced harsh verbal attacks from managers at various points in her tenure and, as she whispered in a barely audible register, sexual harassment. As our conversation transitioned to trust, she commented, “trust, at the end of the day, it’s number one. If you don’t feel like you can trust...” She stopped mid-sentence, uncertain of how to complete it, “I can’t imagine not feeling like I can trust my coworker. I couldn’t work there.” When I pressed her about what made her believe that trust was so important, she paused and then said, “someone told me the other day, like, love is a choice...I think trust is a choice, too.” Thus, despite every reason not to, Lanie was strongly oriented toward trust, and she felt like this decision was one that she, alone, owned.

While the template of work relations orients American workers toward trust, my participants did not describe feeling coerced in this regard. Instead, they described numerous emotional, moral and interactional benefits associated with the accomplishment of trust at work. In the face of insecurity or injustice, I observed people at DTC and The Jones actively employing trust to bracket doubt and negativity. Carly's case is illustrative of this. A few days before we spoke, Carly received notice that she was being laid off from DTC due to a restructuring initiative. She was now in the process of working out her final two weeks. Surprisingly, she told me that the situation had not undermined her trust in the company or with her managers, "I mean, through everything that happened, I would say that if this whole thing happened in a different way, obviously I would lose my trust with...my manager...[but] I would say no. I haven't lost my trust."

It is certainly possible that Carly felt compelled to express ongoing trust as a professional display, especially as she anticipated using her workplace social network to find future employment. However, I also saw how, through trust, she was able to interpret the conditions surrounding her layoff in a very particular way. She recalled sitting at her desk around 7pm a few weeks earlier and observing two of her supervisors enter the senior manager's office and shut the door. When they came out, the senior manager apologized, and Carly remembered that her two supervisors seemed annoyed, even expressing that, "it wasn't fair." While she disregarded it at the time, Carly now recalled the situation through the lens of trust and suspected this was when her supervisors were informed about her layoff. She felt comforted by this interpretation, which portrayed her supervisors as upset – and also somewhat powerless – in relation to her layoff. About her direct manager, she commented, "I think that she was looking out

for me when this whole restructuring happened. I mean, obviously I don't know the nitty gritty, but I think that she was very stressed knowing that my position was getting cut." If Carly's manager was "looking out for her," she was unsuccessful in her efforts; nevertheless, implying the logic of allied trust, Carly was able to come to terms with the situation without disrupting the relationship.

Given this trust, Carly had not given up on the possibility of continuing employment at DTC. A number of colleagues suggested she apply for a contract position at the company, and she was talking through that possibility with senior management. She looked determined, not distraught, as she told me, "you can't dwell because that's when you lose out on opportunities." She noted that she was not wasting time "walking around, wandering, chit-chatting," and even though her last day was scheduled for Friday, she claimed, "that's probably not gonna be the last of me." Carly enacted trust to bracket negativity and doubt, and this bracketing enabled her move forward with resilience and to focus on pursuing what she now saw as a desirable outcome. Weeks later, Carly was in a new contract position at the company. Her situation confirms what studies of trust in other settings, such as healthcare, have shown: within a position of vulnerability, trusters can actively pull upon trust to cope with doubt, anxiety or indignity.¹⁹ However, it remains unclear if this was the best route of action for Carly. Her enduring trust in managers framed her interpretation of being laid off in innocuous terms, and as a result, she did not feel slighted, devalued or betrayed by the process. Instead, she exhibited a sense of gratitude for any opportunity to stay within the company, even though that meant taking a less secure and prestigious contract position.

Had Carly interpreted her layoff through a lens of distrust, she may have been motivated to seek a better position elsewhere.

In other cases, trust allowed people to enact agency and jockey for power. Across both DTC and The Jones, participants at all levels expressed a strong distrust of what they viewed as “corporate” policies, procedures and mentalities. One night at The Jones, I observed how trust, contrasted with formality, could be seen as a means of negotiating flexibility and autonomy. Jones’ policy required two servers to team up for guest parties of twelve or more people. Management believed this helped ensure good service, but servers detested the practice because it meant they would have to split the tip.

Occasionally, managers allowed exceptions, letting someone take a large party alone. On this busy night during the December holiday season, one of my coworkers, Cheryl, took a thirteen-person party on her own without asking permission. The manager on duty, DJ, found out and reprimanded her. Explaining the situation to DJ, Cheryl said, “Listen, I wasn't trying to defy any managerial rule, or something. I just thought it was, uh, like a holiday treat, or a leniency towards me because I just had a party that, like, completely didn't tip me. And, all the tables [used for the thirteen-person party] were in my section.” She implored DJ to exhibit versatile trust, but he did not budge, responding rigidly, “okay, but you know, I gave you clear instructions, and you know what the rules are.” Taking a slow, deliberate breath, Cheryl replied, “yeah, but rules don’t always have to stay that way.” Venting about the interaction later, she told me, “the only reason he's sitting down and talking to [me] is 'cause his power was pushed aside.”

In the absence of versatile trust, Cheryl was reminded of her position within the formal structure, and it felt disempowering. Lauding more participatory management

styles, she added, “I will work better for a leader if they will work *with* me, you know?” She commented how she had this type of relationship with other managers at the company but not DJ. Cheryl preferred working with these managers, as through the relations of trust, she could often develop some control over her material working conditions. However, as the interaction with DJ reveals, trust-mediated benefits were ultimately contingent upon managerial discretion. In this way, trust offered the hope of agency and empowerment, but neither trust nor its benefits could be guaranteed.

Managers also navigated workplace relations through trust. At one of the Jones’ quarterly “town hall” meetings, for example, a corporate-level manager named Aaron spoke at length about how his primary objective at work was to build relations of trust with the staff. Noting an inability to observe every interaction within the restaurant, he declared his strong trust in workers’ dedication and ability to consistently deliver positive guest experiences. Relying on the performative power of trust, Aaron anticipated that such declarations would compel workers to act in trustworthy ways. Indeed, managers preferred this mechanism of normative control compared to more direct measures, in part, because it allowed them greater autonomy in their role. As Sean, a manager at DTC, explained, trust meant that he could “rely on [people] to get the job done and not have to micromanage ... you can kind of loosen the slack on them and not have to constantly be worried.” Micromanagement was a sign of distrust, and it was highly stigmatized. When I asked Hugh, another manager at DTC, about his management style, he echoed a common refrain, “I’m not a micromanager! I hate micromanaging. Micromanaging means to me that it’s somebody who doesn’t trust you...it’s constant hand holding.” Thus, the trust of managers not only bound workers to a moral ethic, but it also allowed –

in fact, encouraged – a detached style of management that could undermine close mentoring relationships.

Back at The Jones' town hall meeting, another senior executive interjected into Aaron's soliloquy, noting how it was equally important for workers to trust managers. He explained, "people have this big bucket of discretionary effort, and we can't ask you to use that. You have to want to. We want you to want to work harder." Managers therefore sought to elicit trust from workers to help obscure power relations and legitimate authority in a contemporary, American business context in which traditional and bureaucratic structures have largely fallen out of favor. Stuart, the CEO and owner of The Jones, expanded on this later when we talked one-on-one:

I feel like, when we talk about [trust] with managers, they often times, start with this: how much they trust other people. I feel like if people trust me, that's the most important thing. My trust for them, in them, is way less important than whether they trust me. Because if they trust me, they will take chances, make decisions, feel empowered, all of those kind of things. Cause I, from the bottom of my heart, just want everybody to succeed. And if they don't believe that, it's tougher for them to do their job.

Thus, managers often used trust *in* workers as a mechanism of control and trust *from* workers as a mechanism of consent. Across both cases, regulation is internalized within the worker.

This is not to suggest, however, that managers were not themselves bound to relations of trust. As both trusting and being trustworthy are key dictates of the managerial discourse, managers also felt the performative power of trust. To be untrusting was to be a micromanager – which as described above was highly stigmatized – and to not be seen as trustworthy was to be a bad leader, as I will discuss more in Chapter 5.

This brief discussion explains how workers became motivated, in the first place, to seek resonance within the repertoire of trust. In what follows, I focus my attention on Mosseri

how workplace actors employed resonance to select between specific logics of trust, leading them to construct meanings of trust that enabled its accomplishment across various situations.

Practical Resonance

A lingering weakness of cultural repertoire theory has been its inability to explain variation in the use of particular cultural elements across groups and situations.²⁰ Why do people pull upon certain “tools” in some cases but not others? I argue that the concept of resonance – as recently revised through pragmatist theory – can help explain some of the heterogeneity in when and how people use specific items in their “toolkits.”²¹ I then apply this to the case of trust at work, illustrating how people mix and match different logics to accomplish trust in the contemporary workplace.

The concept of resonance surfaced within sociology primarily through the social movements literature. Snow and Benford (1988) describe resonance as the “responsive chord” that makes some frames more “potent” than others. In other words, resonance is the process through which some frames become meaningful and motivate action.

According to this theory, frames resonate when they are credible – meaning they are internally consistent and believable – and when they are salient, meaning they “fit” with one’s life experiences and worldviews, as well as with broader cultural themes.²²

Recently, however, resonance theory has come under scrutiny for its tendency to view cultural objects as inherently “resonant” or “not resonant” and for explaining variation in resonance solely through alignments with existing beliefs, structures and cultural narratives—both of which make it difficult to theorize cultural innovation and social change.²³

Addressing these shortcomings, McDonnell and colleagues (2017) argue that resonance is not an essential congruence between cultural objects and worldviews or between objects and familiar experiences; rather, it is an emergent process that occurs in the relations between cultural objects, audiences and the situations they face. Drawing on pragmatist theory,²⁴ they recast resonance as “the act of *making* a cultural object congruent as a person works through a situation or problem” (2017: 3). Resonance is experienced as an “aha!” moment not because the cultural object inherently clicks with a given situation, but because the actor was able to apply it “to make sense of a new situation or problem that differs from problems that [the cultural object] routinely solves” (p. 4). In other words, resonance is the satisfaction experienced through creative problem-solving.

I suggest that this revised theory of resonance offers one possible explanation for how people select from among the tools within a given cultural repertoire. Specifically, I posit that actors mix and match cultural resources within the repertoire of trust in an experimental fashion until something resonates, meaning the cultural object(s) provide a satisfactory sense of solution to a given problem.

Mixing Trust: Meaning and Resonance

Workers do not simply trust or distrust, as if turning a light switch on and off. Instead, they act like a sound mixer, experimentally turning up or turning down the volume on different logics of trust within specific situations until a meaning resonates. This allows them to accomplish trust at work and helps to explain the variation noted in the meanings of trust across individuals and contexts.

Shawn, a server at The Jones, offers one example of this process. Shawn related to me how the dynamic with one of his managers, DJ, had recently shifted. Describing the situation, he said:

(laughs) All right, like I go around and play all the damn time... I play grab ass, which is I guess technically sexual harassment at work. (laughs)...It's just joking around at a restaurant. And uh one manager saw me. The only reason why I did it around him is because I trusted him and thought we were friends: DJ. But he ended up pulling me down to the office with Donele [another manager] and gave me this whole speech about like HR and sexual harassment and how that was uncalled for and how it makes people uncomfortable, *you* make people uncomfortable blah blah blah. I was like, "Okay, yeah."

This situation marked a moment of discord at work, thus creating a problem situation for Shawn within his work relationships. Within his description, Shawn employs the logic of intimate trust, expecting that DJ knew him and would accept him unconditionally. Thus, DJ's rejection of Shawn's behavior, and as noted at the end of the excerpt experienced by Shawn as a rejection of himself, would appear to be a deep betrayal of intimate trust.

While not explicitly stated, Shawn also implies that he approached the situation with a logic of versatile trust, in which he expected "playful" behaviors to be considered within the context of the restaurant culture. Here, too, DJ betrayed this trust by holding him accountable to more traditional understandings of workplace behavior.

Yet, when I posed the question of whether DJ had betrayed his trust, Shawn rejected the idea outright. He explained that he "expected people to be human." Pausing for a moment to consider DJ specifically, he suddenly smiled and said, "I trust him to be a manager first." Now aware of the conflict of interest between himself and DJ, which would cause prolonged tensions in this work relationship, Shawn shifted from the logics of intimate and versatile trust to the logic of legible trust. This logic resonated with Shawn because, in its emphasis on conformity to roles and an ability to predict behaviors,

it allowed him to overcome sustained conflict with DJ and continue to accomplish trust within that relationship.

Later when talking about some of his coworkers, Shawn engaged in a similar process of resonance, switching among logics of trust to address workplace tensions. Referring to coworkers who were more serious in the workplace, he said, “it’s kind of good to have some people who do the right thing, and I trust them to, you know, if they see me doing something wrong, they would tell on me...I trust them to be *not my friend*. I can trust them to be coworkers and put the job first. Just like with the managers.” When I asked Shawn what trust among his coworkers whom he viewed as friends looked like, he pivoted, noting, “see, this is a different kind of trust. We’re talking about two different trusts right now...I trust my friends to be my friends...if I slack off or say something crazy, they won’t say anything cause they’re my friends.” In talking about his friends at work, Shawn reverts back to intimate and allied trust. His friends accepted him for who he was, and they would not ‘rat him out’ due to a respect for the relationship. With coworkers that he could not trust using these more personal logics, he found alternatives, such as legible or even righteous (“people who do the right thing”) trust, that provided a feasible solution within his working relationship.

I observed similar processes at DTC. For example, I had lunch at a nearby café with Asia, a manager in the finance department. Asia described herself as “trusting” yet caveated this by saying, “but I’m very careful with how I trust.” Throughout the conversation, I noted that she often pulled upon legible and allied logics of trust. She spent much of our hour-long meal, however, divulging the very difficult dynamic that currently existed with her supervisor, Conrad. She detailed how Conrad hoarded

knowledge, blocked her from opportunities and frequently stole credit for her work. He could also be difficult to be around. He was rude, and he had a reputation for yelling and for making people cry. She recalled how, the month before, he had offhandedly commented that he wanted a rifle so that he could shoot insubordinate staff.

Nevertheless, as we walked back toward the office in the warm summer weather, Asia expressed a bewildering empathy for her supervisor's behavior, saying, "he means it in a good way. He just takes his work personally. He doesn't know how to separate them [work and personal life]. He literally feels that if you do something that, that you personally attacked him. And then he just gets mean." She noted that she wanted to trust him. Sighing, she commented, "[he] has a really good heart. He's just never had a good mentor to mentor him to know what's appropriate and not appropriate." In this way, I observed Asia experimenting with alternative logics of trust. In particular, she was attempting to employ a righteous and versatile logic of trust whereby she understood her supervisor as an ultimately good person whose behavior was understandable when put in context. Noting her struggle, I commented that trust seemed to be a big problem, to which she responded, "oh, trust is huge!" Interestingly, she then switched from her *own trust* in Conrad, to *Conrad's inability to trust* others, noting, "Conrad will tell you right out, 'I don't trust people. I don't trust anybody.'" Asia had not yet landed on a logic of trust that fully resonated, yet in the meantime, she was unable to proclaim that she did not trust Conrad. Instead, she highlighted Conrad's own hesitance to trust, marking him as the one with the problem, as opposed to her.

Thus, we see the significant amount of effort people exert to accomplish trust within workplace relations. People want to believe that those with whom they work are

trustworthy, and they are willing to bend and expand their definitions of trust considerably to make this belief fit with their realities.

Conditions of Resonance

Another example at DTC provides a means for exploring the conditions that make resonance – the sense of satisfaction experienced when successfully applying cultural objects to address real-world problems – more or less possible. About a month after I arrived at the marketing agency, a company-wide email was sent out, alerting everyone to a recently published press article. The article revealed how all marketing and media agencies owned by the holding company, MAC, were cutting costs through hiring freezes, delays of merit-based raises and promotions and limits on business travel, all as a result of predicted declines in market conditions. As a subsidiary of MAC, DTC was accountable to these mandates, yet there had not been any previous announcements within the company. In fact, the news article was the result of a leaked memo, making it somewhat of an embarrassment for both DTC and MAC. Adam, the CEO of DTC and the one who had sold ownership of the company to MAC a few years before, called a company-wide meeting to address the article.

At the meeting, Adam sat in the middle of a large conference table facing an expansive, open area in the office's front lobby. Several members of the executive team filed into the chairs that surrounded him on either side. Someone had also set up rows of chairs, capable of seating somewhere between 50 and 75 people, facing Adam's table. As the space filled up, Adam joked that everyone was gathering to help him celebrate his fourteen-year anniversary with the company, which was that very day. The executives around him laughed, but most people appeared preoccupied with their own thoughts and conversations. Transitioning, he lamented that the current conversation could not be as

light-hearted. He then addressed the news article, noting first that much of the business travel within DTC was paid for through client budgets and thus they would not be significantly affected by that mandate. He then moved to the merit raises and promotions, which were being delayed by 90 days.

At this point, Adam said he was “going off script” and quipped that Lark, the communications manager, would probably kill him later for doing so. He explained to the team that he had decided to acquiesce to MAC’s request – or as he later described it, do them a “favor” – by delaying raises and promotions for three months. He continued that, sometimes, being part of a larger network required prioritizing the collective good over individual interests. The overall benefits of being in the network, he assured the team, far outweighed any drawbacks. Nevertheless, he knew it was “a hard pill to swallow,” and he admitted that this was not the first time DTC had delayed performance review procedures for MAC (they had previously done so during the acquisition period). He ended by declaring that the leadership team had “good intentions” when making this decision. Today’s conversation, he explained, was simply about having a direct and transparent conversation. Adam then invited people to ask questions, and he responded to their queries with a sense of empathy and understanding, mixed with a steadfast resolve about the current path of action. At one point, someone asked what would happen if market predictions did not improve within 90 days. He replied passionately, saying that another request for delays would “personally” be an issue for him. He opined that the request was acceptable one time but that MAC could not reasonably ask this of them again (even though this was, in fact, the second request of this type). It was about 5pm when the meeting ended, and Adam invited everyone to hang out at the company bar

(located behind us), noting that he was happy to talk further about the announcement. For several hours, he stayed, sipping beer and chatting casually with employees.

The announcement introduced a problem in that it contradicted the traditional sense of an employer-employee contract through which employees could expect economic reward, upward mobility and stability in return for their efforts. In his remarks, Adam pulled upon the various logics within the repertoire of trust. In “going off script” and describing this as an exceptional case that required a unique, one-time solution, he employed a versatile logic. In highlighting transparency, he offered a logic of legible trust. He also experimented with employing the logic of allied trust, in framing the company’s relationship with MAC as requiring a give and take and suggesting this act served as a “favor” that would be – or already had been – reciprocated. Moreover, he employed this logic in noting that he would be “personally” upset if MAC pushed further, viewing that as an un-defendable asymmetry in the relationship. His emphasis on the team’s “good intentions” hinted at a righteous logic of trust, by which DTC leaders were portrayed as good people acting with rectitude. Finally, in listening in an open and non-judgmental manner to employees’ questions and concerns – and speaking with many one-on-one at the bar afterwards – Adam sought to enact an intimate logic of trust.

In response, I observed people at DTC pulling upon these logics as available cultural resources for interpreting and processing the situation. However, not all logics of trust resonated equally. For example, Marsha, a junior-level employee, questioned the logic of righteous and allied trust in this situation, noting, “I would want a parent company to have the same values as us and wanna treat people who make them money well.” She continued, “I come from a long line of people in car sales, family businesses,

all that stuff. I've seen it. My family treats their employees great, so that's important to me." Attempting to employ the righteous logic of trust, Marsha questioned Adam's moral values in selling the company to MAC, and in attempting the allied logic, she expressed disappointment regarding the overarching relationship (between MAC and DTC'ers) he was asking them to honor. While these logics were closely matched to her worldview, the cognitive distance between logic and situation was too great for the allied and righteous logics to achieve resonance for her in this context.

Others demonstrated similar difficulties. Like Marsha, Sean and Jerry held worldviews that led them to desire and expect allied and righteous trust in the workplace. Also like Marsha, they could not reconcile this logic with the situation. Sean, for example, tested the logic of allied trust as he reflected back on the announcement, but this logic failed to resonate when he noted the breach of reciprocity the situation implied with regard to the employee-employer relation:

This is why we work, ultimately, is to get paid, right? I mean, I'm not, like, doing this out of the goodness of my heart. People have expensive apartments, they have lives to pay for...and the whole being a good corporate citizen, and talking about how *our* performance was good but DAN's was bad, and we're getting penalized for it. Like, it's just a very tough pill to swallow.

Attempting to employ the righteous logic, Jerry noted that Adam's lightheartedness during the meeting felt inappropriate and reflected poor judgment. Chastising the performance, Jerry shook his head back and forth as we spoke, exclaiming, "don't laugh about people's money!" Adam violated Jerry's moral code, and thus the righteous logic could not resonate in this case.

Yet, many of my participants continued to express a sense of trust in Adam's handling of the situation. In doing so, they emphasized the legible logic of trust, giving particular attention to Adam's honesty and transparency. Carly, for example, recalled the

event, saying, “Adam called actually I think two meetings regarding it and just was very open, and this is how it’s going. This is what we’re doing.” She continued, “even though it wasn’t the nicest information, the best information, it made me feel safe because it’s like, okay if I have a problem I can go to him. And if there are problems, he will let us know.” Marsha also employed the legible logic, telling me that Adam was “a very transparent and down-to-Earth guy, so I would like to trust him when he says stuff like that.” This interpretation of Adam’s actions as trustworthy demonstrates how workers adjust the volume of different logics to produce an understanding of trust that resonates. In this case, Marsha amplifies the volume of legible trust, while tempering the volume of the allied and righteous logics. This is notable because allied trust, in particular, was the dominant logic that Marsha pulled upon during my other interactions with her. During our interview, for instance, I asked her about the meaning of trust at work, to which she responded:

Um, specifically at work, I think it would be that like we're one team, one dream and that... they, I would trust them that they're looking out for me, just like I would look out for someone else... I would think trust really means that I know someone's making sure a client's not taking advantage of me or that I can trust them that they'll like really care about reviewing me and knowing like, "She's doing this right," you know, "She should be moving up soon," like kind of that is where I find trust in work.

Thus, it seems that allied trust would be the most likely logic for Marsha to pull upon.

However, when this logic failed to align with the situation at hand, she turned down the volume on allied trust, emphasizing instead the legible logic to accomplish trust.

As McDonnell et al. (2017) suggest, resonance is not simply about an essential congruence between cultural object and personal worldviews, or even between object and lived experience. Instead, resonance is “established by the [cognitive] distance between objects, audiences and specific problem situations” (McDonnell et al. 2017: 6). As

highlighted above, Marsha's worldview was one in which she anticipated and desired allied trust at work, yet the chasm between this logic and her convictions, on the one hand, and Adam's statements, on the other, was too great to establish resonance. Thus in thinking about whether or not she trusted Adam, she employed a logic that better "fit" the situation: legible trust. Notably, legible trust was not something that Marsha necessarily expected in this kind of work relationship. Throughout the course of our interactions, she often employed the legible logic when talking about relationships with friends and family, but previous experiences had challenged her belief that such relational qualities were the norm at work. She explained how her prior supervisor had acted in unpredictable, and often unprofessional, ways and how he had made a habit of "sweeping things under the rug," leading her to doubt whether or not she could trust workplace actors within the terms of the legible logic. Following McDonnell and colleagues, I argue that this previous disruption to legible trust provided a subtle but constructive dissonance between this logic and Marsha's view of "how the world worked." As a result of this dissonance, she did not take the legible logic for granted within the workplace. Thus, when it could be successfully applied to this situation, she felt a satisfying sense of accomplishment, or resonance.

Interestingly, the logic of legible trust failed to resonate in this situation for Sean and Jerry. Again, I suggest that this may be due to the distance between logic and worldview – here, the distance was too small. For both of these men, legible trust was strongly aligned with their overall views about what one could and should expect at work. Jerry, for example, told me that trust at work was about being able to "understand or know someone's decisions prior to them making it, giving you the ability to foresee

their actions or understand them.” When I asked Sean about the meaning of trust at work, he also responded in legible terms that emphasized an ability to comprehend and rely on the actions of others: “trusting that person enough to do their job well.” Unlike Marsha, these two men did not bring up previous experiences that had caused them to challenge this worldview. I contend that they took the legible logic for granted in a way that Marsha did not. The logic of legible trust was too familiar, too aligned with their worldview – in other words, the volume was already too far up – to provide the constructive dissonance required for resonance. As a *creative* solution to the problem of betrayed trust, legible trust did not resonate for them in this situation because this was something Sean and Jerry simply expected within their work relationships.

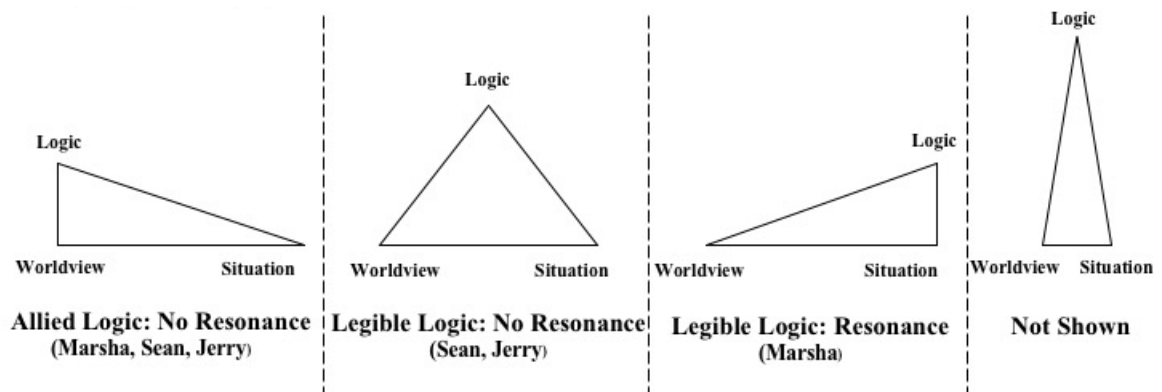


Figure 3. Conditions of Resonance

Figure 3 summarizes the different configurations of beliefs, cultural tools and realities that shaped how my respondents defined trust in this interactional context. When a logic is misaligned with a situation, but consistent with one’s worldviews, it does not resonate. My participants experienced this with the logics of allied and righteous trust. These logics did not resonate, but they also could not be ignored. Instead, they contributed to distrust, a problematic state within the template of workplace relations. When a logic can be easily applied to a situation *but* does not align strongly with one’s worldviews, its

application creates a sense of discovery and thus triggers resonance. Thus, the legible logic resonated for Marsha, leading her to emphasize this logic, while simultaneously turning down the volume on more potent logics within her repertoire. However, when a logic is closely aligned with both worldview and situation, as in the case of Sean and Jerry, it appears to be overlooked. As a result, these two men could not accomplish trust, and within a month of my departure from DTC, Sean was fired and Jerry left for another job, making Carly's statement that, "if you don't trust your company, you either get let go (laughs) or you leave," quite prescient.

Not observed in this vignette is what happens when a logic is discordant with both worldview and situation. While I cannot theorize this configuration here, I speculate that this may represent what others, such as Kunda (1992) have observed: a display of trust that produces both cynicism and alienation.

Conclusion

Sebastian is correct: trust is a very big word. Despite a steady rhythm and common refrain, its tone shifts widely across contexts. I contend that trust in the workplace is neither a fully composed number nor is it a spontaneous improvisation. It is a cultural process developed in concert with lived experience. In this chapter, I have sought to deconstruct this process, outlining five dominant logics of trust at work: legible, versatile, intimate, allied and righteous. I demonstrated how workplace actors are motivated to accomplish trust at work and how they mix and match these logics to "puzzle through" difficult work situations and relationships. Importantly, trust is not simply a rhetorical device, available for manipulation by opportunistic workplace actors. While pragmatically innovated, the meaning of trust has roots within people's worldviews and

is constrained by available cultural vocabularies, dominant workplace templates and practical realities.

The analysis in this chapter offers two primary contributions to existing scholarship. First, I offer a means of overcoming an underdeveloped aspect of cultural repertoire theory: namely, its ability to explain variation in the use of particular cultural elements across groups and situations. By connecting repertoire theory to the revised theory of resonance, I take a first step in addressing this unexplained heterogeneity. I reveal how some cultural tools become privileged through a process of pragmatic resonance that emerges through the relational distance between cultural objects, social actors and situations. I encourage future research to build on this theoretical advancement by both further interrogating the conditions and processes of resonance and by identifying additional mechanisms through which cultural resource selection occurs.

Second, to the scholarship on workplace trust, I offer a more dynamic, relational account of the meanings and manifestations of trust within the workplace. In relying on reified understandings of trust, previous scholarship has often produced one-dimensional portrayals of workplace trust that overlook the political dynamics of how trust is continually negotiated at work.²⁵ Indeed, research on trust in the workplace has long been hindered by the assumption that trust and control are mutually exclusive, leading in many cases, to overly deterministic accounts of workplace relationships.²⁶ My analysis offers a new path forward by providing a framework through which trust, power and agency can be understood and examined as overlapping processes.

In this chapter and throughout the dissertation, I argue that emergent meanings and manifestations of trust shape the experiences and relationships of workplace actors in

ways that organize and stratify modern work. Workplace actors appeal to trust, as a cultural resource, to fend off the dehumanizing aspects of contemporary work. Like Asia, many workers look for clues that employers are trustworthy, and as we will see, they also emphasize their own trustworthiness to bolster their value and bracket their replaceability. Meanwhile, employers and managers, like Adam, invoke trust to shore up their own legitimacy, obscure power differentials and bind workers in relations of obligation. Yet, trust within the contemporary workplace is the historical product of a managerial discourse that has sought to depoliticize workplace relations and maximize individual responsibility. Thus, trust offers ease and comfort within a workplace reality that remains deeply precarious and unequal. As with all compromises, trust is not accomplished without costs, and the most vulnerable workplace groups often disproportionately experience the risk and disappointment it produces.

CHAPTER 3 NOTES

¹ Colbert 2005

² Stinchcombe, in discussing the concept of “freedom” argues, “defining things by their essences is always troublesome in an explanatory science” (1995: 130).

³ By relational sociology, I am referring to the framework collectively developed by scholars such as Abbott (1996), Emirbayer (1997), Tilly (1998) and Zelizer (2012) that emphasize social relations as the starting point for analysis.

⁴ For example, scholars have developed frameworks that distinguish between the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions of trust (Lewis and Weigert 1985; McAllister 1995), frameworks that outline the legible, relational, characteristic and institutional bases of trust assessments (Zucker 1986; Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin 1992; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer 1998; Kramer 1999), frameworks that delineate different temporal points or levels of trust (Lewicki and Bunker 1995; McKnight, Cummings and Chervany 1998) and that examine differences in trust, trust propensity and trustworthiness (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman 1995; Colquitt, Scott and Lepine 2007).

⁵ Researchers have specified the conditions that foster workplace trust and modeled the effects of interpersonal trust on key work-related outcomes, finding that trust bolsters communication, collaboration and effective leadership and improves performance and employee satisfaction (i.e., Fukuyama 1995; Mayer et al. 1995; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard and Werner 1998; Kramer 1999; Dirks and Ferrin 2002; Colquitt et al. 2007; Fulmer and Gelfand 2012).

⁶ For exceptions, see Lewis and Weigert 1985; Weber and Carter 2003.

⁷ Mizrahi, Driori and Anspach 2007.

⁸ See also Swidler 1986.

⁹ Zelizer 1988

¹⁰ While I found legible trust to be comparable to their study, normative trust was too broad. I instead noted several different logics of trust that might fall into the broad category of “normative.”

¹¹ As with the conceptualization of trust as a “choice,” scholars have previously discussed how trust is also a “forced choice” (Barbalet 2009). My findings confirm this, and demonstrate how this dynamic of trust operates within the modern workplace.

¹² Cabanas and Illouz 2014

¹³ The Human Relations discourse is not the only dominant managerial ideology. Authors such as Bendix (1956), Barley and Kunda (1992), Guillén (1994) and Wren and Bedeian (2009) have outlined a number of different ideologies. However, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and I would argue that ideologies from earlier periods, such as Human Relations, inform later ideologies.

¹⁴ For example, Cabanas and Illouz (2016: 28) argue that “the psychological language has made more and more possible the devolution to workers of individual responsibility for the structural deficits of the workplace.” See also Hanlon 2015 and Illouz 2008.

¹⁵ Illouz (2008) provides a more thorough description and analysis of this discourse. A similar process takes place at a more micro level in Burawoy’s (1979) foundational study of the manufacturing floor.

¹⁶ This lexicon has since been perpetuated by corporate cultures and by both popular and managerial texts. Kunda (1992) highlighted the importance of trust in his study of a high-tech corporate culture, and writers such as William Ouchi (1981) and Stephen Covey (2006) have emphasized the importance of trust in their managerial advice texts.

¹⁷ Luhmann (1988) argues, in fact, that trust is defined by “choice,” and that this is what distinguishes trust from other concepts such as confidence and familiarity.

¹⁸ See Vallas and Hill (2012) for a review of the utility of Foucauldian concepts in understanding power in the contemporary work landscape.

¹⁹ Brown and Calnan 2012 argue that dependence and agency are mutually constituting in acts of trust launched from positions of vulnerability (see also Brown 2009; Elliott 2004). Additionally, trust scholars have previously noted how trust can bracket doubt, reduce uncertainty and enable action within the context of insecurity (Barbalet 2009; Giddens 1991; Möllering 2001; Weber and Carter 2003).

²⁰ For critiques, see Lamont 1992; Lamont and Thévenot 2000; Vaisey 2008

²¹ McDonnell et al. 2017

²² Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson 1992; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Schudson 1988.

²³ Benford 1997; McDonnell et al. 2017

²⁴ See Dewey 1929; James 1907; Whitford 2002

²⁵ Functionalist portrayals of trust at work and in economic contexts include those by Dirks and Ferrin (2002), Fukuyama (1995), Fulmer and Gelfand (2012), Mayer et al. (1995), Putnam (2000) and Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard and Werner (1995). In addition, more deterministic accounts of trust – as a mechanism of normative control – can be seen in Barker (1993) and Kunda (1992)

²⁶ I argue that the case of interpersonal workplace trust directs attention to new, more malleable and reflexive processes of control at work and can therefore potentially breathe new life into scholarship on the labor process (i.e., Vallas and Hill 2012). As an enabling and constraining force, processes of trust demonstrate the complex interplay of structure and agency at work.

CHAPTER 4**COMMUNIONS OF CRISIS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRUST-BUILDING AT WORK**

Bad companies are destroyed by crisis.

Good companies survive them.

Great companies are improved by them.

– Andy Grove, American business leader and author

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands
in moments of comfort and convenience,
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

My alarm went off at 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. I put on jeans and a white-collared shirt and grabbed my serving apron. Today was my first scheduled shift for Sunday brunch at The Jones. The shift was notoriously brutal: busy and long. Sunday brunch lasted nine or ten hours, as opposed to the typical six-to-eight hour shifts. I was lucky, as I was spared a closing shift the night before. Many of my coworkers and managers were “clopening,” meaning they had closed down the restaurant at 1:00 a.m. and would be returning again this morning.

I was assigned to a section in the back of the restaurant. Alena, assigned to the same section, told me we had a good team. “It will be fun,” she said. I paused, trying to determine whether or not she was being sarcastic. I was responsible for seven tables, which seemed like a lot. And when the doors opened, things shifted into warp speed. Within the first twenty minutes, all of my tables were seated. I rushed to take drink and food orders. I enjoyed a slight pause after the initial rush, and I restocked the plates at our station. My manager, DJ, shouted with approval, “you’re killing it this morning, Sarah!”

Then came the turn, as the first round of guests left and all of my tables were again seated all at once. It was impossible to greet every table within the first ten seconds, as dictated by The Jones' standards of service. Mike, who was working in a nearby section, went by and greeted a few of my tables. I was a little embarrassed, viewing myself as the weak link on the tea, but I also really appreciated – and needed – the help. The running list in my head was getting longer. A woman at Table 52 asked about her cappuccino. I had completely forgotten! Things were spinning. I was hustling, almost running, trying to get everything. I replayed the list in my head over and over: cappuccino for 52, ring in the order for 61, maple syrup for 53, coffee refills everywhere, greet 64, take the order for the party of six at 71.

Alena came over as I was ringing in the forgotten cappuccino: “what can I get for you baby girl?” I froze. What could I delegate? Seeing my blank stare, she pointed to a pair of cocktails on the bar. Reading the ticket, she said, “I’ll run these to Table 61.” A few minutes later, I saw her take the order for Table 71. Finding my employee number in the computer, she rang the order in under my name.

Someone mentioned that the coffee urn in our section was empty. Brittany brought the empty urn to the front and started a new brew, while I grabbed a full one to replace it. With the large urn, getting through the restaurant felt like an obstacle course. Guests were everywhere. They congregated in corners and near the bar. They walked slowly to and from their tables. They leaned back in their seats. The juxtaposition between the guests' leisurely Sunday brunch and what felt to me like an extreme sport was frustrating yet oddly energizing.

I checked my watch: 1 p.m. already!? I accidentally knocked a glass ketchup bottle off the shelf while wiping down our station. It crashed down on the glassware below. The team rallied around, helping me quickly clean it up. Around 5:00, DJ came by: “you’re cut. Start doing your closing side work, and get out of here.” What a whirlwind! Tom, who had trained me during an earlier shift, came over. Laughing, he asked, “how’d you survive your first brunch?” “Is this normal?” I asked. He affirmed that it was but noted I had handled it well.

“Are you coming to the bar, Sarah?” I turned to see Brittany, another server, smiling at me. I was tired and dehydrated. My feet hurt, and I had not gone to the bathroom all day. But I did not want to be rude, or miss out. When I got to the bar, many servers and bussers were already there and a number planned to join soon. Some of us were in our food-stained clothes, while others had apparently brought a change of clothes, anticipating the after-shift get-together. Two hours passed quickly while we chatted, at first about the shift but later about our lives outside of The Jones. At 8:00 p.m., everyone was still going strong. I felt a strong sense of belonging, for the first time since I had started, and it was difficult to tear myself away. However, my 7 a.m. breakfast shift would come early the next morning.

* * * *

Brunch pushed workers to the extreme. The large crowds and dizzying pace created a chaotic and unpredictable scene. Yet, brunch was not an anomaly. During my time at both The Jones and DTC Communications, I came to see *anticipated freneticism* as a central feature of the working environment. Amplified moments of intensity,

disorder and uncertainty were a regular occurrence, as people dealt with overwhelming demands and contingent work conditions.

Scholars have documented increases in the length, intensity and volatility of U.S. work hours in recent decades. Embedded within continually shifting markets, companies have pursued agility over size, leading to widespread downsizing.¹ When additional workers are added, they are often hired on a temporary basis.² This has meant fewer workers on site. Moreover, managers use “on call” and “just-in-time” scheduling strategies to limit labor costs during less productive hours, and they use digital communications to reach both salaried and hourly employees outside their standard working hours.³ These labor strategies maximize the output of workers. Understaffing requires them to do more with fewer people, while scheduling practices and digital communications push the boundaries of reasonable expectations during both paid and unpaid hours.

Demanding and unpredictable work hours take a toll on workers’ health and family life.⁴ Not surprisingly, a substantial percentage of American workers report feeling overworked, burned out and conflicted over work-family arrangements.⁵ In many cases, workers shift expectations of themselves and others to make sense of this work landscape, reevaluating their identities, relationships desires and dreams in light of the realities they experience.⁶ American job seekers, for example, construct “entrepreneurial selves” to navigate the difficult labor market, while employed individuals often adopt a language of resiliency to cope with the overwhelming and volatile nature of work.⁷ Indeed, many workers resign themselves to insecure and asymmetrical work conditions, viewing them as an inevitable characteristic of modern work.⁸ These individualistic

narratives enable people to embrace uncertainty and risk, but they also leave them engulfed in shame and self-blame when things do not work out as planned.

While scholars have begun to map how the fervency of modern work influences individual subjectivities, private lives and well-being, less is known about how workers collectively respond to these recent changes in the structure and rhythm of work. As Clawson and Gerstel (2014) argue, work schedules do not occur in individual silos; rather, they have a cascading and reverberating effect across workers and their families. One disruptive event spreads across a “web of time,” affecting others, like a row of falling dominoes, both within and outside of the organization. In this chapter, I analyze the social effects of work instability and intensification, not in terms of a causal chain like Clawson and Gerstel, but in terms of a communal reckoning—in other words, how people collectively respond to and manage work volatility and intensity.

In particular, I look at “crises” at work, which following my participants, I define as extreme moments. Structurally, crises entail work that is believed to be more consequential, making them periods of heightened scrutiny. Crises are also extreme in a more embodied sense, requiring a level of effort that pushes workers’ physical and emotional limits. Despite the well-documented negative effects of long and extreme hours on workers’ lives, my participants embraced work adversity and volatility as moments that could define and cement connections to their work and to their colleagues. According to my participants, teams are built – and tested – in the face of adversity, making challenging times both meaningful and productive. In what follows, I describe the rhythm of work at DTC Communications and The Jones, and I outline how people come to view difficult work situations as ritualized opportunities for achieving honor,

purpose and social connection. This response can have short-term benefits for workers and managers, but it can also create an environment susceptible to marginalization, coercion and exploitation.

The Crises of Modern Work

DTC Communications: Episodic Crises

Andy sighed and shook his head as he sat back in his desk chair. He was fifteen minutes late to our scheduled meeting. I smiled, “busy time?” “It’s unbelievable,” he gasped. He asked if I had heard about the fiasco in Los Angeles. I shook my head to indicate that I had not. DTC’s client, BevCo, was sponsoring an Emmy’s after party, and the agency was tasked with the planning and execution of the event. Months ago, the team secured a large beach house and confirmed a guest list filled with VIPs. Now the event was on the horizon—less than five days away. Yesterday, the team learned the reserved venue would no longer be an option. A foreign diplomat with priority access to the house had unexpectedly extended his stay in L.A., leaving the team scrambling to develop a contingency plan.

Andy, who was the head of DTC’s New York office, told me the team was in crisis mode. My eyes widened. “People are starting to break,” he said, looking at me with his eyebrows raised quizzically. He described tears and yelling at the event site in L.A. It sounded like a dramatic twenty-four hours. He was hopeful, though. The team was actively searching for other venues, and luckily, the client was cooperative, making the path forward easier. He was not sure exactly how the issue would be resolved, but he was confident the team would figure something out. I asked if they often faced situations

like this. He retorted, “well, we’ve never had a diplomat come take over our venue before. That’s a first!” He began to chuckle, shaking his head again.

He had only been at DTC a year, and he described it as a roller coaster. His friends told him he should write a book. He was thinking about it. I noted that he worked within a demanding industry, and he nodded in agreement. Things were getting worse, though. BevCo was a prime example. They were DTC’s oldest and largest client, and they were changing their business model. For many years, DTC had been the agency of record (AOR), meaning they managed the bulk of BevCo’s business and were paid through an annual or quarterly retainer that covered labor and overhead costs. Now BevCo was transitioning to a project-based model. BevCo divvied up their business into small projects and required agencies to compete for each project. The agency could no longer rely on a steady stream of business, and the project-based pay structure left little wiggle room within their budgets.

At DTC, project-based marketing contributed to a pattern of “episodic crises” within the agency, in which work was defined by an ongoing series of time-limited crises. Specifically, there were two cyclical peaks of activity at DTC Communications. New business pitches represented one peak. During a pitch, a small team would put together a proposed campaign idea for a client. Sometimes, pitches were for projects with existing clients, like BevCo. At other times, they were opportunities to gain a new client. There was usually little advance notice for pitches. As a result, the company had to quickly assemble a team, which then worked tirelessly to create a proposal, inclusive of creative designs and plans for execution, within a relatively short period of time. Pitches were not paid for by the clients, which meant the assembled team worked on pitch materials

alongside regular client work. This translated to extremely long hours during a two-to-three-week period. Yet, most people at DTC jumped at the chance to work on a pitch. Senior executives, anxious to increase sales, were highly engaged on pitches, making them a great chance for more junior and mid-level workers to increase their visibility within the agency.

The second peak occurred around the execution of a campaign or promotional event. Executions were stressful. It was the moment of truth, in which creative ideas were brought into fruition. The work was often not glamorous, but it was detailed, requiring substantial travel and logistical coordination over the course of a week or two. In the era of project-based marketing, seamless executions were vital. If the agency flubbed an execution, they were not likely to be invited to pitch for future business.

Both pitches and executions were seen as the moments that counted. People justified long hours and overwhelming demands at these points, as these times were key to the continued survival and success of the agency.

The Jones: Rhythmic Crises

The Jones had a distinct, but equally tumultuous, rhythm of work. In response to market pressures, the management team embarked on an ongoing, concerted effort to keep the restaurant filled to capacity. Within the restaurant, guests were seated shoulder-to-shoulder in tables arranged just inches apart from one another. Large crowds gathered near the door and the bar, as people waited – often for over an hour – for a seat. Management kept the music loud, wanting to create a “fun, high energy” atmosphere, and between the music and constant chatter, it was a loud and hectic scene. I often had a hard

time hearing myself think in the middle of a shift, never mind hearing my customers and coworkers.

At The Jones, there was a sense that busy was good for all. Guests seek out lively restaurants. Managers and owners view more people in the door as more money in their pockets. Workers, especially servers, hope that higher sales will result in greater tips. Even non-tipped workers believe their jobs are safer within a continually busy restaurant. Yet, this did not make it any easier to manage the workload during the “rush” or “pop,” which occurred every shift without fail. Most shifts maintained peak intensity for several hours. There was an expectation that everyone would become “weeded” – overwhelmed by the quantity and pace of work – at least once during each shift. The temporal experience at The Jones was thus defined by “rhythmic crises.” Workers expected to be pushed to their limits during each shift, and by design, this occurred over and over throughout the work week.

Communion of Crisis: “It’s Like the Trust Fall on Crack”

Kevin was a central figure at The Jones. As a back-of-house manager, he typically ran point in the kitchen during the busiest shifts, which meant he touched every plate that went out into the restaurant, and he was the primary liaison between servers, food runners and cooks. When I asked Kevin how he ended up at The Jones, he told me it was unexpected. He was working in accounting after college when an old friend reached out. His friend asked if he could work part-time in the kitchen at a nearby restaurant. Kevin needed the extra money, so he agreed. Before he knew it, he was promoted to a sous chef position, and the rest was history.

I asked Kevin if he had any regrets. “Absolutely not,” he told me. He said that, at first, he thought The Jones might be too busy and overwhelming. He recalled, “I think after a few months, I just realized that that’s what I enjoyed. I want to be in that environment. It’s not for everyone, but I really like the pressure. I work better under pressure for the most part. And I like that.” Thinking back to his time in accounting, he recalled how bored he had been. Sitting at a desk, he would have grown old too quickly. He was happy he had gotten out.

Kevin, like many of my participants at The Jones and DTC, was drawn to the intensity of work. Workers at both locations were not oblivious to the toll that stressful, fast-paced environments and long hours took on their bodies. They described problems with high blood pressure, poor sleep habits and a number of disrupted personal relationships. In fact, Kevin told me he had no life outside of the restaurant. Yet, to my surprise they did not view their work conditions and schedules as unreasonable or even intolerable. Work was hard and could be frustrating, but it was also enticing and fun. It became very clear to me, and in fact it was frequently stated explicitly: if you did not love the rush and the pressure, you did not belong.

The memories people shared about The Jones and DTC Communications were punctuated by crises. Stories about work usually began with a preamble about how it was a “crazy shift” or a “really insane period.” Crises are significant because they render typical work expectations, routines and rules irrelevant or inadequate. Punishing deadlines or an influx of work are unsettled times that justify the suspension of standard protocols. In these moments where anything *could* happen, what *did* happen became meaningful.

There was a belief among my participants that what people said and did in unfettered moments revealed something essential about their intentions and character. Moreover, when the normal rules did not apply, people emphasized a reliance on one another. There was an embrace of those moments as opportunities for collective growth. Manager training materials at DTC, for instance, encouraged trainees to embrace difficult times, stating: “We need to cultivate the courage to be uncomfortable and to teach the people around us how to accept discomfort as a part of Growth [sic].” Thus, crises were seen as transcendent spaces of human connection and meaning-making.

Within the social context of crises, trust was highly salient. Times of crisis revealed who could be trusted and in what way. The stakes were high in these moments, and appropriate pathways of action were not clearly marked. Thus, my participants were attentive to others’ responses to crises: could people prove effective in these moments? Did they act in the best interest of the team?⁹ As high turnover in both the restaurant and the marketing firm resulted in a proliferation of short-term relationships, it was difficult to build trust slowly over time. Crises offered a short-cut, providing what people thought was a glimpse into others’ character and behavior that could otherwise take months or years. They then pulled from their repertoire to produce trust in these moments.

The trust-building capabilities of crises motivated some of my participants to actively seek out spaces of turmoil. Ronald, a production manager at DTC Communications, told me that tough situations were “where the rubber meets the road in terms of personalities and trust.” In fact, he wanted his team to participate in an emergency rescue training. He had heard about one in Connecticut, where the team is ushered into a mock submarine. The submarine is flooded, and the goal is to work

together to get everyone out. “It’s like the trust fall on crack,” he exclaimed. This would be good for his team, in particular, because good producers had to work well under pressure. Good producers, he explained, were less like the armed guards at Penn Station, tasked with preventing an attack, and more like the emergency response team, jumping into action after the attack. A good producer was prepared for the worst, and always had multiple contingency plans. Those were the people he wanted on his team.

I use the term *communion of crisis* to refer to this collective embrace of work crises as a source of meaning, purpose and social connection. My participants view crises as a sacred space of intimate exchange and social development. Despite the distinct temporal structure of crisis at each work location, they approach crisis in a ritualized manner, consisting of three distinct yet interconnected interactive processes: *sharing the grind*, *surviving the battle* and *telling war stories*. Prior to the climax of a crisis, they expected trusted others to share the grind by participating in the drudgery of work that precedes crisis. During crisis, they paid attention to who contributes to surviving the battle, and afterwards, they came together to share war stories about what happened.

Sharing the Grind

Crises orient people to the moments that matter, and in doing so, they also differentiate the non-crisis times. In slower periods leading up to busier moments or during lulls within the chaos, my participants paid attention to who was willing to “share the grind.” Sharing the grind often pulled upon a versatile logic of trust, representing a willingness to work hard and do whatever was needed to get the job done. It was about not shirking the

work, demonstrating a strong work ethic (righteous trust) and importantly, not letting the team down. Amanda, a server at The Jones explained:

Trust comes out in the smallest ways, and that's noticed by everybody. Like, when you're opening the restaurant, you know how everyone sets up their own section and *then* does side work? Things like that [hurt trust]. Just, like, being aware of your surroundings at all times. If you see that there's one person still stuffing knives, you'll help them finish that first before starting something else. Or, like, if you're sitting down waiting for the meeting to start on a p.m. [night shift], and you see that there are no water glasses on tables in the back, like doing that.

I saw the importance of sharing the grind one evening at The Jones as we were setting up space in the back for a private party. The restaurant would sometimes rent out the back room of the restaurant for private events, during which time two or three servers and one bartender would be scheduled to service the room. Cathy, Gary and I were scheduled for this particular party, and we were moving tables and chairs downstairs to create a large open space. We would spend most of the night running up and down the basement stairs with trays of appetizers, while Chelsea, the bartender, made drinks for the guests. We worked quickly and finished setting up the main area about 45 minutes before the party arrived. Casey, who was managing the party noticed that the trash can in the back needed to be emptied. She asked Lu, a busser who was scheduled within the main restaurant, if he would do it. Lu kept walking. Glancing back, he replied, “sorry, we don’t get tipped out for that.”

It was true. Bussers were never scheduled for private parties, as the management assumed the servers and bartender could handle the workload. As a result, those working the parties were not required to reserve a portion of tips for other staff members. Nevertheless, Lu’s comment sparked an immediate reaction. Chelsea dramatically dropped what she was doing and walked immediately over to the trash. She began pulling out the trash bag somewhat frantically, saying, “it’s fine. I’ve got it.” She

dragged the bag toward the basement door as Lu made his way to the front of the restaurant. Cathy looked at me, her eyes wide, “I can’t believe he just said that!” Gary chimed in, saying Lu’s behavior was completely ridiculous. They both agreed that he should be written up.

A few minutes later, Chelsea returned. Her face was red, and she was a little out of breath. She started pre-mixing drinks again, before looking at Cathy: “I mean, it *is* a team environment. There is no reason for that!” The shared frustration fueled an ongoing joke within the group throughout the night. Someone would restock plates or refill water bottles, and yell out sarcastically, “but, you know, we don’t get tipped out for this.” I knew the point they were making, but in actuality we would be splitting the tips amongst the four of us.

As the party wrapped up, the servers gathered around the bar. Casey came over to us to discuss closing details. Cathy used this opportunity to tell her that she should write Lu up. Casey, a newer manager, was hesitant. She noted that she probably should not have asked Lu. It technically was not his responsibility, and the servers in the back had extra time to do it. She continued, “out of respect for me, I wish he would have done it, but I can also see his side.” Gary interrupted, “it doesn’t matter. When your supervisor asks you to do something, you do it.” Casey nodded, but she did not take any actions against Lu.

While Lu was not formally sanctioned, he was perceived as betraying the logic of versatile trust, hurting his relations with the team. Sharing the grind was about being willing to help out – to go above and beyond – even when it did not serve your own interests. It was also about being humble, doing things that were not your job. There was

a belief that sharing the grind was an equalizing act; it helped to flatten hierarchies. For example, Ray, who worked at DTC, told me that he thought trust was built in the trenches. When I asked him what he meant by the trenches, he clarified, “in the trench is when you’re, like, down and dirty. You’re on the ground.” A big part of this, he explained, was sharing in the drudgery, despite one’s formal title or role. He gave me an example from the week before, when he had been executing a big client event in Atlanta:

Claire and I unpacked probably 2500 mugs... and just, like, we're both doing it. I'm not the senior account executive, she's not an assistant account executive at that point. We're like, same level [gestures with his hands to show the equal level], more of a team... When you go through those situations... you're kind of playing with each other and keeping that team environment going. And you haven't eaten, like a full meal in however many days or whatever. And then no sleep. All that type of stuff.

Ray believed that part of what united him and Claire during the event was a sense that they were in it together. He did not pull rank or try to avoid the less glamorous tasks. In doing so, he performed a versatile trust, in which he proved himself to be flexible and willing to compromise.

However, in these scenarios, there was a larger benefit for those with more power and prestige within the organization. Such individuals had the choice of doing lower-level work, and there was an honor in choosing this path. For instance, Conrad, a senior financial executive at DTC Communications, concurred that trust was built in the trenches. He told me about how they had just finished a big audit for one of their clients, and he jumped in to help wherever he could. He said that he thought his efforts were noticed: “I think when they see that, people underneath me know that I’ll do whatever. This is the job I will do...they know if something’s got to get done, I’m not going to shy away from doing – ‘oh, this is beneath me!’ – *I will do this.*”

Such performances were indeed noticed and appreciated by others in lower levels of the organization. Stories about how senior executives were spotted stacking glasses or

Mosseri

making copies often came up during my conversations with DTC'ers. One mid-level manager at the company told me, "I've been on site where an Andy or a Casey will come and start folding t-shirts or counting inventory of things. These are pretty senior guys. They've earned their stripes. They've done all that before. But it's just the mentality." He added that most people who failed to have that mentality did not last long within the industry.

Yet, the symbolic benefit of sharing the grind was not equally distributed. In Lu's case, "dirtier" tasks, like taking out the trash, were considered part of his job. While he was stigmatized as not being a team player for his dismissal of the task in this particular scenario, had he helped the team, his discretionary effort would likely have gone unnoticed. Indeed, management might have simply viewed this work as being covered by his hourly salary versus tipped money, rendering it an expected task. If it was noticed as discretionary, the added benefit would have probably been much smaller than the recognition Chelsea earned for doing the same task. This was due to the hierarchy of labor within the restaurant, which often intersected with social status inequalities. Bartenders were typically aspiring actors: gregarious and attractive, overwhelming white and relatively young. Bussers were often men of color, many of whom were recent immigrants and for whom English was a second language. To see a bartender – in this case a white woman – take out the trash was an aberration; to see a man of color wearing the black busser t-shirt do the same task was not.¹⁰ Sharing the grind was, in large part, about having the power to say no, but doing it anyways. If you did not have the power to say no – due to organizational role and/or the naturalization of gendered or raced work divisions – doing the task came with less value and appreciation.

Surviving the Battle

Sharing the grind typically occurred in calmer moments that ran adjacent to crises. My participants also emphasized the forging of relationships at the pinnacle of stress. For example, a number of people told me they had bonded with others at the DTC event in L.A. that Andy had described to me. Rosaline and Marsha, two account executives, pointed to that event as a key moment in their relationship.

“It was a fucking shit show,” Marsha told me, raising her hands to her head. She was grateful that Rosaline had been there. “For like a whole week straight, we really bonded because we were side by side through the most ridiculous – I can’t believe some of the stuff I did down there,” she said, shaking her head. Rosaline echoed these sentiments a few days later when we were talking at an outside café near the office. “It was Marsha and I making things happen,” she recalled matter-of-factly. She continued, “we would go in looking like a mess with a bun and no makeup and sweatpants. We would *fight*,” she laughed. “When I say fight, I mean we’d *fight* with people to get it how we wanted the event to go.” She nodded, saying “I think that’s definitely when we went from colleagues to friends.” Surviving the event had brought them closer together, and it cemented their relationship moving forward. Rosaline employed the logic of allied trust as she explained, “moving forward I think we still have that connection, and she definitely knows that I have her back.”

The battle-like atmosphere of the event helped unite Marsha and Rosaline, informing a perspective that it was “them versus the world.” In describing high-stress events, many of my participants defined their own actions against a specified other, which could vary to be a disgruntled client or guest, a competitor or an uncooperative

partner. In doing so, they created a sense of a unified team, all fighting a shared enemy to achieve a common goal. Relatedly, I noted the frequent militarization of language within their descriptions. This language not only contributed to the creation of two opposing groups, but it also raised the stakes of the work. They saw themselves as fighting *for* something. Their efforts were worth something bigger, and the bonds forged between them were stronger as a result.

The use of militarized language to bring meaning and purpose into the work was particularly apparent in my interview with Liz. Liz had been a server at The Jones for three years when I started. In some ways, she felt that trust was antithetical to the environment of a corporate restaurant. She had no illusions about her worth to the company, describing herself as completely disposable. “None of us actually matter,” she said, “as much seniority as I have and as much as I think I matter, I don’t matter. I can be replaced tomorrow by 400 people who want my job, who are capable of doing that.” Yet, despite this, Liz cared a lot about the work, and she put in a lot of effort. She admitted that she had created a few relationships that she hoped might last. There were some coworkers who might even be life-long friends. I looked surprised, and she continued:

You know *The Things They Carried*? Like, you know, you go into war with someone, and you build these unbreakable bonds where it's like you're going to be close for the rest of your lives because you face such hardship? When you work brunch with someone you respect. And you survive what we do at that fucking place. And what we go through. (sighs) I mean war is an extreme situation, it's not like I'm saying people die. But we go through the upmost mental distress together. And then we unwind together.

Despite feeling like she did not matter at The Jones, Liz compares her work there to war: a life-and-death situation. It is a remarkable analogy for a position in which she, herself, feels rather insignificant to the company. She granted that not all relationships were enduring. People sometimes got fired, and she never heard from them again. Regardless, she had forged bonds that she hoped would last. Liz’s description reminded me of an

email sent out to The Jones' staff listserv when I first started. It was from a woman who had just quit.

My Dear Jonesees,

Please bear with me as I must get my feelings out.

I no longer work at The Jones with you all, and I didn't get to say goodbye to most of you. While a succinct e-mail cannot express the joy that comes from the reoccurring realization that I no longer work at The Jones, the same rings true for the gratitude I hold for all of you and all you have given me over the last 2.5 years. I am so fucking thankful to have met you all and to have worked with you all. And, let's be real, to have trudged through hell with you all. Time and time again. And from the bottom of my heart, it was your stupid, beautiful faces, it was your terrible, hilarious jokes, and it was each of your bright, accepting spirits that made me want to come to work despite the hellfire that never stopped raging and that allowed me to leave work saying, "That wasn't so bad." I mean it. You all made that shit worth it. And you all will continue to make that shit worth it for each other. And again, while I'm really fucking glad to leave a lot of things about that place behind, I am so sincerely sorry to leave one of the best dysfunctional families of which I've ever been a part behind with it. (And my family is really fucking dysfunctional.) But! Technology is a thing, and it's amazing, and I know I will see and continue to talk with many of you. And that makes me very, very happy. And that's why it's okay I never got to "say goodbye" to a lot of you. Because I will see you again. Abso-fucking-lutely. Couldn't forget ya if I tried ;) And for all you newbs who I don't really know, and who now I've potentially terrified by talking about hell so much, don't worry, you're in good hands. Most of the time ;)

I love you all. Thank you, thank you, thank you - you will never know how much I appreciate you. Every one of you!!! Yes!! Every. Single. One of you has given me something I didn't have before. I mean it.

So. Without further adieu.

Please take me off the email chain.

*Sending you all peace, love, and light
Jess*

I was one of the “newbs” slightly terrified by Jess’s email, but over time, I came to understand what she meant. The job pushed people to the edge. Along that edge, people tended to reveal a version of themselves that they normally would not, and there was an intimate connection that could transpire within that vulnerable space of forced visibility.

It’s important to note, however, that the collective experience of extreme work conditions was necessary, but not sufficient, for creating meaningful ties. One had to “survive” these scenarios. Crises were moments of truth, which meant they were also moments of evaluation. As Liz told me, “you see someone’s true colors when you go through that much distress.” Stressful work situations were so revealing, she joked that she could not commit to an intimate relationship without seeing the other person at “brunch level”:

I never want to marry someone in this industry, but I need to see them at their full work... Because I base my respect levels of people, and kind of categorize them, and their identities based on their work ethic. I need to see someone in the utmost distressing moments of their career. To see how they handle it. To see how they work. To know how I would deal with them in a personal setting for the rest of my life. Does that make sense? Like if I'm going to marry someone I need to see them at Sunday brunch level.

During work crises, Liz looked for one’s work ethic. After seeing their work ethic, she felt she had a better understanding of who they were. In this way, she pulled upon a righteous logic of trust. Others used different logics to different degrees, but crises remained a point of evaluation.

Marsha, for instance, drew upon the criteria of emotional composure and loyalty, which aligned with both the legible and allied logics of trust. She recalled losing respect for her boss, Mona, during the tumultuous event in L.A. She detailed how Mona had lost her temper, throwing boxes, crying and screaming. At one point, Mona had even packed her bags and threatened to leave. Initially, Marsha felt compassion toward her and wanted to help, but over the course of the trip, she described changing her mind. She

summed up her thoughts by noting, “it’s really important to keep your composure when shit goes wrong.”

The ultimate turning point for her, however, was Mona’s discussion of quitting. “I mean, she almost quit! *She told me she was quitting* and packed, literally was going to her room to pack her bags in L.A. So, it’s hard to trust her when she was really that unhappy. Like in a second (snaps), she would just quit!” Marsha’s voice still reflected a sense of betrayal, and she looked slightly dumbfounded as she sat across the table from me a couple of months after the event. It was a notable reaction considering Marsha had spent a significant portion of our interview talking about the high turnover at the company, the precariousness of her own job and the ongoing stress associated with working on a BevCo account. Surviving the battle was not only about one’s actions during the moment, but about a sense one could get about their willingness to endure the war.

Crucially, as Liz articulated during our discussion, ultimate survival was at the organizational level, not the individual level. In this broader context, individuals were expected to endure the war, but they might also be sacrificed in the process. This became clear to me during a company-wide presentation about the value of failure, which was being given by DTC’s CEO, Adam. When someone asked Adam if he approached things assuming to fail or to succeed, Adam responded that he always hoped to succeed, but that he had come to realize that some successes were more long term. Making an analogy that was perhaps more apt than he had intended, he said “the front line might die, but you can still win the war.” I recalled this statement, and in particular his distinction between

himself and the “front line,” a few weeks later when the company laid off a number of people in an attempt to curb losses driven by difficult market conditions.

Telling War Stories

Following crises, many workers would come together to rehash what had happened. Through this process of telling “war stories,” my participants constructed a narrative about their recent experiences of adversity. The telling of war stories provided an opportunity for people to detail and validate the challenges through which they had just persevered. It was also a time for recognizing the event as a shared accomplishment and identifying both individual and collective contributions.

My first introduction to war stories at The Jones occurred at the bar after my first brunch shift. In that first thirty minutes, we chatted about what each of our sales had been and how much money we had made. Some of the veteran servers gave an assessment of how well they thought new people were handling the stress. We complained about annoying guests and about our manager, DJ. It felt good to unwind, and it provided closure to the shift.

The after-shift bar gatherings were a regular thing at The Jones. At least a few people would always head over after work. Al, who almost always bartended during Sunday brunch, told me that he expected to go to the bar after that shift. “I think everyone goes,” he said shrugging. “Everybody just goes and complains and drinks,” he continued, “it’s just like a way to feel comfortable to get stuff off your chest.” As Al mentioned, war stories could often have a negative tone, a venting session. I came to see these as a “humble brag” of sorts. We complained about the craziness, but in doing so, we brought the intensity of what we had overcome into focus.

While my participants at The Jones often engaged in war stories at a nearby bar, this was not the most common venue for war stories at DTC Communications. In fact, because agency work crises coincided with pitches and executions that often took place outside of the main office, sharing war stories frequently happened during travel. Conrad told me he felt he had gotten closest with people during travel: “I’ve gone to some fun, some very intense trips. You get to know somebody that way, too. Everybody’s exposed or vulnerable. I look at some of the trips like you’re in combat together.”

I got a sense of this when talking to Constance, a mid-level strategic campaign manager, a few days after a pitch. Constance had traveled to North Carolina with Fred, a creative director, for the pitch. Recalling her conversations with Fred, both through text messages and on the plane, Constance described the pitch as successful. They did not have time to rehearse the presentation beforehand, but both she and Fred agreed that the energy in the room was phenomenal. Beaming, she described how Fred told her that she was the glue that had kept the team together. She reiterated that they worked really well together, and she was hopeful about the next steps. The conversation on the flight back seemed to solidify her sense of both individual and collective success.

War stories often took the form of informal conversations, but The Jones also incorporated a formal means of sharing war stories. This came in the form of communication reports (CRs) and manager notes, which were completed by every server and manager respectively. CRs consisted of a piece of paper containing a short open-ended survey. The survey included six or seven questions, such as: how was your mood when you came in and how is it now? Were there any significant events that occurred during your shift, including guest compliments or complaints? Was anyone particularly

helpful to you during today's shift? Were there any requests the kitchen could not accommodate? CRs also included a section at the bottom to include additional comments or thoughts. After every shift, the CRs were scanned and made available to managers across locations and to the corporate office. Manager notes were done electronically, but they were also available to the full management team after being submitted.

Servers expressed some skepticism of CRs. Liz told me to be careful what I wrote. "Self-incrimination," she warned. Some told me they thought management was unresponsive to the concerns shared in the reports, while others told me they thought some of our location managers did not upload negative reports to the full company. Yet, people still filled them out in detail, describing particularly helpful coworkers during a given shift and outlining guest compliments they received. Workers would also document areas of dissatisfaction: things they thought could work better, events that were poorly handled by management. While manager notes were never made available to the staff, managers told me they were fairly similar to CRs, but from a different perspective. In documenting the happenings of each shift, both CRs and manager notes served as a more formal means of telling war stories. However, because the flow of information generally went "up the chain" as opposed to being shared with everyone, the impact of these formalized war stories for building coworker solidarity was limited.

DTC lacked a formal forum for consistently sharing war stories. Teams would create summaries of events and campaigns, but these were focused on specific metrics and lacked detailed descriptions or individual accomplishments. On the rare times that both hardship and accomplishment were incorporated, it was noticed. For example, Marsha told me about how her client sent an email to the team after the event in L.A.

The subject was like, "at a loss for words." And she just went through and was so appreciative and so thankful... I started crying 'cause I was so happy. (laughs) It was just amazing. I'm willing to do ridiculous shit, and be on site and throw boxes around and be yelled at and be screamed at and like have people crying and calm everyone down. But like it all makes it worth it if someone appreciates it.

Marsha told me this was the first time she cried at work. The public recognition of what the team had been through was very moving for her. It made everything she endured worth it. Similarly, when people did not feel acknowledged, it hurt the connections they felt with the team. For example, Wendy teared up during our interview as she told me about how she was left out of an email summarizing the event she helped coordinate the week before. She explained, "the day after that event, there was an email chain that I was added to late." She described scrolling down the email and seeing how the client had thanked the account team for all of their hard work. Production assistants, like her, were not mentioned in the original email, which was sent by DTC senior management. A junior-level account team member added Wendy in one of the replies. Wendy ended up sending a private email to the senior manager directly, saying "Thanks for including me. I actually ran point on everything. I was the first person there and the last person to leave. I'm a team of one, so I often get forgotten." In hindsight, she wished she had taken a minute to cool off before sending the email, but she said she was tired of constantly being an afterthought.

While more formalized war stories were rare in the positive form (i.e., what went right), they almost never occurred in the negative form (i.e., what went wrong) at DTC. People would complain to one another informally, but a formal setting for discussing things that went wrong did not exist. Sharon, a producer, told me she had noticed this when she first arrived at the company: "it seemed like there weren't many people around me that were willing to kind of go to the mat and just straight shoot it, and be like: this is

what happened, I messed up or like the client pushed us and we felt pressured and like this is what we signed onto.” Because mistakes and problems were not openly addressed, a number of people told me they felt like it created a greater sense of fear around making mistakes. For example, Russell, a creative director, commented that “everyone has the fear they make one mistake and they’re gonna get fired. So everyone is just protective of their position more than they are of the thing we’re trying to deliver.” Jill, a senior manager, echoed Russell’s comments, saying “everyone’s protecting themselves.” She elaborated on how mistakes were typically brushed under the rug, “there’s never a deep dive into looking at why did we get the request to begin with? Why was it so hard?” Recounting a difficult project from a few months before, she remembered how “there was never a time where we got together and just said: guys that was horrific, we all felt the pain.”

For DTC’ers, the lack of a public or formalized forum for negative war stories undermined a sense of cooperation and safety within the company. This could contribute to a more individualistic culture among employees, with my participants sometimes scoffing at an atmosphere that focused on “CYA: covering your ass.” More practically, the lack of a formalized space for sharing war stories – sometimes referred to as “post-mortems”¹¹ – made it difficult to learn from mistakes and set up best practices that might alleviate the constant “fires” erupting during the work process.

Contesting Crises

The potential for crises to imbue meaning and purpose into work and to inform workplace relationships was dependent upon a collective recognition of adversity.

Without this, crises could feel oppressive and alienating. In what follows, I outline several obstacles to the shared agreement of crises.

Unacknowledged Crises

Demanding work constituted the dominant view of crisis at both DTC and The Jones. Yet, people experienced other forms of crisis. People encountered abusive managers, sexual harassment, discrimination and other inappropriate behaviors during their time at work. These events had to compete against the dominant view of crisis in order to be acknowledged, and in many cases consensus around this could be hard to achieve.

A contestation of crisis occurred during a Sunday brunch shift about a month or two after I started working at The Jones. It was extremely busy, as usual, and at some point, an elderly, white couple was seated near the middle of the restaurant in Candace's section. At first, things seemed fine. The couple was quiet and cold, but we dealt with a range of personalities during any given shift. Candace rang in the orders, not thinking much of her interactions with the couple. When the food arrived at the table, the couple asked to see a manager.

Paul, the general manager of our location, checked in with the table. The couple expressed dissatisfaction with the service, and they pointed to Candace, saying offhandedly, "look at her." Candace, who was a black woman, interpreted this as a racially motivated statement, as did several other staff members who witnessed the interaction. Paul, in contrast, did not. He apologized to the couple and took a few items off of their bill. He then asked a server in a nearby section to take over the table.

When I spoke with Candace about the event later, she described it as completely disheartening. "I feel like Paul had never been in a situation like that. But even if you

don't know what to do, I feel like you should ask someone for assistance or support," she explained, expressing some empathy for Paul's position. She added that after that incident, "I did not trust them, and I didn't feel safe. I told him [Paul] that it infringes upon how we feel in the workplace, safety in the workplace." She recalled Paul's confusion regarding her statement, "he was confused. He was like, what do you mean you don't feel safe?" His failure to recognize the situation as a crisis led to a breakdown in trust: "that was big for me, where I just, I lost all trust." The failed recognition ultimately informed Candace's decision to leave the company a few months later. She explained, "I have no loyalty to this place. They don't have my trust. That was just, that was really big for me."

Not only did Paul fail to initially see the situation as a crisis in the moment, but he continued to do so afterwards. When Candace tried to engage in a corrective recounting of the story – an attempt at constructing a shared war story – Paul refused to validate her perspective, leading to a further breakdown in trust. This betrayal of intimate trust hit hard, leading Candace to reinterpret her purpose and value within The Jones. Eventually, she decided she felt unsafe in that environment, making the decision to leave.

This moment reflects a failed communion of crisis between Paul and Candace, which was meaningful given that Paul was not only Candace's manager but also the most powerful individual within our location. It may be that racism, in this case, was interpreted as more of an individually experienced crisis, undermining the event's ability to produce collective cohesion. However, work itself was often managed at the individual level yet viewed as a collective challenge or concern. It is certainly possible to envision an alternative unfolding of this event, in which a racist encounter is viewed as a

team or organizational-level problem. Indeed, Candace attempted to reframe the event as an organizational problem when she told Paul the interaction made her feel unsafe. In this reframing, the event contributed to a hostile work environment.

Despite the missed opportunity for manager-worker trust, the situation did in fact contribute to a sense of solidarity and resistance among the staff. At the end of the shift, a number of people who saw or heard about the incident wrote about it in their communication reports. May, for example, recalled this:

Everybody wrote in their CR that day: "I think Candace is important, and I think that she is a good human, and I think that like her needs are and her life is important" ...I mean, I understand that that's a really tough situation, and it's brunch, and [Paul]'s busy, and the best way to make that situation go away is to give them a free meal. I get that. It just was a little disappointing, but like everybody rallied around her that day.

As May describes, the staff attempted to restore trust for and with Candace by writing down a version of the "war story" that acknowledged her struggle and her value.

Nevertheless, the *crisis of dignity* was forced to compete with the dominant definition of crisis as the frenzied, demanding pace of work. The successful re-construction of this event as crisis was further limited by the structure of CRs, which were not widely accessible across the staff and about which doubts existed regarding whether or not they were even all passed along to senior managers. Thus, while a touching show of support, this move was not enough to fully redefine racist encounters as crises, creating a sense of marginalization for Candace.

The Visibility of Battles

In other cases, people failed to accomplish communion of crisis because their efforts lacked visibility. I noticed this at DTC with one of the senior managers, Jill. Jill joined DTC a few months before I arrived, and she was one of a handful of women in senior leadership at the company.

Jill had been hired to lead the BevCo account, and she had the difficult task of trying to improve the agency's relationship with its largest client. Jill brought with her over a decade of experience within media and communications. She entered the industry as a receptionist and worked her way up to the vice president level. In her last agency, Jill was recognized for her strong client relationships, including one with BevCo.

When we spoke, Jill told me she was hired as a "change-maker." The opportunity excited her. However, she was having a hard time making progress within the male-dominated culture of DTC. Her proposals and ideas received a lot of pushback from senior management, and she was sometimes excluded from important conversations and meetings. She felt disheartened and discouraged, but she tried to remain hopeful, continually looking for ways she could have impact.

Given Jill's earnest approach, I was surprised when I began to hear complaints about her. Andy was one of the first to bring up issues with Jill. He told me her team did not trust her. "She's lost quite a few people out there, meaning mentally lost them," he said. Comparing her with other managers, he noted, "I'm not saying Jill's personality is bad or good. It's just, she's not as approachable, and that's a huge issue." Asia, who was a vice president of finance and very close with Andy, told me something similar. According to Asia, Jill's team felt like she did not care about them. "The leader they had before was very caring," she explained, "it's a huge change for them."

Indeed, Jill's predecessor, Jane, had been with DTC for about ten years. Jane was loved almost unanimously by the junior-and mid-level staff at DTC. She left the company about a year before I arrived, but she agreed to speak with me. During our conversation, she told me about how she really enjoyed her time at DTC, and she thought

she had done a good job. Under her watch, the BevCo business had grown, and she also brought in another major client. She left because she did not get along well with the CEO, Adam. Jane described Adam as being very insecure about her relationships with both clients and staff members. He constantly challenged her, and eventually the constant conflict with him made it too difficult for her to continue. She quit, moving back to the Midwest to be closer to her spouse.

The team missed Jane, and like Asia, they often compared Jill to her, a comparison in which Jill continually came up short. The biggest complaint about Jill was that she was not engaged enough with the team. Frannie, an account executive for BevCo, conceded her distrust of Jill during our interview. When I asked Frannie what was off in their relationship, she compared Jill to another manager, Ernie. “Ernie’s just more approachable,” she explained. When I asked her what she meant, she shrugged, “I don’t know what it is that makes me feel like she’s not very approachable.” A senior account executive on the team, Ben, said something similar. He told me he had very little confidence in Jill and that he thought that was the general consensus in the office. He elaborated, “I do not have confidence that she’d fight for me for anything.” He noted that Jane, and another previous male manager, had always had the team’s back, but with Jill, he did not feel like that. “I don’t think any of us have confidence that if like BevCo was going to pull out of the company, it wouldn’t be like, she’s gonna fight for us. It would be like, all right, well we’ll just have to find something else.” Ben also contrasted Jill with Andy. While Ben had hesitations about Andy, he noted that at least Andy would “take the effort and know about you and your stuff.” He lamented that the lack of confidence in Jill made him feel really uneasy and insecure on a day-to-day basis.

When I asked Jill if she thought her team trusted her, she seemed aware of some discontent. She paused, and then said, “it’s really weird too because this whole time I’ve been working behind the scenes and killing myself. But, from their perspective, they probably are thinking: (1) what in the hell is she probably doing and (2) how is she going to help out?” Jill told me she was trying to bring a solution to them, but it was so hard to change things at the top. She felt like, because of the difficulties with the client relationship at a senior level, she was not being a good manager. “It makes me feel like a failure in a lot of ways...I feel like I’m like a mother, but I’m not mothering them,” she laughed. “I’m ignoring them in some ways because it’s been so horrifically bad with the clients, just trying to keep the business,” she explained, “It’s almost like they’re over here [gestures in one direction], and it’s like, I’m protecting you from not knowing how bad this is and then trying to fix it, but somehow trying to gain some sort of trust or relationship with them.” She told me it was the biggest challenge she had faced in her career. As she reflected on how she might do things differently if she could start over, she eventually concluded with a heavy sigh: “the biggest conundrum of my life is that, just wow, how do you, it’s like you have to have two different sides to yourself. Try to gain trust over here, in this world, and pretend like everything is good. And then, try to gain trust with the clients over here that want to fire you.”

Jill recounted how, even the day before, she felt like she had let her team down. She had to miss a client meeting due to a conflict with a senior leadership meeting. “I know with all my instincts that that person [on the team] was looking at me differently because they needed me and I couldn’t be there,” she said. Becoming more pessimistic about her ability to change things at the macro level, she sighed again: “I don’t know, I

wish, I would prefer to have all this headache removed from my plate. Because I don't believe that like the leadership piece, like someone else can handle it. I'd rather just be in the trenches all day long with these people. To gain that trust."

Jill's story highlights how communion of crisis do not occur within a vacuum; rather they are shaped by the structure and culture of the organization. At DTC, there was a gendered hierarchy with women making up the majority of junior-level positions, while most of the managerial roles were held by men. In junior roles, women were on the front lines of client service, managing the day-to-day volatility of client requests. To an extent, managers were able to step into crises at their own discretion. They enjoy the symbolic rewards of sharing the grind when they did, but when they did not, people typically assumed they were busy with other, more important, tasks.

When women were hired as senior managers, they were often, like Jill, brought in to address higher-level crises – a phenomenon that has been dubbed the "glass cliff."¹² Marked not only as "change makers," but also as tokens within the managerial ranks, their actions were under heavy scrutiny.¹³ In this position, Jill felt compelled to focus on macro level problems at the agency, as this was what she was brought on to do, and people were watching her closely. Yet, this prevented her from getting "in the trenches" with the team, which fed a distrust in her. Concurrently, senior men, like Andy and Ernie, were under less scrutiny. Ernie had been with the agency for many years, and Andy, unlike Jill, was not a token within the managerial ranks. With less pressure on their every move, managerial men used their time to engage with the teams more deeply, building considerable rapport and trust. This contrast, perhaps made stronger by cultural stereotypes that naturalized women's but not men's relational labor,¹⁴ further contributed

to the gender gaps in trust. It was a difficult situation, and a few months after I left DTC, Jill told me she had moved on to an opportunity at another company. She had been at DTC less than a year.

With Jill and Jane, we see two different strategies lead to the same outcome. While Jill focused on higher-level crises, she failed to build trust with her team, especially more junior members. She received negative feedback regarding this, and the struggle in deciding between two different – and in her mind equally important – spheres of crises ultimately became too much. Jane had the benefit of longevity within the company, which perhaps fortified her trusted position among the staff. However, her male colleagues and supervisors created a narrative about her ability to survive higher-level battles. Indeed, Adam told me that Jane was great, but unfortunately, she simply could not keep up with the evolving market and changing client expectations. Whether or not this was true, this was the narrative that was sustained among a number of senior men at the organization. Thus, Jane was deemed better than Jill at fighting lower-level crises, yet she was positioned as failing at more senior-level crisis. Again, the constant tension was too much, and in both situations, the company lost female talent at the senior level.

Women in mid-level positions, hoping to elevate their careers, also experienced some of the same tensions. Women like Constance, Asia and Shari were in mid-level positions at DTC, and they were beloved by their teams. Ben, for example, told me that no one had his back and fought for him like Shari. She was always in the mix, working long hours and weekends alongside her team. Yet, these women described stagnation in their careers within the company, with their accomplishments either overlooked or

undervalued. In order to become more visible to senior management, it seemed they would need to become engaged in higher-level crises, which would require disengaging from the crises they shared with their teams. I watched them struggle with this, as each enjoyed the emotional and symbolic rewards associated with communions of crisis. They risked sacrificing this as they moved up, and in the case of both Shari and Constance, I watched them work very long hours to try and achieve both. However, during my time at the company, none of these women seemed on the cusp of a promotion. In fact, Shari became so frustrated with her lack of senior-level recognition and upward mobility, she quit the company without having another job in hand, a move that both she and others saw as a sign of protest.

Shifting Enemy Lines

As discussed above, one of the mechanisms through which communions of crisis occurred was through the identification of a common enemy. Thus, events that blurred the line between “us versus them,” could disrupt crisis consensus, and as a result, the sense of purpose and camaraderie that was achieved. When this happened, it typically reconfigured the triangle of relationships between managers, customers/clients and workers. As others, such as Robin Leidner (1993) have highlighted, alliances within these tripartite relationships inform the degree and form of control at work.¹⁵ In some cases, my participants saw themselves, as workers and managers, fighting against an uninformed or belligerent customer. In other cases, workers felt they were fighting against both managers and customers, or they felt like they were fighting against management on behalf of customer interests. Regardless, when there were

misunderstandings about where the battle lines were drawn, the balance of power was tipped and relations of control altered.

One such situation occurred at The Jones before a Friday night shift. Amanda, one of the veteran servers, was standing near the bar, her face red. She was talking to some of the other servers and bartenders, who tried to offer her comfort. Later, as I was doing my opening side work, I saw that she was still crying. This was completely out of character. Amanda was a very positive person, always seeking to find joy in the little things. She was an aspiring actress and singer, and often during our opening side work, I'd catch her softly singing or twirling around in an almost dreamy haze. More surprising, the managers seemed not to care about her distress. Having worked at The Jones for three years, Amanda was very close with the management team. It was strange that they were being so distant.

The team sat down for the pre-shift meeting to go over the specials and hear highlights from the managers. Still, Amanda was crying, and her sobs were audible. Why were the managers ignoring her grief? What had happened? Amanda worked the full shift, but she seemed down throughout the night. At one point, I saw her go to the back closet, and I heard from others that she was crying uncontrollably. Clearly, something terrible had happened. As she left the closet, I asked if she needed anything. She smiled sadly, shaking her head as she made her way back out into the main dining room.

A few months later, I asked Amanda if anyone had ever betrayed her trust at work. She brought up the day of her tears. She recalled it vividly. She told me a guest had written a letter to the corporate office complaining about her. That afternoon, the

management team brought her into the office and asked her about it. Apparently, Paul had started to yell at her during the meeting. She was upset, not because she was in trouble, but because she was surprised that they never once asked her what happened from her perspective.

I recalled seeing how upset she had been, and she told me it was “the most traumatic thing that’s ever happened to me at The Jones.” She could not believe that they did not begin by asking to hear her part of the story. She recounted the conversation in the room, recalling how she had said “you’re not going to take a step back and remember who I am, and how this story could be misconstrued?” She said that was what hurt the most. She felt betrayed: “I was like, I do a lot for you guys, and I’ve been here a long time. I just thought you knew me by now.”

Eventually, the managers did ask for her side of the story, and Amanda told them about the couple, who was visiting New York from France. She had wonderful rapport with them throughout the meal. When she went to pick up the bill, she saw that they had not tipped her. She was surprised, and said “oh” aloud. The man, who was getting up and putting on his jacket heard her and asked what was wrong. The couple had been so friendly, Amanda thought maybe it was an accident. Often, people from other countries were not aware of the tipping structure in the U.S. She took a risk, saying, “I wasn’t sure if you knew, but gratuity is not included.” The man snapped back, “so, are you saying we did not tip you?” Amanda quickly tried to reassure him, quipping that it was fine and she hoped they had a wonderful rest of their evening. Then, they left.

Amanda said that after she told this to the managers, she still did not feel heard. Paul kept repeating, “we just don’t do that.” He noted that servers made good money at

The Jones. Was she not happy? He even suggested that maybe she should work somewhere else. Feeling the betrayal of intimate trust, Amanda started crying. She thought that after she told Paul exactly what had happened, he would see that this was the case of a misinformed and rude guest. He knew she was an excellent server, very professional. She could not imagine him not understanding. Yet, Paul did not understand. Pulling on the logic of legible trust, he could not make sense of why a senior server like Amanda would make such a mistake. He was even more upset that the complaint had been sent directly to corporate. Both Paul and Amanda saw this as a crisis, yet they viewed it very differently. Paul saw it as a case of failed customer service, whereas Amanda viewed it as a crisis about her source of livelihood. In the former, management and guest were aligned, while in the latter management and servers were aligned. The discrepancy led to a failed communion. Amanda felt she had been left in the lurch. The personal relationship she had developed with Paul over the past several years was subsumed in that moment by broader relations of control. She experienced the visibility of the power indifference as a personal affront, and the betrayal still stung at the time of our conversation.

I asked Amanda how she moved on from that situation. She said that it was difficult, but that later she felt vindicated. Apparently, the man came back to the restaurant on another trip a few weeks later. He ordered avocado toast, and he claimed that it chipped his tooth. The Jones was forced to pay for his dental work. When that happened, the managers told her all about it. She remembered them saying “okay, this guy’s insane. He’s just a douche.” This made her feel better. The lines were clear again; it was her and management against the guest.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrate how workers collectively negotiate and respond to extreme work conditions. While previous research has documented the negative effects of work intensity and volatility, my findings show how workplace actors also find purpose and social connection within moments of heightened stress. Through the interaction rituals outlined here, which often pull upon military and triage metaphors, my participants developed a sense of allied resilience within relatively short-lived and precarious work relationships that might otherwise be considered senseless, taxing or even adversarial. Observing a similar use of language among finance professionals during “deal time,” Benjamin Snyder (2016) suggests that crisis metaphors situate extreme work conditions into a cultural context in which they can be understood as normal. I argue that, in using such metaphors, my marketing and restaurant professionals appear to be doing the opposite, engaging in what political and economic sociologists have referred to as “exceptionalist” practices.¹⁶ In other words, they suspend what is considered normal, creating a situation in which extraordinary expressions and modes of behavior are justified. Viewing harried work environments and demanding schedules as exceptional – even though they occur regularly – my participants at DTC and The Jones justify pushing themselves beyond their limits.

However, over time, exceptionalist practices contribute to a *new* normal – a process recently dubbed “technocratic exceptionalism.”¹⁷ I argue that the acceptance of crisis conditions is becoming normalized in contemporary work, and this can cause an institutionalization of work intensity and volatility. I argue that communion of crisis (re)produce unequal conditions through three mechanisms: the definition of crises, the

recognition of certain behaviors and individuals within crises and the repetition of crisis. First, the way in which crises are defined creates boundaries for the relationships that are formed within them. To the extent that some experiences – such as assaults on workers’ dignity or sense of social safety – are excluded from definitions of crisis, participants may be unable to see themselves reflected within the collective, leading to a sense of alienation. Individuals who experience invalidated crises are, in this way, akin to fans of a losing team sitting amongst the winning team’s crowd. They are aware of the collective effervescence that surrounds them, but they cannot fully experience it in the same way.

Second, crises do not occur in a vacuum. Both the cultural landscape and workplace actors’ social location influences *how* specific contributions are recognized within crises. In particular, people pull upon dominant cultural beliefs about what makes a good worker or manager (i.e. unflagging work ethic, strong emotional control) to evaluate others during times of crisis.¹⁸ Further, despite my participants’ belief that crises can flatten hierarchies, social status remains salient – and perhaps even amplifies – through these moments. Lu’s social and organizational position undermined the benefits of sharing the grind for him, while Jill’s tokenized position among senior managers divided her attention among crises, making it difficult for her to survive the battle in any of them. In this way, crises renew and reinforce existing social systems rather serving as an equalizer.

Third, communion of crises naturalize the constant and frenzied churn of modern work, ultimately benefiting the capitalist company. Focused on immediate tasks and relationships, my participants bracket –and thus implicitly accept – the widespread insecurity that surrounds them. With worth achieved and trust built or betrayed through

high-stress moments, they perpetually engage in challenging and risky work in order to replenish a sense of value and purpose. Over time, this not only deters the less glamorous – or at least less visible – strategic planning work, but it also leads to exhaustion and burnout. Moreover, as workers forge relationships with their peers through crises, their bonds become solidified through a moral lens that valorizes doing whatever it takes to get the job done and not letting the team down. Through this, the necessity of tumultuous work conditions becomes taken for granted and remains unquestioned. Workers are compelled to continually consent to difficult work conditions in order to create and maintain intimate relationships with their coworkers, building and reinforcing a sense of solidarity.

In highlighting these dynamics, my findings reveal a potentially overlooked mechanism of control within the modern workplace. Applying a Marxist perspective, much of the extant research on the labor process has assumed social division to be the primary mechanism of control.¹⁹ According to this dominant perspective, either inherent divisions between managers and workers drive explicit power struggles, or corporate cultures instill a sense of individualism across employees, motivating workers to compete against one another and, in the process, consent to their own exploitation.²⁰ My findings reveal that control in the workplace can also occur through a different pathway of control: solidarity. Solidarity has often been celebrated within the labor process literature, yet all social processes are contextual: my findings reveal how solidarity, too, can become a mechanism of control.

CHAPTER 4 NOTES

¹ Cappelli 1999; Kalleberg 2011

² Kalleberg 2000

³ Lambert, Fugial and Henly 2014; Perlow 2012

⁴ Grzywacz and Smith 2016; Schieman, Milkie and Glavin 2009

⁵ Galinsky et al. 2011; Pew Research Center 2013

⁶ Sennett 1998

⁷ Lane 2011; Sharone 2014; Smith 2001; Snyder 2016

⁸ Pugh 2015

⁹ It is noteworthy, that people continued to pull upon specific logics of trust – with these two questions, we see the legible and versatile logics being employed.

¹⁰ Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) has demonstrated historical continuities in the racial-ethnic division of labor, showing that women of color are often relegated to “dirty” work such as food preparation and cleaning. She discusses how racial cultural stereotypes, entrenched in the history of slavery within the United States, frame women of color as being inherently better suited for such work, thus benefitting white women. While gendered divisions of dirty work have shifted over the last several decades, racial-ethnic divisions of labor remain, with both men and women of color overrepresented in public reproductive labor (Duffy 2007).

¹¹ Post-mortem is business lingo that is used across a number of industries. It is meant to refer to a formalized process for evaluating a project’s ability to meet its goals. This is sometimes also called a project retrospective. It is an opportunity to discuss what went wrong (or right) and how things can be improved in the future.

¹² Ryan and Haslam (2005) find that women are over-represented in leadership positions characterized by significant risk of failure, and they must often suffer the consequences if and when failure occurs. They term this phenomenon the “glass cliff.”

¹³ Kanter 1977; Roth 2004

¹⁴ Fletcher 1999

¹⁵ See also Lopez 2010 and McDonald and Sirianni 1996.

¹⁶ See Best 2017 for a review

¹⁷ Best (2018) uses the term technocratic exceptionalism to describe the routine ways in which some situations and social actors become regularly exempt from normal political processes.

¹⁸ See Blair-Loy (2003), Lamont (1992; 2000), Ridgeway and Correll (2004) for a sampling of these beliefs.

¹⁹ Edwards 1979

²⁰ Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Kunda 1992

CHAPTER 5**DOING TRUST: INTERSECTIONS OF POWER AND INEQUALITY**

*You may not agree with his authenticity but he's authentic.
People like that. He speaks his mind, which reminds me of me once in a while.
I think that's something that's refreshing.
- Harry Reid, talking about Donald Trump*

*"My authenticity is my rebellion."
-Viola Davis*

"We all just clicked. Yeah, we met that way. So, it was kind of a luck thing." Danika, like many of my participants at DTC and The Jones, had trouble articulating how she developed trusted relationships with her coworkers. Across a number of conversations, this was a common theme, with people telling me: "it's kind of like, who I just click with" (Sigi, DTC); "if you click with somebody, you click with them" (Mario, DTC); and "when I first started working two years ago, Cecilia and I clicked instantly" (Michelle, The Jones). Even in the cases of failed trust, my participants often relied on the language of "clicking." Paolo, a busser at The Jones, told me about a lack of trust he shared with a bartender, Shannon, saying, "yeah, I don't think she ever clicked with me, and that's just fine. It's just fine. I have the same thing with some people. I just don't click. I don't know." Some people clicked, while others did not; in the words of my participants, trust seemed to be self-evident.

Yet, researchers have demonstrated that trust is socially patterned, particularly within the workplace.¹ Previous studies have documented how people tend to associate with – and trust – those who share similar social characteristics and how cultural stereotypes and schemas influence perceptions of competence.² It is critical to understand these interactional dynamics, as they are persistent mechanisms of inequality

within the workplace, particularly in contexts, similar to today's work landscape, that are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and organizational disruption.³ To date, however, researchers have devoted greater attention to the interactional recipient, detailing when, why and how people pull upon homosocial characteristics and social stereotypes to categorize, interpret and evaluate others. In this chapter, I build on this scholarship by focusing my analytic lens on the other side of the interaction, asking: how do people "do trust"? What challenges do they encounter when enacting these performances, and how do performances of trust contribute to workplace inequalities?

Contending that trust is not universal, but situationally located, I examine performances of trust from three specific relational perspectives within the workplace: trust "down," trust "up," and trust "across." I find that the dominant performance of managerial trust-down entails an enactment of what I call *maverick management*, characterized by unfiltered communication, the pragmatic enforcement of rules and procedures and an enthusiastic embrace of vulnerability. In contrast, worker performances of trust up rely on a *neoliberal fealty*, which stresses self-sufficiency alongside an allegiance to management. Finally, both workers and managers perform trust in peer relationships through *squad solidarity*, which depends on mastering interactional currencies and displaying unity with peers. Within each type, I find that performances intersect with other axes of power and inequality to produce particular renderings of trust with specific consequences, renderings of trust that also draw upon the repertoires outlined in Chapter 3. Across types, I find that tensions of trust emerge, creating opportunities for manipulation, division and scapegoating within workplace relations. By piecing together these "partial" or "situated" understandings of trust, I

construct a mosaic picture of trust that provides a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of this interactional mechanism of inequality within the workplace.⁴

DOING TRUST

I adopt the analytic orientation of “doing trust” to highlight how trust is a “complex of perceptual, interactional and micropolitical activities.”⁵ I suggest that trust is an ongoing project that must be constantly “worked upon” and continually negotiated and revised within concrete social relations.⁶ People cannot simply proclaim trustworthiness or untrustworthiness; others must also certify this categorization. Thus, performances of trust are oriented toward others – both real and imagined – and remain accountable to the normative order of a given context.⁷ By analyzing how trust is accomplished within work relationships, I deconstruct essentialized notions of trust and trustworthiness, revealing instead how trust is the outcome of patterned, socially produced distinctions undergirded by relations of power and inequality.

At stake within these negotiated performances is a sense of moral worth. To trust and be trusted is a moral accomplishment; trust signals a perceived compliance with normative standards of behavior. It is therefore a signaling mechanism,⁸ used to indicate one’s deservingness and justify the allocation of resources. Thus, in defining and normalizing the moral properties of the modern workplace, processes of trust contribute to the organization and stratification of work.⁹

In what follows, I map this moral terrain, outlining how people “do trust” from three different relational locations (see Figure 4). In doing so, they contribute to a moral architecture that connects through similarity *and* divides through exclusion, emancipates

through autonomy *and* binds through obligation and protects through comfort *while* exposing through vulnerability.

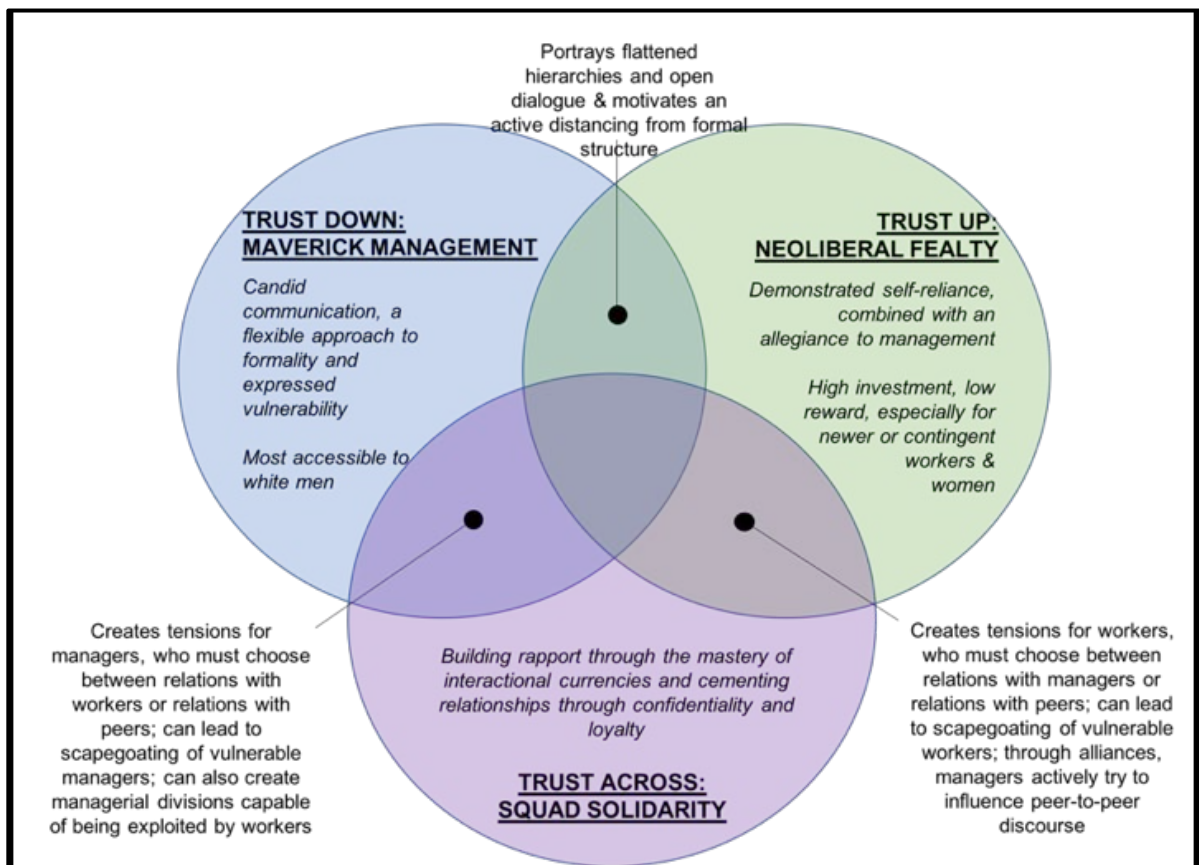


Figure 4. Mapping the Moral Landscape of Trust at Work

Doing Trust Down: Maverick Management

According to Eva Illouz (2008), power within the modern workplace is based on an ability to establish trust and trustworthiness. As she outlines, managerial ideologies have helped guide a shift from institutional to interpersonal bases of power within organizations, emphasizing the importance of trust, in particular. Within both DTC Communications and The Jones, my participants adopted trust as an operating category within the workplace and associated trust with good management. The owner and CEO of The Jones, Stuart, told me, “I feel like if people trust me, that’s the most important thing.” Continuing, he said, “if they trust me, they will take chances, make decisions, feel

empowered, all of those kind of things.” The importance of managerial trust was not solely a belief among those with supervisory responsibilities; most workers said it was important to be able to trust their managers. For example, when I asked Jasmine, a server at The Jones, why it mattered if she trusted management, she explained: “‘Cause you're my manager. I would hope that I could go to, look to you for something or advice in any situation, whether it be something at work or outside of work.” Jasmine's comment not only reflects the importance of trust for managers, but it also reveals a willingness to cede substantial agency – that exceeds even the boundaries of work – to those deemed trustworthy.

The importance of trust in relations of power at work begs the question: how do managers “do trust”? At DTC Communications and The Jones, trusted managers engaged in what I call *maverick management*. Maverick management was about invoking a sense of trustworthiness as a manager by being honest and direct, breaking the rules when needed and not hiding shortcomings. This performance that relied upon a combination of legible, versatile and intimate logics of trust. Maverick managers yielded considerable business acumen while also invoking what one manager referred to as a “homegrown” quality that harkened blue-collar sentimentalities of pragmatism, honesty and hard work. They were authentic, willing to “tell it like it is,” and they frequently and visibly tossed aside formal procedures and professional personas in an effort to create genuine and uninhibited connections with others. Maverick managers stood out as being “human” and “real” in these two work environments where substantial company growth was introducing more “corporate” processes.

An essential element to maverick management was direct communication. Conrad, a manager at DTC, told me that his “no fluff” style influenced others’ trust in him, explaining, “[my team] know[s] I’m pretty straight. I don’t hide my emotions with them.” He continued, “you always know where I stand. I never, I don’t sugarcoat. So I think that is why [they trust me]. They know what they’re getting. They’re not guessing.” Similarly, Andy, whom we met in the last chapter, told me, “I’m very candid and honest and straight with people. I don’t try to talk around something. I just try to make it very clear.” Describing a recent email to one of his direct reports, he said: “there wasn’t a lot of flowery language around it or HR language about it. Just really direct and honest.”

Maverick managers put a premium on communicating “bad news,” or things people may not necessarily want to hear. During a conversation with Andy, he opined, “I also think if people just shared good news all the time, it’s like a horrible idea. It becomes, you know, it almost could create a trust issue, like what is he not telling me?” A number of workers echoed this when telling me about managers they trusted. Jenna, a server at The Jones identified Evan as a manager she trusted, saying, “he’s so genuine and honest when you talk to him. He’s like, this is how it is...he’s like, I didn’t do that well. He always admits to like, I did that badly.” She continued, telling me that every time she had a conversation with him, she felt more connected with the management team “because they’re human too and because they admit their mistakes...we’re all on the same reality.” Workers felt like they could relate better to managers who acknowledged things were not perfect and that they were fallible; their humility made them more real. In addition, maverick managers’ proclivity to share undesired or

upsetting information was celebrated; they were seen as doing the hard work of speaking the truth—something deemed not to be for the faint of heart.

Maverick managers were also willing to make exceptions or bend the rules when the situation called for it. Their pragmatic approach led others to perceive them as being less corporate, and thus more trustworthy. For example, Bernie, at The Jones, told me that he really trusted his general manager, Jeff. He explained, “[Jeff] didn’t necessarily train me how I feel a GM of any other Jones restaurant would...He was like, listen, our company will probably tell you that’s not how we handle it [a situation], but your common sense will tell you that’s how we should handle it.” Similarly, a number of people told me about Oscar, a manager who had worked at The Jones before I arrived. Oscar would often let the team begin closing down the restaurant when things slowed down instead of after the final guests left. “He was always doing what made sense,” one server recalled approvingly.

Maverick managers, themselves, often highlighted their more flexible style. Manuel, a white manager at DTC, told me that the standard approach was not always the right approach. For example, his team had just been on a project that had them working over 100 hours a week. To ask them to then stick to a 9-5 schedule when things were slower would be unfair and counterproductive. He credited this mentality as being something that made him a better and more trusted leader. Managers like Manuel thought that flexibility was particularly important in the context of digital and data-driven workplaces. David, a white manager at The Jones, said he almost never addressed a challenge by looking at the data first. The data was helpful for seeing trends, but he cautioned that the data could never tell the whole story. He noted, “I respect and put

emphasis on context more than data, more than hard data.” He continued, “it’s more about empathy and understanding the way people on our team operate...at least in my case, there’s just a human level to it, where I respect you as a human.” David said the staff trusted him because he was willing to look into the human stories behind the data, not just accept the data as objective truth.

A final component of maverick management was an embrace of vulnerability. Adam, a white man and the CEO of DTC – often dressed in casual clothes and occasionally walking around the office barefoot – perhaps best personified this aspect of maverick management. Adam was, as others in the office told me, “big on vulnerability.” Two weeks after I arrived at the company, Adam gave a “vulnerability talk.” On the afternoon of the talk, everyone gathered in the open area near the front of the office. Adam sat down casually on a tall stool near the front and began by making self-deprecating jokes about his thinning hair. He admitted it was hard to talk about his personal side, but he hoped this could generate greater dialogue within the company. He wanted people to feel more comfortable with one another, and he was sharing his story first because he assumed he had failed more than anyone in the room. He proceeded to tell us about growing up in Kansas, playing baseball and working a slew of part-time jobs – answering phones at a rectory, working at McDonald’s, then at Pizza Hut. He recalled his parents’ death when he was in college, and he talked about acting as a passion he left behind after graduating. Working in sales after college, he described taking a big leap. He moved to California. A few years later, another leap brought him to New York. After working in media and communications for a few years, Adam joined his mentor to found DTC, although later he would break his alliance with her and mortgage his house to buy

her out. While a difficult thing to do, he told us the risk had paid off: DTC was global now. He encouraged others to take risks, question authority and to be okay with failing. As he opened the floor for questions, I was intrigued by the audience's visible enthusiasm. Had he had a plan? How did he manage work and family life? What were the wisest words someone had shared with him? What was the best road trip song? They seemed to think he had the map for a successful life, and they wanted to know more.

Curious about the company's response, I asked a number of people about Adam's talk in the days and weeks that followed. A few people expressed cynicism, yet most seemed to genuinely appreciate the talk. Someone told me that they liked that Adam shared his story, saying, "it makes me feel more comfortable when they're [management] completely open." A newer employee, Clara, had seen the talk as well, and she told me that Adam's down-to-earth approach made her feel like she was a part of the company.

Importantly, the emphasis on honesty, occasionally going rogue and embracing vulnerability allowed maverick managers more freedom to express all aspects of their personalities. They were allowed to be complex, contradictory and flawed. Showing and embracing that raw, exposed aspect of themselves validated that their beliefs and actions were acceptable, even when those actions were questionable or may have negative consequences. Maverick managers did not "armor up," and regardless of what was exposed, this unguarded quality helped to create a powerful sense of intimacy among those who worked for them.

Mavericks at the Margins

Maverick management was the dominant style of "doing trust" among my managerial participants, yet not all managers could accomplish trust in this manner. After Adam's

talk, Everett came over to ask what I thought of the talk. Everett, a black man, was new at the company, and he was likely still several years away from a managerial role. After briefly discussing how vulnerability seemed to be trending with things like Brené Brown's Ted Talk on the subject, Everett began sharing his perception of the talk. He liked Adam, he said, but the talk was just another story of a white, male CEO. He appreciated hearing Adam's story, and he admired how Adam had worked his way up. Yet, the focus on trusting your gut and taking risks conflicted with the messages he had received in his own professional life thus far, which seemed to emphasize fitting in as much as possible. While Everett was not yet himself a manager, his reflections raise questions about the shape and limits of vulnerability among managers.

While white, male managers were celebrated for freely expressing themselves, marginalized managers had to be more careful. This became particularly evident in my interview with Russell, a black man. Russell led the creative team in DTC's New York office, and he was not well liked. He had a great reputation with clients, but a number of people within the office complained about his aggressive management style. Constance, for instance, admitting that she had asked Donnie for a transfer so she would no longer have to report to Russell. According to her, Russell frequently shot down her ideas without adequate consideration. While both men and women commented on Russell's style, there was a sense among women, in particular, that it was difficult to work with Russell. This recognition was notable given that – during my time at DTC – I observed seemingly similar behavior among white, male managers, yet Russell was disproportionately called out for such actions.

When I asked Russell if he thought people trusted him, he told me they should because he did not have any other agenda, and he was frank and honest in his conversations with people. Thus, Russell was not dissimilar to other maverick managers, who attempted to gain trust through a direct communication style. Yet, Russell also acknowledged a tension he experienced while trying to navigate managerial trust:

When I need to be frank and straightforward and brutally honest or demanding or any of those things, it's very easy to tip the scale from a passionate creative and a passionate leader to an angry black man. It's like (snaps). It's super delicate. Um, and I know that as well. But there's also nothing I can do about it. Zero. There's nothing I can do about it.

Russell explained how his managerial toolkit was different than others. He had to work harder to project honesty because he always needed to balance that honesty with affability, to avoid tipping the scale toward stereotypical understandings of black men as having an uncontrollable anger. Adia Harvey Wingfield (2010) has called out this tension in her research, highlighting how feeling rules within the workplace are racialized. As Wingfield points out, whites are able to express a range of emotions within the workplace, but anger is off limits to black professionals.

The limitations of black emotionality within the workplace came up again in an interaction I observed involving Everett. Everett came into his boss Edith's office one day while I was sitting in there. She asked him about a confrontation with a coworker he had the day before, and he began to vent to her. Edith, who was a black woman, carefully cautioned him to calm down. She told him, "you can't just go in guns blazing all the time. You can't do that here and be successful." Everett was visibly frustrated; he was certain his coworker was in the wrong. Edith shook her head, sighing, "sometimes you just need to stay in your lane." Citing her own confrontational encounter earlier in the day – a man had yelled at her and tried to intimidate her by towering over her chair.

Edith recalled her blood pressure rising and her ears turning red, but said that outwardly she remained very calm. Earlier in her career, she acknowledged that she might have gotten really angry, but she had learned that it was best to stay in her own lane. Turning back to Everett's issue, she explained this was a game he would have to learn to play. He could not come across as the "angry black man"; he would not be able to get away with that. Everett protested, but Edith told him to let it go, adding, "unfortunately, you show your emotions on your face...you can't do that." She offered to help him with that, saying when she saw him scowling, she would tell him to "fix his face." "You can't let other people see you like that," she warned again.

When Everett left, Edith turned to me and admitted that mentoring was hard. She wanted to be honest, but sometimes people did not want to hear it. Edith was in a particularly delicate position as a manager, faced with intersecting racialized feeling rules and gendered requirements for emotional labor. As a trusted manager, she needed to be seen as a maverick – honest, independent and fearless – but as a black professional woman, she also needed to demonstrate care for others and limit her emotional expressions. A few weeks later, as I sat beside her in a managerial training about expressing vulnerability as a manager and not "armoring up," I wondered if Edith felt like the resources within the workplace equipped her to deal with this difficult combination of factors.

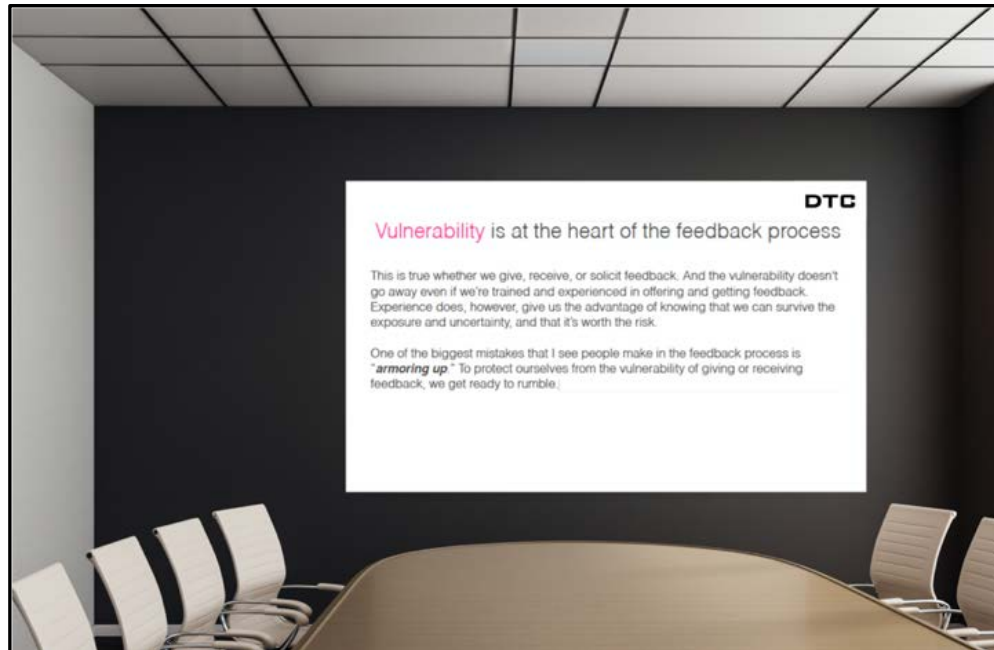


Figure 5. Slide from management training session at DTC.

Lola, who was facilitating the training and who often led trainings within DTC, told me that the concept of not “armoring up” generally resonated with women in the company, but that they had often told her that being authentic and vulnerable was hard in a male-dominated environment. She recalled a conversation that occurred during one training session attended only by women:

We went around the table to talk about like what are some of the issues and why have you decided to be part of this course. And they said, a lot of them said that they wanted to kind of show up as their, like authentic self, but they had a hard time doing that because, you know, it's such a like male-dominant environment that they had to like probably, you know, sound meaner than they really are, or they had to like come up with this front almost like an armor I guess so that they'll be respected kind of.

Interestingly, while the male-dominated environment made women feel like they needed to armor up – something that directly contradicted maverick management – women were equally constrained by prescriptive gender stereotypes that required them to take a nurturing approach to others,¹⁰ a style that conflicted with the direct communication extolled within performances of maverick management. For instance, Ashley, a manager at The Jones, embraced maverick management. Straightforward and willing to break the

mold in certain situations, Ashley often successfully performed trust down. Cecilia, a server, described Ashley's style, contrasting it with that of another manager:

I feel like Ashley is way more straightforward than Paige is. I feel like, even if it's bitchy, like obviously it's real. At least I don't think she's trying to like bullshit me, you know...Ashley, if she doesn't agree with me, she'll be like, "but, girl, da-da-da" [waves finger], where Paige is just like, "yeah." And I'm like, did you really agree with me? Like, I don't know. So I feel like Ashley's just more real. I feel like I can trust that Ashley is telling me what she really thinks. I feel like she'll - also if I tell her something - then I feel like she'll be like, oh, yeah, you're right. Like she'll check what she thinks. And be like, oh, yeah, I do see your perspective. Whereas Paige, I feel like I don't even have the opportunity to be like you don't get it because she's just like "yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative)."

Ashley earned Cecilia's trust by being honest and direct and also by being willing to adapt when the circumstances required it – all key elements of maverick management. However, also in Cecilia's description, it is possible to discern the consequences of gender stereotypes. Cecilia noted that Ashley can be "bitchy," setting a potential boundary on her maverick style in a way that was not generally done in regard to managerial white men. Indeed, Ashley told me that she sometimes found it difficult to be candid with people. She explained, "there's a time for me to just tell you what to do, and *unfortunately* my job is to tell you what to do. I don't want to be like a *bossy person*, but at the same time, I need results and I'm gonna get them. You know what I mean? [*emphasis added*]." Ashley had to temper her straightforward style, separating her personality from the role. As a woman, she tried to avoid being seen as too assertive, yet as a manager, she knew she was accountable for results, and thus needed to be directive. She told me she worked hard to balance her need to get things done, while also being attentive to others emotions. "I'm gonna find whatever it takes to make sure that you understand that my objective is not to patronize you, it's not to belittle you in any sort of way because I do my due diligence to make sure I don't make anybody feel like that," she explained. She, herself, had been made to feel bad within working environments, and she

never wanted to do that to someone else. Ashley developed a maverick management style, which helped her become a trusted manager, but her efforts here were more intentional than her male counterparts, as the cultural landscape that she traversed, as a woman manager, was more tumultuous.

Managerial men sometimes noticed the added burden women managers faced. For instance, Ronald told me that he prided himself on being a “bulldog,” explaining it as the only way to get things done at DTC. Nevertheless, his female producers were often scolded when they took a bulldog approach. Talking about his best producer, Sharon, he said, “she’s been equated by multiple different people as being too assertive or too aggressive, or like a bulldog...but then if you’re not, it’s like oh, why are you being so passive?” He conceded that it was a difficult line to toe, but he was unsure of what to do about it. In my interview with Sharon, she told me, “I’m a Brooklyn girl, a New York girl, so I’m used to being direct,” perhaps illustrating a learned need to explain, or account for, her straightforward approach to others. Moreover, her use of the word “girl” to describe herself aligns with cultural icons – such as the “fearless girl” on Wall Street – that infantilize women in an attempt to make feminine power more palatable and less threatening to others.

While black managers and women managers tried to negotiate maverick management, the Latino managers in my study pursued a distinct pathway of trust. Like others, this group of managers faced obstacles to the successful enactment of maverick management. Mario, for instance, told me that he did not stray from formal procedure. If things went wrong, he wanted to be sure that he could not be blamed. He recalled some office materials being stolen a few months before. The team had approached him about it

because he was working late that night, and he felt that there was a hint of accusation. Humiliated by the experience of being falsely accused, he saw this as an example of why he always needed the protection of formal policy and procedure.

Sebastian, a manager at The Jones, brought up another challenge with maverick management. He told me that, because English was not his first language, he was always very thoughtful and deliberate when he spoke. He elaborated, telling me that when he first started managing, he would say things in English that he did not mean. “I was forced to learn that I had to think what I had to say first in order to say it in an eloquent way. That taught me to think before I spoke, and I was able to channel my emotions,” he said. Sebastian was honest in his communications, but he could not fully emulate the off-the-cuff, unguarded speaking style used by other managers. This challenge is noteworthy, as it helps to explain how interactional misunderstandings might develop, identifying a potential trigger of interactional mechanisms of inequality. In this case, the need to “code switch” limits the ability of marginalized managers to display unbridled authenticity, which in turn limits their ability to engender trust among workers.

As opposed to adopting maverick management, which stressed individualism and nonconformity, the Latino managers in my study performed trust through a more accommodating approach, harkening back to the strong cultural value of familism in Latinx culture.¹¹ They focused on showing respect to others – especially those they managed – and ensuring the comfort of others in their efforts to build trust. Mario told me he thought people trusted him because “I treat them like people. I give them a lot of respect.” He chuckled, “thank god for my personality! I don't know where I got it from. I think it's my father. I have that welcoming type personality. And I know that, I know

that.” In addition, Latino managers were very thoughtful, but reserved, when they advised others. Noting that there were multiple ways to do things, not just one right way, they were happy to share their thoughts, but ultimately the other person would need to decide what was right for them. Thus, Latino managers could be seen as being less forthright than others. While Sebastian and Mario appeared to be trusted managers, the limited number of people in my sample pursuing this strategy for “doing trust” made it difficult to discern whether this strategy could be successful on a larger scale.

Thus, the dominant strategy of gaining managerial trust was through maverick management, which emphasized unfiltered communication, the pragmatic enforcement of rules and procedures and an embrace of vulnerability. Both managers and those being managed describe maverick management as an effective means for building a varied repertoire of trust, although stereotypes and expectations made this style more difficult for women and people of color to enact. Black men and women attempted maverick management, negotiating race and gender stereotypes in the process, while Latino managers adopted a different style of doing trust.

Doing Trust Up: Neoliberal Fealty

Studying trust “down” illuminates expectations for management, which contribute to stratification among managers and which also have implications for workers. Studying trust “up” provides a different perspective for understanding workplace relations.

Workers perform trust with managers to demonstrate their value and worth, and the dominant ways in which doing trust is recognized and rewarded can contribute to workplace hierarchies. To the extent that these performances are influenced by

normative expectations, they also shed light on the hegemonic processes of control operating in each workplace.¹²

I found that workers do trust “up” through performances of *neoliberal fealty*. Neoliberal fealty entailed the paradoxical combination of being self-sufficient in one’s work, while also demonstrating a strong allegiance to management. In this way, it represented an integration of legible and versatile logics of trust. In combination with maverick management, this style of doing trust obscured hierarchies within the workplace. However, neoliberal fealty demanded that workers extend effort and endure risk, often with little or no reward, and the costs of this performance were particularly high for certain groups of workers, such as contingent employees and women. Moreover, performances of neoliberal fealty strained peer-to-peer relations, creating divisions that ultimately served employer interests.

The Neoliberal Worker

At both DTC and The Jones, the neoliberal worker, an employee who was able to operate independently with little guidance or oversight, was highly celebrated. I noticed this as I sat watching the annual rewards presentation at DTC. Each year, six people were recognized – through an all-expenses paid trip of their choice – for their outstanding contributions within the company. “For this next individual,” Andy announced, “her boss told me that he often felt like *he* reported to *her*.” As laughter erupted within the room, he exclaimed, “that’s a strong indicator of her performance!” When he identified the recipient as Sigi, a thin, brown-haired woman with a big smile bounded to the front of the room. I spoke with Sigi a few weeks later, and she told me she rarely saw her boss, Ernie. “I go in there when I have a question or need some extra support,” she explained,

but generally Ernie was fairly hands-off with her and the team she managed. His other accounts were time consuming, and Sigi was happy with that. “I like the freedom of being able to just do whatever we need to do,” she explained, before adding, “I think he likes that too ‘cause it’s one less thing he has to worry about.” Sigi told me she expected a similar level of independence among those that she managed, saying, “I want you to be completely self-sufficient. Be part of our team, but be able to be okay on your own.”

Labor scholars have generally viewed autonomy – discretion over the tasks and timing of work – as a benefit for workers, noting that they derive greater dignity and purpose from their work when given discretion over tasks and schedules.¹³ While managers may appreciate some of the benefits of autonomous workers – such as greater worker satisfaction and engagement¹⁴ – worker autonomy has generally been viewed as a concession of managerial power,¹⁵ with managers conceding worker autonomy in situations where conditions make it difficult to effectively exert control over work activities.¹⁶ Interestingly, however, I found that managers actively develop and encourage workers to be autonomous. For example, Andy described his managerial philosophy, saying, “I’m going to give you a lot of rope, and you’re either going to climb with it or potentially hang yourself (laughs).” He explained that he loathed micromanaging, and he had seen the best results with a more hands-off approach. Workers echoed this sentiment. Marsh described her last supervisor as someone who “pushes you in the deep end and hopes you swim.” She viewed this as an opportunity to prove herself to management, and she boasted that she typically thrived in that type of situation. Similarly, Ben told me about how he and another junior-level employee ran a portion of the BevCo business by themselves for a while. Elaborating, he told me, “I

mean we were running the entire business, from like top down.” When his boss Shari came onto the team, she knew he could be trusted because he was already running the business.

Worker autonomy was also emphasized at The Jones, yet this autonomy was tempered¹⁷ at times by the scripted and routinized nature of the work and by a high level of workplace surveillance.¹⁸ Nevertheless, while working at The Jones, I quickly learned that managers’ trust was earned by proving that you could work independently.

Managers told me they did not trust people they had to “constantly be on top of” or who made frequent mistakes. One manager, David, explained how he typically lost trust, saying:

it’s never like (snaps) instantaneous. It just starts to slowly happen where, before I know it, I subconsciously put him into tiny sections because I think that’s what they can handle...it just starts to ingrain in you that it’s what this person can handle, anything more, and I’m going to have to be on him, standing next to him all night. And I don’t have time for that.

Trust was signaled through the schedule at The Jones, and trusted servers were often scheduled busy shifts and larger sections where it was possible to make more money. I remembered the first time I was scheduled one of the good sections, located near the front of the restaurant. Shawn, another server looked at me and joked, “Are you in the front tonight? Oh, you better not mess up! This is your chance.” He was picking on me, but it was also true. I knew that if I made a lot of mistakes or became too overwhelmed, the managers would think I could not handle it, and it would be a long time before I got another chance. In fact, I had seen Lynn go through something similar a few shifts before. Also new, Lynn was excited to have the opportunity to work one of the front sections, but unfortunately things had not gone well:

I was like super excited, and Donele had to give away one of my tables because I got so badly in the weeds, and so badly like, I messed up. I think I ordered, I forgot to put the

appetizer for three different tables for some reason. I was just like all over the place at that point, like tables were moving, like four tables had their glasses dirty. I freaked out, and I couldn't handle it. She had to give away one of my tables. And that was like a knife in the heart, like I couldn't handle it... obviously I didn't do as well as I could have.... (laughs) but it was my chance to prove myself.

Lynn felt that, because she was not able to maintain her section, she failed to earn manager's trust.

In performing this self-reliant aspect of neoliberal fealty, workers demonstrated autonomy to gain trust. In contrast to previous assumptions, autonomy was not necessarily the reward for being trusted; rather trust was the reward for being able to function autonomously. However, in demonstrating their autonomy, workers often accomplished more with less engagement or help from managers. This was clear one Sunday morning when I arrived to work a brunch shift. As people filed in, we began – as normal – by unstacking the chairs and setting the tables. As we finished this setup, we realized no one had seen a manager. In the absence of managerial oversight, we continued as normal, filling juice containers, setting up condiments and stocking dishes. We were all in sync, even though no one was really talking. Guided by memory and training, we had a natural rhythm. Later, Jenna, a veteran server, pulled out a blank floorplan. She assigned people who were scheduled to close in sections one, two, five and six and then passed the sheet around for the rest of us sign up for the various sections. Liz commented on our resourcefulness, before laughing and adding, “now that’s autonomy in the workplace.” It would be another hour and a half before David, who had overslept, arrived to see a bustling, yet smoothly operating brunch shift. He congratulated us on a job well done.

While most workers said they enjoyed the autonomy and learned best by “doing,” they also lamented a lack of managerial engagement. Some staff members at The Jones

described being frustrated by managers' lack of availability when they needed them. At DTC, Sean told me: "I don't like to be micromanaged, but at times, it is frustrating 'cause there's just less mentorship. I don't feel like I need her support necessarily day-to-day, but it's more just like hey what are your thoughts on this. I almost have to pry for her input." Autonomy was a double-edged sword, especially when the lack of mentorship resulted in delayed upward mobility. Jerry, an account executive who had just accepted a job offer at another company when we spoke, told me that despite his autonomy being recognized, he had not received a promotion or raise in almost two years. Venting, he said, "I mean, they just keep slapping on more work, and it's just, there's really no benefit to that. Like, oh great, I have a little coin of trust – hooray! Like that doesn't do shit for me!" As Jerry succinctly articulates, the symbolic rewards of trust did not always articulate into material benefits for workers.

Demonstrated Fealty

A second aspect of doing trust up was about partnering with management. On the surface, this appeared to contradict the notion of working in an autonomous, self-reliant way, but trusted workers managed this tension by acting almost like pseudo-managers, reporting select – but valuable – information up the chain and rallying other workers on behalf of managerial interests.

Senior managers continually reminded workers of their "open door" policy, inviting staff to come to them with updates, ideas and concerns, and at The Jones in particular, this was institutionalized in the written communication reports completed by employees after each shift. Managers stressed not only the sharing of work-related information, they also sought to constantly gauge the interpersonal and emotional state of

the organization. Communication reports inquired about employees' mood at the beginning and end of each shift, and managers at both organizations often expressed an interest in gossip. David told me that, as a manager, he could not walk up to a group and ask for the gossip, but he had a few employees who would tell him what was going on behind the scenes. He thought this information made him better at his job, and he really trusted the individuals who confided in him. Managers framed open communication as mutually beneficial, inviting employees to share mistakes, weaknesses and frustrations so they could deal with them together. For example, Ronald told me that workers earned his trust by being open and honest with him: "Like, if you still need to learn, then just admit that you need to learn. You know what I mean? Be like, you know what, I don't actually know what the hell I'm doing here. Cool. Well let's figure that out together, or I gotta figure a new spot for you." Ronald's statement represents some of the tensions in this dynamic. To earn trust, workers needed to be open with managers, yet in sharing some information about themselves or others, they risked their own position within the workplace.

Managers not only requested fealty through open communication, but they also expected trusted workers to contribute positively to the overall culture. In some cases, managers actively recruited the support of trusted staff members. For instance, when the management team decided to promote DJ, a manager disliked by many, they called a number of trusted servers into the office. Amanda, one of those servers, recalled how the managers said that "we shouldn't freak out about it. And that we should encourage everyone to stay calm, to be like, it's going to be fine." Amanda explained that the management team was cognizant of the staff's feelings about DJ, telling the group, "we

hear all of your concerns, and we're taking them into account. And so we need you guys to be calm and on board with our decision because we didn't just make this choice lightly, and we need you to help the rest of the team be on board." Amanda described feeling trusted in that meeting, and as a result, she was happy to build support among other staff members. Amanda performed versatile trustworthiness in this case by being sensitive to the needs of management and by encouraging others to understand the managerial perspective.

The Costs of Neoliberal Fealty

Neoliberal fealty brought symbolic rewards, particularly trust, for workers. People such as Amanda at The Jones and even Jerry at DTC felt trusted by their managers. However, as Jerry pointed out, that symbolic recognition did not always translate to material outcomes. Indeed, neoliberal fealty often came at a cost for workers. In seeking trust, for example, workers took on more responsibility and ownership, yet independence led managers to be further removed from their work. As a result, workers missed out on opportunities for mentorship and the details of their efforts were less visible, slowing processes of recognition and reward.

The skew toward corporate interests was perhaps most acute for contingent workers, who in maintaining their self-reliance, often put themselves at risk for the company. Peg, who was a contracted sales representative for the BevCo account at DTC, noted this, telling me:

Our job is very gray. We're the ones who are tasked to go out and do, not the illegal stuff, but the stuff that's not totally white or black, because if it was, they would be doing it without me. They don't need me to do it. They need somebody to go in there and kind of do the shady shit that they cannot physically have their hands dirtied with. You know what I mean?

Peg described doing things like going into bars and spending a certain amount of money in return for the bar agreeing to put the brand on their cocktail list. She was frustrated because, while she felt that there was an informal understanding that this was part of the business, the company offered her no way of documenting such actions on her expense reports, likely to avoid any liabilities.

Moreover, while managers emphasized communication as a means of facilitating partnership, the asymmetrical structure of worker-manager relationships ultimately placed limits on the stated partnership. Notably, when a worker was dissatisfied, managers were not compelled to make changes. For example, Manuel, a manager at DTC, told me that, among those who reported to him, he was more likely to trust those who were forthright. He explained, “if you don’t feel good about something, tell me. Don’t just bury it. Let’s have a conversation. It doesn’t mean I’m gonna change my mind necessarily, but I at least want to talk about it.” Similar, Paul at The Jones told me he felt betrayed when people complained to coworkers instead of talking to him directly. He admitted, “I may not be able to change what they’re upset about,” yet he still preferred that people come to him with their concerns.

On the dimensions of honest communication and vulnerability, neoliberal fealty served as the inverse of maverick management. Open communication was key to doing trust in both directions of vertical workplace relationships. Yet, the relational positioning of actors resulted in different experiences and implications of doing trust. Managers’ honesty was less constrained. Their transparency was voluntary – a token of appreciation or a “good faith” gift – to workers. Workers were not entitled to this information, making open communication and vulnerability a symbolic vehicle through which managers could

translate power into trust. In contrast, worker candidness was valued only to the extent it served managerial interests. In terms of work tasks, truthful and timely communication was mandated. In terms of self-assessments or emotions, honesty and vulnerability came with risk. As evidenced within Liz's caution to not "self-incriminate" by being too forthcoming on communication reports, and Ronald's comment above about finding someone a new spot, if managers were concerned or did not like what they heard from workers, there could be material consequences. Even when open communication built trust, it could work against workers. As a recent survey suggests, managers fear being perceived as biased, and thus they may actually engage in biased actions *against* workers with whom they are close.¹⁹ David, at The Jones, told me, "trusting somebody doesn't mean that you favor them." He explained:

it would be a disservice to personally reward somebody for something that isn't work related...so there's no reason that person X should be able to confide in me, and I reward them. And person Y feels like now they need to be able to confide in me so that they can get a better section...There's no longer integrity to truth if, just because you tell me something, I'm rewarding you because you didn't have to tell me that. You're not telling me that to get something. If you're telling me that to get something, it's kind of fucked...that's not trust, and in fact, that's going to bite you in the ass harder because I'm going to find out.

Moreover, while senior managers seemed eager to know how people felt, they also frequently discounted the feelings that workers shared, usually portraying them as misguided. Managers wanted to stay informed, not because they necessarily aimed to change the company in response, but instead – as Andy said to me one day – they hoped to "change the narrative" among workers.

In fact, managers not only wanted to change the narrative, once they sensed dissatisfaction, they almost demanded it be changed. As I described in the Introduction, interpersonal harmony is required in the name of productivity. The mandate for positivity at The Jones, for instance, could sometimes feel oppressive. I experienced this

first-hand when Paul came up to me one evening telling me he found my check-out sheet on the ground. It must have fallen out of my apron during the rush. As he handed it back, he asked, “Sarah, are you happy? Do you still like working here?” I assured him that I was and that I did, but his question triggered a strong sense of unease. I recalled how, at the new employee orientation, the CEO, Stuart told us:

Our mission is to have the best culture, to have great, happy people. If you know of someone or see someone who doesn't fit, let us know...We don't want people to hate their job. You should like working in the restaurant, find pleasure in it...Find a way or leave...We're huge believers in that. Our goal is for people to like their job. It shouldn't feel like a job. If you don't, tell us and we'll try to fix it. If we can't, you can become a guest.

Was Paul implying that perhaps I should become a guest? I mentioned my encounter with Paul to others, who validated, “oh yeah, he does that!” May recalled how management used to call her down to the office constantly to ask if she was happy. She told me at one point she threw her hands up and said, “I'm a 26-year old waitress. I don't really know how happy I'm supposed to be. Like, I'm sorry, I don't know what to tell you.” Over time, however, she admitted to giving in to the pressure. She tried to embrace the positivity, at least on the surface. Mocking herself and making faces as she spoke, she exclaimed, “I love it here. It's so great. It's everything I've ever dreamed up for my life.”

Notably, but not surprisingly, this cultural and emotional work was more frequently assigned to women than men. Jenna, for example, recounted how managers had brought a group of female servers down to the managers' office. Concerned about their disgruntled attitude, the managers told the women, “we rely on your positivity.” Jenna wondered aloud to me: “is this a woman thing? Am I supposed to like, be just like bubbly and like a Disney princess all the time? Would you say that to a guy?” When Paul had said something similar to her coworker, Chelsea, Jenna recalled thinking “we're Mosseri

not paid for – it’s not like five dollars an hour on your paycheck for positivity. You can’t expect that of one person and not the rest of the team. You can’t rely on certain people for positivity unless they’re getting paid for that.” Nevertheless, Jenna told me that she appreciated being trusted, and she recalled times that she had rallied others on behalf of management.

Differences between junior women and men became most apparent in perceptions of failed neoliberal fealty. In particular, when men complained about problems within the workplace, they could occasionally “pass” as performing aspects of maverick management, simply enacting an authentic and candid approach to communication. Women, whose gender stereotypes conformed more with neoliberal fealty and less with maverick management, were not able to pass in the same way, and when they expressed their dissatisfaction, they were often called out for being too negative. Cecilia, a server at The Jones, noted this distinction while pushing back on managers’ complaints about her negativity:

I also am a human, and if I want to express my feelings...and there have been other servers in the past, *men*, who have been like little bitches. And no one said shit to them, but because I'm a girl, because we are females, like we're not allowed to be 'cause we're just bitching. Or being emotional. Bitch, I'm not being emotional! This is a fact. This is a fact. This isn't an opinion... So don't tell me that I'm being emotional. I'm not being emotional, just because I'm honest about being, no I'm mad. Like, I'm angry because of what just happened. This isn't like I have my period, and I'm irrational. Why is it always that females are irrational? No, I'm pissed, like any human would be pissed. This is a fact.... you would never fucking say that shit that you say to me to Jeff, Danny, any other straight, especially straight, men, and like, they bitch so much. Like the guys complain about getting cut and not making money just as much as I do, if not more!

Cecilia’s frustration regarding a double standard in emotional expression reflects the gendered nature of performances of trust, both up and down. Notably tokenized, junior men – especially straight, white men – were more likely to pass as enacting a modified form of maverick management than their women counterparts, and this often worked to

their benefit. *However*, there was a risk involved. When junior men failed to pass as maverick managers and they failed to perform neoliberal fealty, they risked significant sanctions and could even jeopardize their job security.

A final cost of neoliberal fealty was that it could drive inequality and division *among* the staff. At The Jones, neoliberal fealty was much more feasible for more veteran employees, and thus the performance of allied trust could cause greater divisions between “veterans” and “newbs.” Indeed, this division served management well, as it increased the power of veterans – who allied with managers as a means of doing trust – over newer employees, extending the reach of managerial control to incorporate peer-to-peer control. At DTC, Josephine described the consequences of neoliberal fealty for peer-to-peer relationships. Josephine had been at DTC for three years, and she left the company while I was there. She said that DTC had proved a difficult working environment. Her peers were with her in the New York office, but their bosses were based in other offices in Chicago and San Francisco. Highlighting her lack of a promotion, Josephine, like many others, said she felt her contributions often went unrecognized. She was also frustrated because her managers had reprimanded her for not being more connected to the team in New York. They were concerned because her desk was apart from the rest of the team. Josephine thought this was odd, given that her supervisors had never been to their office; how did they know where she sat? She concluded that other team members must be sharing information about her with their managers, and she felt like she could not trust the group. Eventually, this led her to look for opportunities elsewhere.

At both organizations, workers did trust “up” through neoliberal fealty, which emphasized a combination of self-reliance and allegiance to managers. In performing neoliberal fealty, workers felt valued and worthy, yet this strategy largely served the interests of managers, leading employees to exert significant effort, as well as emotional dedication. In addition, neoliberal fealty could create divisions among workers, encouraging them to align themselves with managers as opposed to with one another.

Doing Trust Across: Squad Solidarity

Trust relations are important in hierarchical relationships because they can illuminate unspoken social contracts and expectations that reflect particular power dynamics. Peer-to-peer trust within the workplace also reflects and informs norms that govern the workplace and, in doing so, contributes to the workplace culture and climate. A number of people told me that trust with coworkers largely defined how they felt about work. Drew, a creative director at DTC, commented, “you spend more time within the office, with these people, than you do with anybody else...so these people have to be an integral, comfortable part of your life. Otherwise, it’s just not going to work!” Talking about The Jones, Jenna told me, “a lot of times I find myself, like I’m hanging out with people first (laughs), working second. I mean, work still sucks, but, ... (laughing) but that’s, like, the best part about it.” For a number of people, coworker relationships were among the most important things at work. Ruth, an account executive at DTC, acknowledged that it would be beneficial for her career to move jobs. Yet, she was having a hard time doing this. She said that while she thought it was “time to grow up” and leave the company, she had a lot of friends there, and she wanted to “ride it out until I can’t possibly anymore.” Peer-to-peer trust was an important aspect of my participants’ work lives, and

it was something they put effort into. In doing trust with coworkers, both managers and workers practiced what I call *squad solidarity*, which entailed building friendly rapport through the mastery of interactional currencies and securing relationships through acts of steadfast support. Thus, squad solidarity relied on the logics of intimate and allied trust. I describe the dynamics of squad solidarity below, noting how conflicting dynamics of trust in horizontal and vertical relationships could, in some cases, lead to scapegoating.

Interactional Currencies: Banter and Spilling Tea

An important aspect of performing peer trust was the mastery of what I call “interactional currencies,” or styles of interacting that were recognized and admired by others.

Interactional currencies were particularly useful resources in doing trust across heterogeneous peer groups, bringing people together through a sense of intimacy that could overcome social difference. I observed two main interactional currencies critical to doing trust across peers: banter and tea.

At both organizations, people playfully joked and teased one another as a means of bonding, but banter was particularly salient at The Jones. Elongated or elaborate conversations were almost impossible in the restaurant, making it necessary to build rapport through short exchanges. Banter was a prime currency; it quickly communicated one’s humor and wit, and it contributed to the “fun, high energy” atmosphere. For example, Al told me about how he first bonded with another bartender, Ken, while working at the back bar:

He and I would talk for long periods of time, and I felt very, very trusting with him ‘cause, I mean, the first thing I did on that second bartending shift...I opened up one of the coolers, and an entire bottle of Sauvignon Blanc fell out and just exploded. First thing I did back there. And he was just like, I think the first thing he said was, uh, "well, it smells like white girls back here now." And so like from there I was just like okay, this is going to be fun.

Quick jokes back and forth occurred all over the restaurant throughout each shift. It was part freestyle battle, with people trying to “one-up” each other with their wit, and part improv show, with everyone coming together to collectively create something. Being able to contribute to this was important to developing bonds with peers.

The provocative quality of banter, at times, tested the lines of what was considered appropriate conversation. In particular, I noticed that sexist and racist jokes were common. These jokes could serve as definitive moments. On the one hand, if someone expressed offense, they might be labeled as taking things too seriously, as not being fun. On the other, when enough people deemed a joke to be too offensive, the joker risked stigmatization. Shawn, a budding comedian, was known for pushing people’s limits, often making inappropriate jokes. As a result, people had conflicted opinions about him. Abigail explained how she was unsure if she trusted Shawn:

I don't know, I find myself having a really interesting relationship with Shawn. He is a really good worker. He will complete his job to the fullest. He's the one who's like doing side work to the *n*th degree. But on a personal level, I just don't quite understand him...we've had some friction between us just because he makes a lot of like racially charged jokes, which I don't necessarily know if they're jokes or not sometimes. And so since I don't know how to respond to them, I don't, I can't really get a good read on him a lot of the time. So I might ask him, hey I'm so sorry, like would you mind doing this thing for me real quick? But I wouldn't be like, so let me tell you about this thing going on in my life because like I don't understand him as a person.

Shawn was very aware of this dynamic, and he admitted to actively testing people. This was driven, in large part, by a lack of social similarity with his peers.

I mean, I was like one of the only black people that worked there...a lot of *Caucasian* people (laughs). So I had a defense mechanism already. You know what I mean? ... I can wear many hats, so my thing was, you know, I'll use my charm, I'll use my wit. I use my intelligence to see who I want to be friends with and who can see through it. I like people who can see through the game I try to play with people. So whoever sees through it and realizes it's just a joke and it's just me being stupid, then I let them get close to me. Then I show them my other side, then, but otherwise it's just all jokes. So what I do is I just play jokes with people and test people and see how they react. And if they react like super sensitive, which they do do cause they're a lot of actors and actresses. And if they just don't get it or they just get offended, then I just stop talking to them, stop associating with them. The people who get it and the people who laugh, then they become my friends.

As a black man in a white-dominated environment, he could not count solely on similarity as a means of bonding. Instead, Shawn did trust with others through banter.

The second interactional currency I observed at play within the two organizations was spilling the “tea.” The phrase spilling the tea is a slang term for sharing the truth (the “T”), and it is said to originate in black drag culture. In recent years, it has entered into mainstream vernacular, and it describes sharing juicy or scandalous information. In one sense, spilling the tea is about sharing personal thoughts and feelings, somewhat akin to the honest and vulnerable approach of maverick managers doing trust down, although there is often an aura of secrecy around this information in peer-to-peer trust. Being able to “spill” in this way not only brought people together, but it was also a means of maintaining one’s sanity within the workplace. Sharon, at DTC, described the importance of spilling, saying: “if you don’t let a little bit spill out of your teapot, how can you put more in? I think being able to vent in a healthy way is very important to people. I think it is necessary. I think you have to have some type of outlet. It’s very stressful what we do, you know?”

Banter and spilling the tea could also occur in vertical relationships, yet it was not the dominant form of “doing trust” in those interactions. The direct and open communication in vertical relationships tended to be more strategic. Managers worried that the more unrestrained nature of truly spilling the tea might be seen as unprofessional. For example, Sean told me he tried to avoid sharing his feelings of frustration with those that reported to him, saying “I think that can come off as, it can kind of diminish your seniority, not diminish, but it can, I don’t know. I would never vent to someone below me, that’s reporting to me. Maybe in certain capacities, but more subtly probably.”

Conversely, when workers engaged in banter with managers, they risked formal reprimand. Shawn, for example, crossed the line one day when he called Ashley, who was Indian-American, a “spicy curry dish.” In this case, Shawn’s provocation did not simply result in social discomfort for some. The managers called him down to the office and spoke to him about the need to conduct himself in a respectful and professional manner while at work. While this could have occurred in peer-to-peer banter, it would have required a staff member to report the information to a manager, which as described below, would violate peer trust.

Spilling the tea not only entailed sharing one’s own “truth,” but it could also include sharing the gossip or secrets of others. Sitting with Cecilia after our shift at The Jones one day, she started outlining some of the social dynamics of the restaurant, telling me who did not like whom, which people had “hooked up” and so on. She laughed, saying, “girl, I’m giving you all the tea!” Sharing secrets was indeed a way of building intimacy and trust. As Shay explained one day, “there are a group of people that love to gossip. That’s how they – I mean you can see them whispering and stuff. I mean, they’ll share if you want to be like what’s going on? What’s happening? You know, and like offering your own piece of gossip (laughing) to get *in* the group or whatever.” As Shay describes, gossip and secrecy served as an interactional currency through which allied trust could be accomplished.

Locking it Up: Confidentiality and Loyalty

Doing trust among peers was about forging trust through interactional currencies, but it was also about maintaining trust by keeping confidentialities and by acting as a united front when faced with those of a different hierarchical rank. Confidentiality, at times,

could be a tricky dance. People needed to share information to initiate new trusting relationships, but they needed to withhold information to maintain lasting righteous trust.

Alena articulated these competing pressures, distinguishing herself as being able to maintain trust:

I'm a very good secret keeper. It's something I pride myself on because it's not hard guys. Like you just don't say anything, literally. And I think it's about wanting other people to like you maybe. I think in some way people think like, oh, if I have juicy information, people are gonna find me interesting. Then I'll be more engaging in conversation, and they'll be more likely to enjoy my company...which I think is some bullshit, because I don't like you for telling my secret, so you forfeited your currency with me with currency for somebody else. That's some crap.

Moreover, confidentiality expectations needed, in most cases, to remain unspoken, making it even more delicate. As Shawna explained:

I had Jill the other day tell me, like, please don't tell Shari. Like Shari and I are close...And I kind of looked at her like, I wouldn't. And she was like, well I just have to say it. So, that, what that told me is she doesn't trust me. You telling me not to tell something that you know I already know can't be said to anybody. Ok, great. I don't know what that did for you. It just told me that you don't trust me. So, if you don't trust me, I'm not going to trust you.

Equally important and equally tricky was presenting a united front to others of a different rank. Ashley, a manager at The Jones, told me that, at first, many of the other managers, had been cold and standoffish to her. Nevertheless, she refused to let anyone know, saying it was very important to present a sense of unity among managers: "you don't want people to feel that. You want them to feel like your team is a united front. So that when we have something of authority to say, it's coming from one voice, even though its multiple people.... you have to work really hard to have that separation, even if you don't like the [peers] you're working with." Workers were very aware of the potential power in breaking this front, and they often tried to pit managers against one another, making it even more important for managers to "hold the line."

Workers, too, built allied trust by supporting one another, particularly to management. At The Jones, for instance, there was a call out system. If one person called out, another who was scheduled the “on call” position would be called in. Workers would get frustrated with one another when they called out, but they would rarely tell managers if they knew that someone called out for an illegitimate reason. May explained that not “throwing people under the bus” like that was an important part of doing trust among co-workers. She described one worker, Abigail, who she thought sometimes abused the call-out system, but noted that she would never report her: “one night I got completely shitfaced with Kate and Abigail, and [Abigail] had to work a double the next day. And she called out for *both* shifts, and it was a *Sunday*...I think she abuses it, but I’ve never, I didn’t report her.”

In some cases, squad solidarity among managers and among workers could contribute to tensions between managers and workers. When I first arrived at The Jones, managers implemented a new scheduling strategy for bartenders, adding an extra bartender for every shift. Bartenders were an exception in the restaurant in that they pooled tips each shift, so this added body cut into their regular pay. Bartenders responded in a way congruent with neoliberal fealty – telling managers about their concerns – but they did this as a united front. As Al told me, “all the bartenders met up [outside of work], and we wrote down what we wanted to talk to the managers about, trying to come up with an agenda.” He recalled how one bartender had then emailed the managers with the request, copying all of the other bartenders. The managers agreed to the meeting, but only sent one or two managers to speak for the whole group. This presented a united managerial front, but it aggravated the bartenders, who perhaps hoped

some managers may be more sensitive to their concerns than others. In the meeting, managers told the bartenders they had made the scheduling decision after much consideration and thought. As Matteo told me, “the story was...they had been talking about it for awhile, but they hadn’t talked about it with *us*. Just among themselves.” When the bartenders, as a group, pushed during the meeting, one of the managers exploded, taking an authoritative tone and telling them that this was the way scheduling would be from now on. With both sides demonstrating solidarity with their peers, managerial-bartender relations became tense in the following weeks. Matteo noted that “you could just feel the tension, every shift, every day,” to the point where little things, like running out of a bottle of liquor could turn into a large argument. Eventually, management appeared to win when one long-time bartender was fired, a situation I describe in more detail in the next chapter.

Scapegoating

Peers did trust among one another, first, by building rapport, and then by covering for one another – either by keeping confidentiality or hiding misalignments within the group. However, I did notice a few exceptions to this. In some cases, if a worker was widely distrusted by management – or a manager was widely distrusted by workers – the group might violate the norms of squad solidarity. In these cases, the distrusted individual would become a scapegoat – treated as an exception – through which the peer group could maintain the vertical trust relations that existed. Russell at DTC and Annie at The Jones represent two examples of this.

As mentioned above, Russell was widely distrusted among workers, and workers would often share their dissatisfaction about Russell with other managers. During these

conversations, managers would often empathize with workers, rather than hold the line. They would explain that they were watching Russell, and they planned to take action in the near future. Russell was aware of this dynamic, especially with Donnie, who was also part of the management team, although more senior than Russell. Russell explained:

it is a problem that he sits directly in the studio because people feel like they have access to him. And they should; it should be accessible. But if they're coming to him with an issue, he should say go over there [to Russell's office]. But he doesn't. And when he continues to allow that, it continues to break down the unity in the studio.

Specifically, Russell noted that sometimes people would complain to Donnie when Russell pushed them to work harder. He was upset that Donnie would have a side conversation with these individuals without involving him, and he thought workers in the studio exploited the division between them: "they know that he's not involved [in the day-to-day], and they know that he's not gonna have the conversation, and he's not gonna push them...it's just them looking out for themselves and trying to position themselves."

This division was particularly noticed when Zoe, a project manager who reported to Russell, was getting ready to go on maternity leave. Zoe previously had a miscarriage, and a few weeks before her due date, she was put on modified bedrest. She continued to work from home, but then Russell sent her a formal email saying that she was no longer needed and to pass off her files. Zoe was furious, noting that Russell was forcing her out on short-term disability, which meant she would not be able to get her full leave post pregnancy. She would have to come back before her daughter was three-months old. Zoe spoke with some of the other managers, such as Casey, Donnie and Andy, and they worked out an arrangement where she would work directly with Casey on a particular project prior to the pregnancy. In addition, both Donnie and Casey were talking with her about potentially working remotely one day a week, now that she was back from her

leave. Zoe said that Russell would never approve of that, but she was hopeful that something would be worked out. While Russell's actions were arguably abhorrent and possibly illegal, what is interesting here is that the other managers worked *around* Russell, not *with* him. As more senior members of the management team, they could have easily worked out a solution with him, in which Zoe was able to work from home but where they still offered a united front, perhaps having Russell deliver the good news to Zoe. Instead, however, they sacrificed peer trust with Russell in an effort to maintain vertical trust with Zoe.

Annie offered a parallel example of how peer trust among workers could be sacrificed to maintain workers' overall reputation among managers. Annie was a server at The Jones, and she frequently called out for her shifts, especially weekend brunch shifts. With the on-call system, there were usually no consequences for this – someone else would just be called in to pick up her slack. Managers felt they could not prove if someone was lying, and they wanted to avoid any potential liabilities associated with unlawful firings whenever possible.²⁰ Annie, however, often posted on social media about late nights on the town before calling in sick the next morning. Servers were resentful about this – not only because they could get called in when she got called out – but also because she made all servers look bad by not being reliable. Thus, after a few months, several servers began showing managers Annie's posts whenever she would call out, and after several incidents like this, she was fired. Like Russell, Annie's actions were out of line, but it was definitely noteworthy that servers, many of whom said they enjoyed working with Annie, were willing to sacrifice peer trust for vertical trust.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined doing trust within three different types of relationships, leading to a typology of doing trust up, down and across. Specifically, I outlined how managers do trust down through maverick management, which emphasizes direct communication, a flexible, pragmatic approach to formal procedure and an expressed vulnerability. To do trust up, workers demonstrate neoliberal fealty, proving themselves to be self-sufficient, yet willing to partner with managers when needed. Finally, to do trust across, peers embrace squad solidarity by mastering the interactional currencies of banter and tea and by fortifying relationships through confidentiality and unified support.

By examining trust in three different types of relationships – and by capitalizing on my modal sampling strategy, which enables comparisons among and between dominant and marginalized groups – I employed what others have called a “process-centered” intersectional approach to the case of workplace trust. Intersectionality focuses on overlapping matrices of power and inequality,²¹ while process-centered studies, in particular, emphasize variation across context and examine how different intersections of material and cultural relations come together in dynamic ways.²² Necessarily comparative, process-centered approaches interrogate “unmarked categories” (such as white and male) alongside categories of disadvantage, explore relations across intersecting axes of power and identify simultaneous experiences of oppression and empowerment.²³

In doing so, I offer several contributions to existing scholarship. First, I contribute to exemplary studies on the inequities of trust, such as Sandra Smith’s (2007) study of trust among poor, Black Americans in Michigan and Judith Levine’s (2013) study of low-income women in Chicago, by demonstrating that inequalities of trust are

not just a matter of degree – who trusts and distrusts whom and by how much – but also a matter of kind. People experience and project trust in qualitatively distinct ways depending on their social location, and the benefits and drawbacks of trust are intermixed and relative to one's positionality and social context. In relations of trust, there are no pure winners and losers, only fluid, complex and interrelated manifestations of power and fragility.

Second, and relatedly, by viewing trust as an intersectional process, I elucidate how performances of trust produce mutually constituting experiences of privilege and subordination.²⁴ I, therefore, contribute to studies of workplace inequality by showing how both advantage and disadvantage hinge upon trust. This Janus-faced aspect of trust creates tensions at the intersections of power and inequality. While previous researchers may have assumed this insight, it has not been explicitly demonstrated in the literature. In particular, I argue that my findings reveal two particular tensions of trust -- tokenized tensions and bureaucratic tensions – each of which highlight the ways in which trust simultaneously reflects, reproduces – and sometimes challenges – entrenched social categories, boundaries and hierarchies.

Tokenized tensions of trust emerged at the point where different axes of inequality overlapped and/or intersected. Managers at the margins, for example, were unable to simply perform maverick management; instead they had to carefully navigate the prescriptive cultural stereotypes that buttress social status hierarchies, such as a belief that women are naturally kind and empathetic or that black men are naturally aggressive and threatening.²⁵ This is because marginalized managers' position of power within the workplace contradicted with their positioning within culturally and historically

entrenched social status hierarchies. At junior levels, men constituted a tokenized group, and their performances of trust also reflected contradictions, this time between their socially dominant status as men and their organizationally subordinate status as workers. In particular, I observed junior men attempting performances of trust up that imitated the dynamics of maverick management, such as speaking openly or showing a degree of disregard for rules. In some cases, this worked out, with those individuals essentially “passing” as maverick managers. However, in other cases, such attempts backfired, and indeed this led to negative sanctions, and even some terminations, among junior men during my time at these two companies. This was notable compared to junior women, who were less likely to pass as maverick managers. Instead, junior women were often asked to carry extra burdens of neoliberal fealty, often shouldering responsibility for the emotional and cultural tone of the workplace – a request that aligned with dominant social stereotypes about women.

I also observed *bureaucratic tensions of trust*, in which performances of trust in different bureaucratic relationships contradicted one another. Specifically, performances of trust in peer relationships could explicitly conflict with performances of trust up or down, creating tensions for workers. In some cases, either workers or managers tried to exploit these tensions for their own benefit. Indeed, managers were attempting this when they tried to recruit certain workers – often junior women – to rally on their behalf, and I also noticed this among workers, who attempted to capitalize on potential discord among managers in order to further their own interests.²⁶ In other cases, people sacrificed peers – through scapegoating – in order to shore up the trust within vertical relationships. It is important to point out, here, the particularly strained position of middle managers.

Located in the center of bureaucratic hierarchies, middle managers had to constantly balance performances of trust up, down and across. When bureaucratic tensions overlapped with tokenized tensions, as in the case of women who were in middle management, the tensions could become overwhelming. These dynamics contributed to the barriers women and people of color faced in moving into the most senior hierarchical positions, or remaining with the company at all.²⁷

In sum, the findings of this chapter provide a more holistic and dynamic understanding of workplace trust as a mechanism of inequality within the workplace. In the next chapter, I move away from how trust is accomplished to look more specifically at the implications of trust within the contemporary workplace.

CHAPTER 5 NOTES

¹ Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001; Smith 2010.

² Kanter 1977; Reskin 2001; Ridgeway 2009; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Roth 2004; Royster 2003; Tobias Neely 2018; Williams et al. 2012.

³ Gorman 2005; Gorman 2006; Kanter 1977; Ridgeway 1997

⁴ Feminist scholars have argued that this “partial” (Collins 1990) or “situated” (Haraway 1988) knowledge, based on specific social locations, contributes to a more holistic transparent and dynamic understanding of social reality (Harding 1992; Keller 1995).

⁵ West and Fenstermaker (1995: 9)

⁶ In making this argument, I aim to combine insights about the emergent properties of social interactions (i.e., Blumer 1969; Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1983) with theoretical developments regarding the continuous and active evolution of trust over time (Adler 2001; Child and Möllering 2003; Giddens 1991; 1994; Kroeger 2012; Luhmann 1988; Möllering 2005; Tilly 2005; Wright and Ehnert 2010).

⁷ West and Zimmerman (1987; 2009) take great pains to highlight the fact that acts are more likely to be recognized and accepted when they align with historically and culturally situated meanings of, in this case, what type of person is deemed trustworthy.

⁸ Lamont 2012

⁹ Lamont, Beljean, and Clair (2014) have called for scholars to be more attentive to cultural processes and pathways to inequality, and Vallas and Cummins (2014) have highlighted the particular need to do this in understanding workplace inequalities.

¹⁰ Fletcher (1999) argues that women are more likely to perform such relational practices (acts based on empathy, reciprocity and mutual consideration) due, in large part, to expectations from others. However, as these practices are often conflated with essentialist notions of gendered behavior, they become invisible when performed. When not performed by women, however, they become highly visible. See also Eagly and Karau (2002); Heilman (2000) and Ridgeway and Correll (2004) for discussions of gendered stereotypes and the lack of perceived role congruity for women in leadership roles.

¹¹ Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang and Supple 2015.

¹² Labor process scholars have highlighted the role of hegemonic and normative control in the workplace (Barker 1993; Burawoy 1979; Kunda 1992).

¹³ Hodson 1991; 2001

¹⁴ Appelbaum et al. 2000; Blauner 1964; Kohn 2006

¹⁵ Braverman 1974

¹⁶ For example, interactive service workers are often granted a degree of autonomy due to the difficulties in producing customized and authentic customer service in highly controlled environments (Hochschild 1983; Leidner 1993). Additionally, in situations where workers have particular expertise, workers may be required to grant them greater autonomy (Freidson 1970; Powell and Snellman 2004).

¹⁷ Yet it also provided workers – especially front-of-the-house workers – some autonomy from, and control over, guests. As Robin Leidner (1993) and others have argued, routinization of service work can help workers manage service interactions and shield against rude or unruly guests.

¹⁸ As a server, there were twenty-one steps of service (i.e., greeting the table, crumbing the table, offering dessert menus) that guided interactions with guests, and these steps were introduced and mastered during seven full days of training. Back-of-the-house workers also had a week-long training, and most employees were required to pass a menu test before their employment status was made official. In addition, video cameras tracked employee behaviors across the restaurant, and there were usually several managers on the floor and in the kitchen during the busiest parts of the shift. All orders and transactions within the restaurant were digitally tracked, and management could easily access this information to monitor if and when something was rung in, how long it took to get to the table and whether the check was closed out properly. Finally, “secret shoppers” came into the restaurant once or twice a week to covertly evaluate the quality of the food and service.

¹⁹ Shaw, Choshen-Hillel and Caruso 2018.

²⁰ This likely reflects the location of my study. New York is not a right to work state.

²¹ Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; King 1988

²² Choo and Ferree (2010) refer to this as “process-centered,” while McCall (2005) calls it “intercategorical.” Glenn (1999), highlighting the same dynamic, refers to the “relational” nature of inequality.

²³ McCall 2005; Choo and Ferree 2010

²⁴ This is aligned with the view, among intersectional theorists, that domination and subordination are relational and depend upon one another (i.e., Baca Zinn and Dill 1996; Nakano Glenn 1992).

²⁵ Ferguson 2000; Heilman 2001; Wingfield 2010

²⁶ Sallaz (2002) observed a similar phenomenon among workers in the casinos he studied.

²⁷ According to 2016 data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women make up 29% of managerial positions, while blacks, Latinx and Asian employees each make up only 7% of managerial positions. Looking at senior managerial positions, women make up only 25%, while Asians make up 6%, Latinx individuals make up 4% and blacks make up 3%.

CHAPTER 6**THE ECONOMY OF CONSENT: TROOPERS, MARTYRS AND PRISONERS**

“The cost of a thing is the amount of what I call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run.” - Henry David Thoreau

“Put some respect on my check.” – Beyoncé

It was Friday night at The Jones, and I was standing at the back bar with Jasmine and Jenna waiting for drinks for our guests. Tom came up, wearing a suit because he was shift managing, or as some liked to call it, “smanaging.” Several of the veteran servers would smanage occasionally, which meant that they were paid an hourly rate to act as floor manager for a day. I asked Tom if it paid well, and he told me he made about the same in take-home pay as he would on a regular (good) shift. But, he added that the smanaging shifts were typically much longer, often extending through lunch and dinner, so it was really less money per hour. He looked tired, prompting Jasmine to ask him what time he had started. He had clocked in at 11 a.m., and as it was 8 p.m. now, he still had several more hours to go.

“Trooper,” Jasmine exclaimed. “Or bitch,” Tom quipped. Jenna, who also smanaged fairly regularly chimed in, “prisoner.” Tom and Jenna both laughed.

“Do they ask you to smanage, or does it just show up on your schedule,” I asked. “They ask, but I mean, I *guess* you can say no,” Tom replied. Jenna added, “yeah, I was telling myself the other day that I *can* say no.”

“Yeah, Kay said no for a long time.” Looking at one another, they smiled as they said in unison, “although...” Jenna looked at me and explained, “she is working three this week.”

“She caved,” shrugged Tom, as he walked away.

* * * * *

Worker consent – or a willingness to participate in labor processes that appear to go against one’s own interest – has been a persistent puzzle for sociologists of work. Why

do people give up certain freedoms within the workplace? Why do they work more than is required, especially when those efforts are not adequately compensated? While earlier theories examined processes of coercion and structural control to explain worker consent,¹ more recent investigations demonstrate how workplace relationships and localized meanings are mobilized in ways that entice workers to extend themselves.² Yet, as evidenced above, the meaning of consent itself is constantly being negotiated. In this chapter, I contribute to scholarly debates regarding whether consent is a process of managerial control or of [bounded] worker agency by asking how subjective understandings of consent vary across relational contexts and with what implications.³ In other words, I go beyond the question of *why* workers consent to interrogate how *meaning and value* is attributed to that consent.

Specifically, at The Jones and DTC, I found that workers could be characterized within three consent categories, inspired by the dialogue above: troopers, martyrs and prisoners. Below, I describe the perspectives of each of these categories, outlining how they view consent and how that consent fits within a broader relational framework that specifies the meanings of the employee-employer relationship and the appropriate currency for rewarding discretionary effort. Following economic sociologists, I contend that these negotiated meanings make up workers' "relational packages" and require substantial "relational work." In the conclusion, I offer the concept of "economy of consent," in order to better situate this relational work within the broader social and cultural forces that shape micro-level interactions and individual orientations.

Troopers

“I have no problem staying up late, and I have no problem working on weekends. I’ve done it. Quite a bit, actually. I’ve worked the eighty-hour weeks,” Jonathan assured me, after reporting that he currently averaged around fifty hours at DTC each week. He explained, “I’m not averse to that. But what you’ll notice is that in every single one of those projects, I’ve been a key owner. And I’ve been a part of it from inception. And there’s a different level of accountability there. I want to make sure I’m committed to the success.” For Jonathan, discretionary effort was about an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution. In these cases, Jonathan was a “trooper” in the sense that, like a soldier or perhaps even a police officer, he perceived his willingness to endure demanding situations as serving a collective objective or goal.

Troopers made up approximately half of my interview participants across the two sites,⁴ and they consented within a particular relational infrastructure in which the employee-employer relationship was seen as mutually beneficial. In doing so, they relied primarily on a versatile logic of trust that emphasized cooperative alignments. Within this relational context, consent meant having a “seat at the table.” Troopers’ consent was agentic in that they saw themselves engaging in actions as part of the company, as opposed to simply doing things for the company. In other words, they saw themselves less as employees and more as constituents. They were enacting agency *through* the company. In this way, their discretionary actions did not typically feel exploitative.

For example, despite describing serving at The Jones as her “survival job,” Amanda, whose true passion was acting and singing, devoted substantial energy and time to the restaurant. During the holiday season, she came in on her off days to do things like

organize the holiday party or manage the company's charity drive. She also "smanaged" several times a month, trained new servers – which came with a little more pay but a lot more work – and frequently went above and beyond when closing the restaurant. She explained, "when I close sometimes, I get anxiety...like if the wet naps aren't full...there has to be plenty of receipt paper...a stack of plates. I like things overstocked." Amanda did not view the company as taking advantage of her extra effort. In fact, talking about training, she told me, "I remember being flattered. I remember...I was training someone, like, every shift. And I was like, why do they go to me? Why are [sic] they keep going to me...I feel like they think of me as an extra-senior server."

Similarly, Hugh, a mid-level professional who had been at DTC for almost a decade, told me that he had been asked to work on a few new business pitches lately. As discussed in Chapter 4, business pitches typically meant long and intense hours in addition to one's regular work. Yet, Hugh felt honored by the opportunity. "That really tells somebody, we value what you have to offer DTC Communications as a whole, so we want you to come and do these pitches for the business," he explained. He continued:

So that was a really cool thing. That was like Andy extending his hand and saying, "I value you and what you bring to the table." And that was the first time I was like, "yeah, I really feel like a part of the team." ... Just being utilized in pitches. That made me feel like, okay cool. You feel like I'm not *just this*. That I'm useful for the greater good.

Hugh appreciated Adam's acknowledgement of his potential to contribute beyond his official role. When I asked Hugh if it was important to feel useful for the greater good, he elaborated, "I think that's what holds a lot of people back – the fact that they get too caught up in the whole, like, resentment of the job, that they keep themselves from moving forward." He contrasted this view with his own: "I've always looked at it like, this isn't about me. Like, this job is not about me. This job's about this whole picture."

Hugh, pulling primarily on a versatile logic of trust, saw himself as flexible, and he was happy to make sacrifices in the name of the larger project. In fact, it is what gave him a sense of fulfillment in the work.

For Hugh, consent was the outcome of a negotiated process. Like Amanda, he traded effort for inclusion. However, he noted that the opportunity to participate in the larger goals of the company could, at times, also be constraining:

You know, it's still frustrating sometimes because it feels good because you know everything that's kind of going on, but there's a lot more pressures...you start to realize how the whole system is and how the system affects thousands of people...Like, if I don't do something, or if I don't hit my deliverables, it's gonna make the client mad and this could literally cause thousands of people their jobs. So it's not about me at that point. You know what I'm saying? It's not about do I want to go see a movie or do I want to go to bed early. It's literally about working for the whole team...so it doesn't feel good. There's stress. There's the added stress of knowing.

Hugh's sense of responsibility here is interesting in that he was in a role – training and development – which was arguably auxiliary to the nuts and bolts of smooth operations. Moreover, Hugh had no direct responsibility for any employees. He was a manager in title, but he had no direct reports. Yet, because he felt part in the process, he also felt a broader sense of responsibility. In this way, Hugh also pulls on a secondary logic of trust – righteous trust – in his portrayal of himself as a dedicated and altruistic person.

Notably, Hugh explicitly distances himself from the allied logic of trust. He commented that sometimes people misunderstood his cooperative nature as loyalty: “everybody looks at me like I’m this loyal employee, and I’m loyal as long as I need to be...if I’m not needed, then I will go to a place that needs me because I’m here, in a sense, to help out systems.” He added, “that’s all business really is. You’re there to find something that you enjoy doing. That you can leave your mark, your legacy, in that stable. Feed out [contribute to] the better good, and *go*.” For Hugh, consent was not

based on loyalty to a given company; rather it was about doing what needed to be done to accomplish broader objectives.

Regardless, I observed how a commitment to collective achievement could work in a similar way to loyalty, keeping workers bound to the company. During my interview with Sharon, she admitted that, three weeks earlier, she had received a job offer from another marketing agency. She lamented that DTC was not a “counter-offer corporation,” but said she had been in discussions with them about potentially renegotiating her salary. To her frustration, however, DTC would not confirm her renegotiated salary in writing before she needed to respond to the offer. She described the decision point, telling me “I had to have full faith that what was being told to me would actually happen, with no written signature, contract, anything...I had to have full blind faith in the people that were telling me that they wanted me to stay and this was what they would do to help me grow.” I asked Sharon if she had made a decision. She smiled, “I did. I made the decision to stay.” She added: “my team trusts me to see this project through.” Even though the new position would have secured her promotion – and DTC management was not willing to offer her an equivalent guarantee – Sharon felt compelled to stay. She felt that she owed that to her team. The way that troopers understood their consent – as a contribution to something larger than themselves – did give them a sense of purpose, but it could also serve as an emotional leash.

While compensation is essential to employment relations, troopers had an interesting relationship to their monetary pay. They often talked about how money was not the most important medium for acknowledging their efforts. Manuel, who also worked at DTC, explained, “if I was just doing this for the money, I would hate it. I just

don't think you can be successful if that's your only motivating factor in this industry." He continued, "because no amount of money can make up for some of the shit that you have to deal with. Like honestly, it helps, but there's got to be more to it than just that." In this way, troopers kept financial compensation on the periphery of the employment relationship.

Troopers wanted access to power and decision-making. In taking this approach, women troopers, in particular, saw their consent as an investment in their long-term goals. At DTC, Clara told me about actively seeking out more work within the company. Chuckling, she told me, "I'm not asking for more work because I am someone who loves to work that much that they want to work for fun." Rather, she said, "there's a reason for it. I want to develop myself. I want to learn more. I want to be promoted here. I want people to see the work I can do." Through her consent to more work, Clara wanted to prove her contributions to company outcomes, and she hoped this effort would lead to her upward mobility. Similarly, Ashley, a manager at The Jones, described taking on more work. She explained how, by taking on extra work, she gained access she would not otherwise have: "like they gave me access to all the programs...to do all those things, to handle all the money, and like make up my own system so that it worked." Like Clara, Ashley saw her extra efforts as an opportunity. She explained, "you want the task, and you want to prove that you can do that. But you're only doing them now so that you can prove later down the line that you know how to delegate those tasks and end up being someone like Paul [her boss]." Similar to Sharon who stayed at DTC without a formally renegotiated contract, Clara and Ashley had no guarantees that their efforts would pay off, but they were willing to take the risk. The risk/reward aspect of troopers' relational

package was much more prominent among women, suggesting perhaps a belief that consent to extra work may be a means of breaking through more traditional gender barriers.

While consent was often forward looking – aimed at forging a path of upward mobility – it could sometimes simply be about having more discretionary power in the present moment. Jenna, at The Jones, described how she had recently gotten frustrated with her weekly schedule. She was particularly upset in light of everything she felt she gave to the company, in terms of “smanaging,” training and even some administrative work, like typing up menu descriptions. Recalling an e-mail she sent to her managers, she said, “I’m doing all of this extra stuff for you guys in hopes that – I mean I feel like I should get a decent schedule anyways – but also I feel I should because of that.” In not taking her considerations into account in making the schedule, Jenna felt that her managers were not honoring her consent, rupturing the mutually beneficial dynamic she expected.

Previous studies have found that strong and participatory work cultures motivate worker consent by blurring the distinction between corporate and personal interests.⁵ Indeed, I saw elements of this dynamic at play in my sites. At The Jones, a core value, documented in training materials and verbalized by managers, was to “Be The Jones.” According to my employee welcome packet, being The Jones was about being “empowered to make a difference,” having a “voice” and being able to “express improvements to [one’s] managers.” Similarly, bulletins around the office at DTC promoted the “Drive” program, which motivated workers to take initiative for their own

careers. These ideas were fully operational within my sites, with workers engaging with them both earnestly and cynically.⁶

Yet, my observations suggested that troopers were not simply driven by top-down values and messages. Instead, they continually engaged in what Viviana Zelizer calls “relational work.” Zelizer suggests that all economic activity includes four elements – relationships, transactions, media for those transactions and negotiated meaning – and relational work “consists of creating viable matches among those meaningful relations, transactions and media” (Zelizer 2012: 151). Through relational work, my participants adopted different elements of their surrounding workplace cultures, sometimes in new and creative ways, in an attempt to align understandings of their relationships with employers, their consent to discretionary work and the appropriate currency for valuing their efforts.

While much of the research by economic sociologists has sought to distinguish between embedded and arms-length ties⁷ – arguably a difference in degree of trust and familiarity – I argue that we need to pay attention to which *logic of trust* is used to characterize the employee-employer relationship. In other words, the difference that made a difference was one of content, not degree. For troopers, the employer-employee relationship was defined by the versatile logic of trust, which focuses predominantly on cooperation. Troopers viewed themselves as members of a team, working toward a common goal. In return for their efforts, they expected to be included in the inner workings of company life.

Within this understanding of the employer-employee relationship – one based on cooperation – workers’ consent meant, as described above, contributing to a collective

achievement. Troopers saw the company's successes as their successes, and the company's failures as also their own. Working extra was about doing what it took to increase the chances of success. The currency with which troopers understood the value of their contributions was increased opportunity. They expected – and this expectation was at least partially informed by the stated workplace culture – their efforts to be rewarded with greater opportunities for contribution, which meant having progressively more voice and discretionary power within the company.

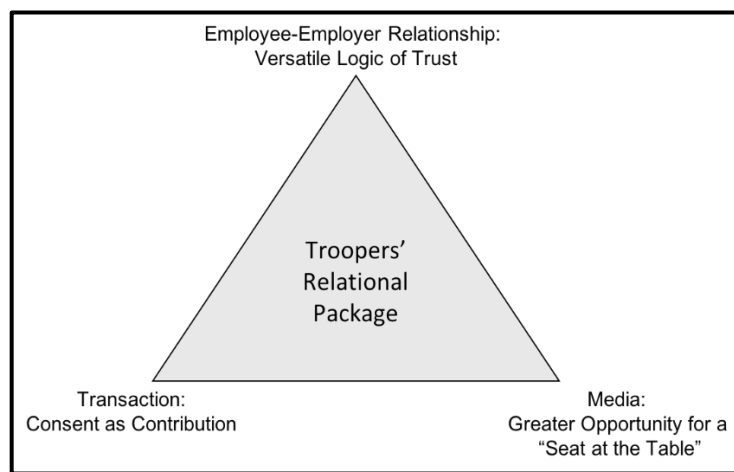


Figure 6. Troopers' Relational Package

Troopers generally did not feel exploited as long as they perceived that their efforts helped them to secure a chance to participate – at ever higher levels – in organizational decision-making. They felt like their consent, rewarded with increased opportunity, was an investment that would pay off, if not now, then in the longer term. However, their consent could be disrupted, as Mears (2015) has shown, by interpretive misalignments, or “relational mismatches.” When relational mismatches, as described below, occurred between workers and employers, troopers became more ambivalent about their consent. In response, they either worked to realign understandings and reclaim consent, to modify

their consent or, if realignment did not seem feasible, to withdraw their consent all together.

Despite being the one to say “prisoner” in the exchange at the beginning of the chapter, Jenna, who had worked at The Jones for about four years, approached work as a trooper, and she recalled a situation in which she experienced a relational mismatch that threatened her consent. The misalignment was sparked when Paul, the general manager, called Jenna down to the office before her shift one afternoon. Paul was upset because Jenna had disapproved of his decision to keep the restaurant open during a massive snowstorm the week before, requiring many employees to spend the night in a nearby hotel, and she had vocalized her dissatisfaction to coworkers and on social media. Jenna recalled how Paul started the conversation by telling her he felt like she was unhappy at the company and asking her if it was time for her to move on. Jenna recalled the moment, telling me, “I was so *livid*. I was obviously crying. I couldn't process it properly in the moment. And I'm just like, I can't believe.” She was further upset when Paul questioned why she did not come to him with her concern: “I was like, Paul...I always come to you with problems. I can't believe you're even saying this.”

Jenna described feeling betrayed in that moment, recounting how she “hated the place for a little while after that.” Reliving her exasperation as she retold the story, she continued:

what really blew my mind was nowhere in this conversation was, “we want you to stay. We don't want you to leave. We want you to be happy. How can we make sure that you're happy so you don't leave?” That's what I feel I've earned. That's what I feel I deserve. Not just from my boss, but also from this guy who's, like, kind of like not my friend, but kind of is. You know? Like, we've worked. We have a relationship.

In that moment, Paul characterized their relationship in a way that obscured the mutual benefits that Jenna anticipated. He failed to acknowledge her extra contributions, acting

as if she was a regular employee that came in, did the job and left, and this characterization of the relationship made it difficult for her to push forward. She confronted Paul the following week, asking him, “Does this have only to do with what happened that night on the snowstorm, which was a crazy night, or is this like a pattern in my behavior?” When Paul admitted that it was just the snowstorm, Jenna reinterpreted their disappointing interaction as an aberration and not something that defined their relationship. She explained, “that conversation with him afterwards helped because I did see that he just fumbles the ball a lot.” Clearly not pulling on the logic of legible trust, she continued, “I know that probably deep down, he doesn’t think it’s gonna cause me to leave, so he’s not saying it from a genuine place.” Later she told me that, while he betrayed her trust in that moment, she knew that Paul valued her and that he “obviously” did not want her to leave. She characterized the moment as one of Paul’s own ineptitude, as opposed to a deeper betrayal of their relationship and her allied trust, thus allowing her to realign the meanings of the relationship, her contributions and her worth.

I saw another example of a relational mismatch while observing Constance. Constance had worked in marketing for over twenty years, and she had been at DTC for a little over two years. When I asked Constance what trust meant within the workplace, she replied, “trust means that you collaborate fairly...that you definitely need to respect other people and their opinions. Don’t be so quick to push people down.” She described feeling trapped by her current supervisor, who seemed to take more of a top-down bureaucratic approach to their relationship, as opposed to the more cooperative dynamic that Constance preferred. She recalled how her trust was betrayed during her performance review a few months before. “It was jarring, but it was a reality check...in

terms of what that person saw in me, and how that person saw me and my role,” she said. She described how her boss started re-writing goals for her during the review. She was struck by the dissonance she felt with her own understanding of the company: “Adam [the CEO] talks about how you’re responsible for your own future. You can write your own job descriptions. You can do whatever you want.” She continued, “and I’ve been doing a lot of that. I’ve been trying to stay engaged. But when I’m accountable to someone who doesn’t recognize it or see the value in it. It sort of dies right there. It dies right there.”

After the review, she went to another senior professional, telling that person that she felt constrained in the current structure and was considering leaving the company: “I told him, I give myself through the first quarter of the year to decide whether or not I want to stay because I’m really not sure anymore what role I play here. Because I feel like I’m a bird in a box.” Noting that she felt constrained by the rigid relationships with her supervisor and, as a result, was unable to meaningfully contribute to the direction of the company, she said, “it’s my career, and I feel like I don’t even own it...I’ve always made a promise to myself to maintain control of my career, my future. Never lose that.” Constance’s boss had betrayed her trust by undermining her expectation of the mutual benefit in their relationship. In rewriting her goals, he rejected her desire to be a part of the conversation – the compensation she expected from her consent. Her frustration led her to forge a “bounded consent.” She was willing to continue consenting, but with the caveat that she made her own wishes more explicit and put a time limit on her consent.

During my time at DTC, I watched Constance expand her role, getting involved in a number of new business pitches and projects, many of which required her to report to

someone other than her direct boss. She was pleased with the results, and her self-imposed deadline for her own consent came and went. When we spoke, she told me about a recent experience that had made her feel good about the future. A senior manager had brought a few people into a meeting regarding a new piece of business. It was supposed to be big. She described the moment, saying:

I stopped, and I looked around the room. I said, oh this is pretty cool. Like you really trust this group of people to bring this amazing project to fruition. That made me feel really good. To be in that room...when he pulled up the slide they presented to the client, that same team was in the room. It had our names up there. That made me feel even better because that plan was presented months ago. And I said, okay. That gave me the confidence and hope that he knows the strengths of the people...and wants them to be a part of this. That, to me, was signals. Again, he didn't tell me definitely where this whole thing is going...but those were signs that things are going to start to change.

For Constance, that meeting was a defining moment, and it led her to continue to consent.

Indeed, Constance continued in the same role at the company for another two years.

A final example of relational mismatches among troopers was evidenced in my conversation with DJ, a manager at The Jones. DJ told me that it was often hard for him to leave a company – doing so made him feel disloyal. He explained, “you’ve developed relationships. You develop trust...you know what I mean? My peers, my colleagues we work well together. My higher ups and superiors value my opinion and entrust me to run their restaurant.” When I asked how he had left his last restaurant, he described it as humiliating. “They were closing their restaurant to rebuild and rebrand it, and they were switching out all of the management. They fired the other managers, and they were like ‘but for you...’, he said as he explained how he helped them break down the restaurant to get it ready for the reboot. “At the end of that day, we emptied the restaurant out, and they were like...” DJ laughed at my audible gasp as he told me they then demoted him back to being a server. He continued, “I know, it was really dumb. It was like really insulting.” He said he took them up on the server position for a month, as he looked for a

new position. Once his employers made it clear that they did not see their relationship as mutually beneficial, and that they were not willing to recognize his efforts with greater opportunity, the meaning of consent changed for DJ, leading him to withdraw as soon as it was feasible.

Martyrs

Kent's weariness was apparent. In his early sixties, he walked with a noticeable limp due to pain in his legs and feet. Even on days when he wore a suit to the office, he often looked haggard and disheveled, frequently donning short grey stubble on his face, apparently too harried to, or simply uninterested in, shaving on a daily basis. He gave everything to his work, but he was growing tired of being unappreciated.

"There is this concept in America of a forty-hour workweek," Kent said as he sat across from me in the small café tucked within one of New York City's side streets. His brow began to furrow. DTC management refused to put enough staff on his team, he said. "You know I'm going to do more because I'm not a 9-to-5'er, but you're taking advantage of me and my capabilities and skill," he said. "You're intentionally not hiring anyone! So my question is: do I break that trust and just say, all right, you know what, starting January 1st, I'm going to work 9:30 to 6:30, period?"

Thus far, Kent had not done so. Even on this particular evening, he had plans to return to work for a few hours following our conversation, despite it already being past 6 p.m. He originally told me that he worked an average of sixty to sixty-five hours each week, but later he admitted that when he was on the road, working an event, he would "do a hundred-hour week and not think twice about it." He noted that this "aberration" happened about once a month, perhaps more. Long weeks on the road were exhilarating,

and he enjoyed the work. His frustration, he explained, was about never having the “opportunity to recharge.” In his six years at the company, he had never used his full two weeks of vacation; it was never a good time.

He recounted how, a few years back, he went on a “timecard strike.” He expounded:

As in, I refuse to fill this out. Because number 1, you told me the reason for me to even do my timesheet is that you were billing to the client all of my hours. But the reality is I know if you put in a thousand hours for a job for me, when I put the thousand and first hour, you're not turning to the client and going “Kent put in an extra hour, we're going to bill you.” You're not doing anything remotely close to that! If anything, you come to me half the time and go, “could you not put in your hours for that, and can you just put it in and say ‘admin’ [non-billable]?” So why am I filling this in?

Kent was aware that the company was desperate to keep clients within the current environment, so much so they were willing to reduce billable hours. He also knew that the company often promised clients the impossible, expecting employees to make up the difference. Yet, this strategy meant that worker efforts were essentially rendered invisible through time-tracking adjustments. Kent, who was on salary, would not be paid any differently if the clients were billed for his efforts, but he felt that his work ethic was being erased and devalued through this process. Nevertheless, he eventually gave up his formal protest after being called out and embarrassed during a meeting. He sighed, “so there’s, you know, there’s the expectation of trust as in treat me well, and I’ll go the extra mile for you. But at this point, it’s not happening.” He observed, “my problem is I have a moral ethic. In my mind, you’re paying me. I have responsibilities. But there comes a point where this is not a two-way street. It’s not equitable.” Chuckling to himself, he added, “my dear departed mother, years ago said, ‘you’re doing this to yourself.’ And I’ve never been able *not* to.”

Kent's relational package fits into the category of what Tom, at The Jones, labeled, "bitches." While the inherent sexism in the word bitch does represent an underlying gendered dynamic that I observed within this group, I ultimately decided that the use of this term did more to reinforce women's devaluation than to challenge it.⁸ Thus, I refer to this category of workers as martyrs, and they made up a quarter of my sample. Martyrs defined their relationship with employers through a logic of trust that emphasized a moral duty, what I have previously termed the "righteous logic." For this group, consent was about demonstrating integrity and character, and they were most concerned with validating their own moral worth.

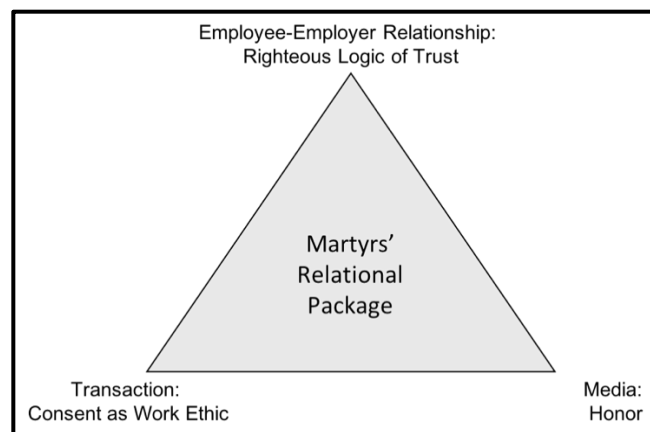


Figure 7. Martyrs' Relational Package

While troopers approached work as a continually negotiated means of contributing to a goal that they could never tackle alone, martyrs saw work as a means of achieving honor. To an extent, martyrs viewed their work efforts as self-rewarding—a strong work ethic represented moral superiority. Yet, like Kent, they noted that their altruism was rarely rewarded within a capitalist context. Therefore, their approach was a double-edged sword, simultaneously characterized by honor and denigration. Ultimately, I found that martyrs were resigned to this duality, seeing themselves in a double bind, in which they felt morally compelled to continue working hard, even as they realized their employers

were taking advantage of them. In return for their consent, then, they really only expected an exchange in the currency of recognition and validation. This perspective was distinct from troopers who viewed their efforts not as a moral representation as much, but as a chance to be a part of something bigger than themselves. Troopers saw work as a site of learning and growth; martyrs saw work as a site of morality.

This understanding of consent as a reflection of character is what motivated martyrs' efforts. Vera, a busser at The Jones, explained, "my work is my mirror. I am not one person outside of work and another in work. It is not two different people. I am who I am, and I want to do a good job." Similarly, Monroe, a manager at DTC, described himself, saying, "I'm old school, you could say. My work ethics are rare...I care about my job. I will do whatever it takes to make sure it is done. I come in on the weekends just to make sure everything is good." As he continued, he made it clear that he wanted these efforts to be seen as selfless, "they'll never hear me gripe about it. They'll always see me smile, no matter what...they know I'm there for the company. I've made that clear. I said, hey listen, I'm here for you. I'm here for DTC Communications. I'm not here for myself."

For people like Vera and Monroe, consent was a part of a deeply rooted sense of identity as a hard-working individual. Indeed, many viewed this aspect of themselves as being embedded within their family history, tracing their connection back to a quality they admired in their parents, grandparents or other relatives. For example, while Alena, a server at The Jones, told me she may not be the best at everything she tried, "I will be damned if I'm not the hardest worker. You know what I mean? Like, that's what it's all about." She told me about how her mother – "one of the hardest workers I know" – grew

up in a poor, rural town in Mississippi. Alena beamed with pride as she told me about how her mom eventually earned her Ph.D. and now ran a public health department within the government. Bernie, a manager at The Jones, told me that he was a “workhorse. I love to work. I like, live for it. If I’m not working, I feel like a waste of space.” He credited his parents for his work ethic, saying, “my parents were both very hard workers. My dad, blue-collar; he’s a tool and dye maker. My mom was a secretary...they taught me to be a hard worker. When you’re working, you put your heart into it.” Similarly, Jaia, an accountant at DTC, told me that his parents, who did “a lot of manual labor” in China, likely influenced his hardworking style.

While individuals in this consent category believed in a meritocracy in which “hard work paid off,” as evidenced in their parental narratives, they were most solely consumed by whether or not their efforts were symbolically recognized. Unlike troopers, who wanted their voice to have impact, martyrs simply wanted to be seen and heard. Money was important primarily to the extent that it represented a validation of their work ethic; in the face of other forms of recognition, a lack of financial compensation was not always a deal breaker. Ben, who had worked in client services at DTC for almost a decade, told me, “I never pushed too hard for like promotions or for things because I figured I do well and it will come.” He noted that, as a result, he was likely three years behind where he should be in his career. At the same time, however, he did feel valued and recognized – even if not financially compensated – and he continued to stay at the company, hoping that eventually his title and salary would catch up to his performance.

Indeed, martyrs viewed workers that prioritized money – or those that simply did not work hard – as less principled. For example, Alena told me there were a few servers

that she thought were “sketchy” because they were less willing to help others out if money was not involved, even describing one as “a snake.” She wondered aloud, “what is it really gonna matter? Like you can pick up an extra shift if you need more money...it just feels like more of a character thing than like a need.” In some instances, Alena intimated a belief that actions should be *completely* selfless, questioning, “how many people are helping other people because it raises their own agendas and self worth.” She immediately felt bad for thinking about effort in such a transactional way: “I know that’s like shitty to think about it that way. And if I think about it that way I get bummed, so I choose not to. I’m gonna choose to believe that people help each other because it’s the right thing to do.” For Alena, relationships – at work and elsewhere – were about accountability to a moral ethic.

When those within this consent category experienced relational mismatches, they tended not to modify or withdraw consent, instead doubling down on their approach. Liz, at The Jones, was an example. Liz was the first to point out to me that The Jones pulled a fee for “family meal” – the pre-shift meal for staffers – out of our paychecks, and she also noted that credit card fees were pulled from our tips and not the company’s profits. She had no illusions that the company defined its relationship with her through an allied logic of trust based in mutual duty and obligation to one another, often noting her own disposability within the company. Moreover, Liz was aware that her focus and attention to detail annoyed some of her coworkers and managers. I noticed others’ annoyance as well, observing people mock Liz’s zealous stride as she walked around the restaurant and hearing others gossip about her “OCD” tendencies, with one manager even comparing her to a “psychopath” while chatting with other servers and bussers one day. Liz

commented on this ridicule, telling me, “I don’t get why people hate me. I’m just doing my job.” Continuing, she posited, “I think it comes down to the difference of priorities...I’m present in everything that I do. That’s like one of the rules of being a human.” “If I’m gonna give you my attention, I’m gonna give you my full attention. So that’s how work goes, too. When I’m there, that’s my priority,” she explained. Thus, Liz was willing to accept ridicule and exploitation as long as her moral stance remained intact.

There was one exception. When their work ethic was consistently denied by others, some martyrs changed their relational framework, and thus the meaning of their consent. I observed Lydia, a freelancer at DTC, engage in this practice. Lydia described herself as a hard worker, telling me, “my mom’s always taught me like, just work hard, be diligent, no matter what...put your best foot forward. Don’t half ass anything.” In her first few weeks at the company, Lydia would work long hours, sending a list of her accomplishments and next steps to her team every day. However, her team often ignored her emails until something went wrong, at which point they would send accusing emails. She recounted, “I don’t know, it was like, you don’t trust me that I’m doing what you asked me to do?” Eventually, Lydia decided the misunderstandings were not within her control, as they were not about the work but perhaps something more deeply embedded, such as an underlying racial bias: “I don’t know if it’s like my relationship with her, or because I’m new? Is it because I’m African-American?...I was really sitting here trying to figure it out.” Despite being bothered by the situation, she re-asserted her work ethic as we sat talking, saying, “I don’t pay any mind because I know the type of person I am. I pay attention to everything I’m doing...like, I hold myself accountable.”

Nevertheless, realizing that her moral worth would not be recognized, Lydia began to shift her understanding of consent, focusing more on obligations within the employment relationship and the transactional medium of money. For example, I was sitting in the kitchen one day at lunch, when she came in and sat beside me and began eating. She told me that she used to work during her lunch – and also on weekends – but she had now decided that it was not fair to do so. She did not get paid extra nor was she receiving benefits. We sat chatting for a full hour – down to the minute – at which point she packed up and went back to her desk. Within this new, more financially driven, relational framework, which I describe in more detail below, Lydia was able to reconfigure her consent.

Prisoners

Lydia shifted how she interpreted her relationship with DTC, and relatedly, her consent. Her new relational framework fell under what Jenna referred to in the opening vignette as “prisoner.”⁹ Those within this consent category defined their relationship with employers in more transactional terms, emphasizing predictability and financial compensation. Within this framework, consent was simply a requirement of employment. While prisoners often prided themselves as having a strong work ethic, it was not a defining feature of their professional and moral identity, as it was with martyrs. Moreover, while prisoners appeared, at times, to be invested in their work product, their primary concern was compensation, not the opportunity to contribute or receive acknowledgment.

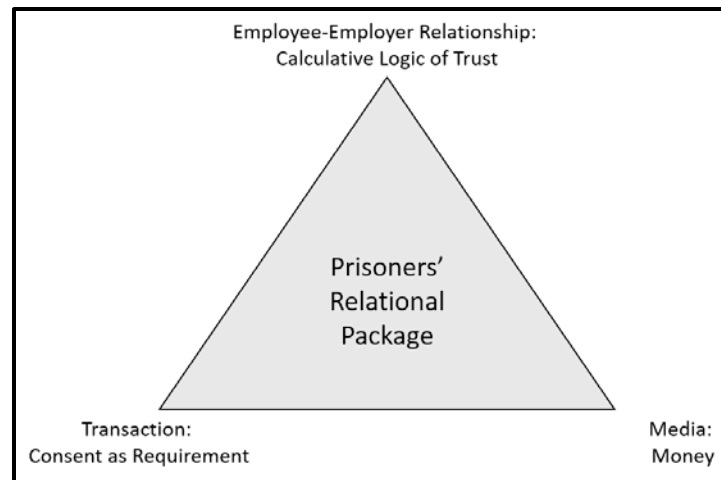


Figure 8. Prisoners' Relational Package

Zoe, a project manager at DTC, caught my attention as soon as she returned from maternity leave. She immediately struck me as someone who got things done, as I watched her zip around the office, building rapport across teams and developing processes for collaboration. I was surprised when she told me she was thinking of leaving DTC. She was upset about her recent title change; it had come without a pay raise. Her managers assured her that she had not received a title bump without a raise; rather her titled reflected where she was “currently tracking,” in terms of responsibility and salary. Zoe pulled out a folder containing a number of printed documents, including printed emails, budget sheets and timelines, as she detailed why this claim was inaccurate. First, she highlighted an email from her supervisor, in which he had stated that her previous raise was based on workload, not a change in seniority. Thus, if her seniority was being upgraded now, her pay should be as well. She explained:

You're currently tracking me based off a year's worth of work. So you are skipping a pay raise. If in fact, I am going for a director title [which they had said], then you are *actually* gypping [sic] me on two pay raises! Like, when will that be addressed? Because for a standard senior project manager in the industry in New York, the minimum is \$105. Typically, it's anywhere from \$105 to \$115 is the average...that is such a gap from where I am currently, where then even if you give me a director title, then that should be a different bracket.

While the title change may entice some, Zoe was not impressed. She laughed, “I always call DTC Communications, *Game of Thrones*. Because I hate titles. I’m not about that...if I’m being compensated for what I deem fair, and I’m being respected at all levels for the work I’m outputting, then I’m good.” She said she enjoyed her work, and she liked DTC, but “I do feel I know what I’m worth, and I know what I bring to this agency.” Depending on the leadership team’s response to her concerns, she would decide whether or not it was worth it for her to stay.

Zoe was not alone. About a quarter of my interview participants fell into this category of “prisoners.” Like Zoe, others in the category of prisoners appreciated formal organization and process within their relationship with employers, and they emphasized predictability, even when the behaviors predicted were not ideal. Recall, for example, Shawn from Chapter 3. He concluded – after some negotiation – that he trusted his managers to prioritize their jobs over their relationship with him, saying “I trust them. I trust them to be managers.” He noted that if the relationship was defined differently, as in the logic of intimate trust, he would likely “be just slacking off way more.” Shawn felt like he understood the relationship because it was predictable – there was legible trust. He knew what to expect, and he appreciated that, even if the expected behavior was not always aligned with what he might want to do. Similarly, Frannie, at DTC, told me she expected people at work to have a motive, and that was ok because, “it’s work. It’s not personal. It’s business,” while Jerry, also highlighted within Chapter 3, explained that trust was about “being able to have foresight.”

Similar to Zoe, Jerry expected that his work would be adequately compensated with money. And like Zoe, he felt that his compensation did not reflect his efforts. He

explained, “I’m bitter ‘cause I’ve been here a year and a half with no advancement and very little pay. They just keep slapping on more work.” According to Jerry, something *had* to change, “either change my title and pay...or reduce my workload...any change would be good at this point, except more work.” Jerry told me that he was currently looking for another job, and indeed, during my tenure at DTC, he did leave the company for another, better paying, opportunity.

Many prisoners spoke about priorities and passions outside of their employment at DTC or The Jones, suggesting money was their primary motivation while there; the job was a means to an end. For example, Edith told me that her family came first, and that work was just a way to provide for her family. At The Jones, Cecilia explained, “my career and my income are not the same thing.” Cecilia viewed acting as her passion and career, but she noted that she was rarely paid for her performances, and when she was, it was not enough on which to live. Serving was her livelihood. I heard something similar from a number of aspiring actors, dancers and comedians. The Jones was their “survival job” as they often called it, and they were there to make money.¹⁰ Even at DTC, some workers told me about their entrepreneurial pursuits or art as being their true calling, with DTC simply being their job.

Within this framework, consent was simply a characteristic of employment—a reciprocal act required if workers wanted to ensure payment for their efforts. In some ways, this perspective limited prisoners’ consent more than for the other groups, who would work endlessly to achieve a collective goal or to feed a sense of personal moral worth. Prisoners demanded financial compensation for their efforts; yet, a lack of clarity around what *exactly* was required, or alternatively a desire for more money, could lead

them to overextend themselves at times. My participants at DTC told me about feeling the need to travel for work, to attend client events on weekends and to be constantly available by email and phone. Matilda described her ongoing connection to the company, saying, “I am always available. Always. I have to be. Even if I go on vacation, my laptop’s with me. I’m constantly checking in.” She felt like this commitment was part of her job, and this belief was confirmed one day when she said she would be unavailable for half the day, due to a medical procedure. Upon her return, her supervisor asked her to submit a doctor’s note. Matilda was frustrated and even googled the legality of the request, but eventually submitted documentation to HR.

At The Jones, managers put substantial pressure on workers to have “open availability,” meaning they could be scheduled for any shift throughout the week. I experienced this pressure firsthand. After finishing my week of training at The Jones, one of the managers, DJ, asked me when I wanted to take my menu test. I asked if I could take it in two days, and he gave me a hard time, saying, “you don’t need that long.” I replied that I did, at which point he asked me, “what is your deal? Do you want to make money?” He asked if I had open availability and said, “I assume you want to work six days a week, right?” Could I say no? Especially since I had apparently just asked for too much study time. I played it safe, telling him that was fine for me.

Others experienced similar pressures. For instance, Gary was taking several additional college classes in order to become eligible for medical school. He could not work on Sundays or Mondays, as he needed that time for studying and class. His request for consistent time off made DJ furious. As a result, DJ scheduled him with only a few hours each week, making it hard for Gary to meet the minimum hours required to be

eligible for health insurance through the restaurant. When Gary tried to pick up shifts from other servers, DJ would often deny them. As a result, he lost his insurance. In response, Gary wrote an email to the general manager, Paul, saying that he was putting in his two weeks' notice. Paul met with Gary and asked him to stay, saying he would speak with DJ. At the end of the conversation, Gary sought to add weight to the discussion:

I was just like, "Do you need me to alert HR for you?" And he was kinda taken aback, he was like, "Why would you do that?" I was just like, "Because when conversations like this happen, when I worked in HR, like HR should be alerted. Sooo, I'm just wondering if you want me to send them a report over and cc you on it." And he was like, "Hmm, no," and you can kinda tell it was like, "Oh, okay," like, "you're not one of these punks." Because I'm not. I might play that role, but I know labor law very well, especially how many hours you're supposed to work without a break et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, I think that's why they're a little different with me now.

Gary was signaling to Paul that he was not simply willing to take his word for it. If Paul did not come through and speak to DJ, Gary planned to pull upon more formalized mechanisms to ensure that the company did not take advantage of him moving forward. This stance was distinct from that of Sharon (a trooper), who agreed to stay at DTC without any formal agreement to protect what they had informally promised her. Both Gary and Matilda, like many prisoners, looked to the legal system as a potential means of bolstering resistance. They felt obligated to consent within their employment relationship, one based on compensation, but they were interested in identifying the limits to that obligation.

While ambiguity around required effort could facilitate prisoners' consent, in other cases, money itself could push workers to the extreme. I witnessed people working through illness, injuries, grief and extreme fatigue. In addition, several prisoners spoke to me about wanting to leave their organizations but described being tied to them because of the money. Paolo, a busser in his early forties, described a particular poignant story when we met in a small coffee shop in the East Village. He had been at The Jones for about

four years, but he was also an artist who made beautiful sculptures. He often posted pictures of his work on Facebook. He began by saying, “something happened this week that struck [sic] me in a really strong way that gives me a lot of force...it made me cry a lot.” Paolo told me about his early life in Brazil and how he had won national awards for designing and executing window displays. “But do you know what I won a week ago,” he asked. He pulled out his phone and showed me a picture of a certificate from The Jones that read, “Best Employee”:

That made me cry so much. It made me cry so badly because it's a good thing, but it shouldn't be. That's what depressed me. You see what I'm trying to say? I know who I am. And now look who I am. I get the best employee in a restaurant. What's happening? I was like, I didn't get no sleep. Obviously, I was really happy. I was really pleased. Like, thank you very much. But I was devastated. Right? What am I doing?...the only thing I'm actually doing well is fucking bussing tables. And that's just not fair.

Ironically, the recognition from the company made clear to Paolo he was succeeding more in his bussing work than in his artistic endeavors, leading him to recognize a misalignment with his personal goals. Later, Paolo would tell me about employees that he hoped would get fired, not because they were not good or because he did not like them, but because he thought they were not living up to their true life potential. They had grown too comfortable with the money at this job, and it was holding them back. Similarly, when I asked May, a server who had been at the company for four years and was now preparing for nursing school, what she worried about most at work, she replied simply, “never leaving.” I heard similar things at DTC. For example, Lark, the head of communications, expressed disappointment that her own “side hustle” doing public relations for major athletes, like Alex Rodriguez, could not grow while she was in her current role. For prisoners, it seemed that steady money was holding them hostage at jobs where they did not want to be.

Like those in other consent categories, prisoners also experienced relational mismatches at times, with others wanting to define the relationship in more mutually beneficial or morally imbued terms. When this mismatch occurred, prisoners would often fight to ensure that their efforts continued to be financially compensated. However, this move could come with consequences. At times, others would stigmatize prisoners for their resistance to the norms of intense work commitment. Wendy told me about a woman, Jenn, whom she had referred to DTC. Wendy was embarrassed by Jenn and regretted referring her. Explaining, she said, “she’s unique in her outlook on life, her societal norm if you will.” She explained that Jenn always looked at the pay first, not the job: “she’s very much driven by money, and those kinds of people can sometimes be very difficult to understand (laughs) and appreciate.” Wendy’s laugh acknowledged that Jenn’s behavior was not culturally appropriate, yet she did see some value in Jenn’s approach. She recalled how, at one point, Jenn complained about not being paid overtime for a job. As a result, all of the hourly employees working that job received their overtime pay, which despite being legally required, Wendy thought would have been unlikely if it were not for Jenn.

In the face of what they saw as unfair compensation, prisoners would also find other ways to extract money from their work, yet this approach could be very dangerous to their job security. This risk became apparent when Ken, who had been a bartender at The Jones for five years, was fired. I first heard about the incident when Shannon looked over at me in the middle of a busy shift. She asked, “so did you hear about Ken?” When I responded with cluelessness, she explained that he had been fired, “for several really silly things.” “Anyways, it’s near the first of the month, and rent is coming up,” she said

as she pulled out a jar, “we’re collecting money for him. If you have anything you can contribute, it’d be really appreciated.” Over the coming weeks, I would hear about this event over and over. Most traced the event back to the early summer, when bartenders and management got into a riff over staffing. The bartenders felt that summer shifts were being overstaffed, making it difficult for them to earn enough money from each shift. With no staffing changes in sight, Ken seemed to take things into his own hands, taking advantage of a “comping” privilege that bartenders were allowed. Bartenders were allowed to take a few drinks or food items off of bar guests’ tabs, at times, to help develop rapport and foster “regulars.” In light of the staffing dispute, Ken started comping more than usual. According to Ryan, another bartender, when DJ called Ken out on this one night, Ken replied, “look man, the way you guys are staffing, if I don’t take care of my regulars, I won’t make enough money to live.” Ryan shook his head:

When I heard exactly what he said, I’m like, there’s only one way that management’s gonna interpret that. They’re going to interpret that as “because of the way they’re doing the staffing, we’re giving away shit...that’s how they’re going to fucking see it.” Surely enough, they sent him home that day and fired him the next day. And he didn’t mean that. All he meant was like, you know, “we’re taking care of our regulars, which we always do because they take care of us, and we have to keep doing that in addition to everything that we do normally because, *especially because*, you guys are fucking overstaffing.” Ummm, was he giving the bar away? Hmm, maybe a little bit...ummm do I, am I guilty of the same thing? Yeah, when they piss me off, I’m like, “alright, who wants a round of drinks on me?” I mean because, if they’re going to do shit that fucks with our livelihood, you know, we have to or otherwise our livelihood gets fucked.

Ryan referred to management’s interpretation of Ken’s statement as “corporate deductive reasoning.” Indeed, the details of the story were not significantly different from management’s perspective. The problem was less about the comping, per se, and more about the meanings associated with that comping. DJ, who had been the manager on the floor that night, told me:

It was a *huge* decision. He [Ken] opened the restaurant! And he basically said that he was comping all sorts of checks because he’s angry at us for how we’re scheduling, and he

wanted to make more money. And I was like, “you literally just said that to me that?” Just say that you didn’t really understand the policy. What am I supposed to do with that?

DJ could not comprehend Ken’s actions. Though his confession, Ken admitted to being self-serving, as opposed to being about the overall guest experience and success of the company, which transformed his actions from policy to thievery.

As I heard the story over and over, most agreed that Ken had probably taken it too far, but they blamed DJ for interpreting what he said too literally and for punishing him too harshly. For example, Jenna recalled, “I just know that [they] treated him like he was a thief...it was like, you are not welcome back here. You are terminated. We will mail you your last check. You cannot go out the server door. You have to go out the regular door.” Jenna admitted that Ken was probably out of line, but added, “none of it warranted that kind of behavior.” Ultimately, what happened in the case of Ken was a relational mismatch. Ken expected to be paid fairly for his efforts, and he was willing to do whatever was needed to ensure that. In this case, however, Ken’s attempt to rectify a relational mismatch cost him his job.

The Emotional Leash and The Economy of Consent

What do we owe each other at work? This question is particularly salient today as companies reimagine employer-employee relationships to match constantly changing market demands.¹¹ Among workers at The Jones and DTC, I found three dominant responses to this question. *Troopers* define their relationship with employers through versatile and allied logics of trust that emphasizes negotiation and mutual benefit. These individuals extend effort because they are invested in the end product, and they see their effort as a contribution to collective achievement. They expect to be rewarded for their efforts with a seat at the table; in other words, they work for the chance for more work.

For *martyrs*, the employment relationship is characterized by a righteous logic of trust that emphasizes duty, and their efforts are a display of their character and integrity. In return, they simply want others to notice their work ethic and validate their moral worth. Finally, *prisoners* believe the employment relationship should be predictable, characterized by a legible logic of trust. Given a more standardized view of the relationship, they see their own efforts as simply a requirement of their position or role, but they expect to be fairly compensated, particularly through money, for their efforts.

Table 3. Relational Packages for Consent

<i>Consent Category</i>	Logic of Trust	Meaning of Consent	Preferred Reward Currency
Troopers	Versatile	Contribution to Collective Achievement	Voice and Opportunity
Martyrs	Righteous	Moral Performance	Recognition and Validation
Prisoners	Legible	Condition of Employment	Money

For individuals within each of these three categories, relations of trust serve as what I dub an “emotional leash.” To the extent that workers’ meanings of work are honored, they feel compelled to continue their efforts – even if these meanings may be exploitative at times. As a trooper, for example, Sharon ultimately acquiesced to DTC’s negative stance toward making counter-offers. Despite being in a strong negotiating position – a valued contributor to the company with another offer on the table – she did not hold the company accountable for a guarantee of higher pay or promotion. Ultimately, she viewed DTC as a conduit for concerted achievement much more than as a meal ticket, a relational stance that limited her motivations for resistance.

Martyrs were also unlikely to demand adequate pay for their extra efforts.

Influenced by broader cultural narratives regarding the honor of hard work within the

American context, this group saw work as a site of morality. They often recognized exploitative conditions, as Liz did in recognizing the problem with The Jones' practice of taking credit card fees from server tips, but they did not actively resist these practices. Instead, such practices served as fodder for the construction of a moral self; continued effort despite poor or unfair pay demonstrated the strength of their work ethic and thus the degree of their moral fitness.

Prisoners were most likely to resist employer practices that they deemed unjust or unfair, yet this group was only equipped to challenge such practices to the extent that they could prove a breach of contract. In a context of deregulation and deinstitutionalization, however, the tools of a legible logic of trust (i.e., employee-focused laws and contracts, formalized procedures) are lacking, and vary from state to state. As a result, many prisoners – as evidenced in the case of Matilda acquiescing to provide a doctor's note to her supervisor – felt they had no choice but to consent, given the terms of their employment.

Economic sociologists, such as Viviana Zelizer (2012), have theorized the concept of relational work to explain how people negotiate the meanings attached to economic relationships and transactions. In a distinct, yet overlapping conversation, cultural scholars have theorized symbolic economies, with Arlie Hochschild (1989) identifying an "economy of gratitude" within romantic couples and Allison Pugh (2009) identifying an "economy of dignity" among school children. Importantly, symbolic economies bring attention not just to micro-level negotiations, but also to how those negotiations are shaped by broader social and cultural structures, such as gender ideologies and consumerism. As Pugh (2009: 51) argues, symbolic economies are the

“shared ground for symbolic life,” and it is through symbolic economies that people make themselves visible to others.

Applying this framework, I suggest that there is an “economy of consent,” through which some relational packages are more valued and some relational mismatches become more likely. Within this economy, I contend that the relational package of troopers is highly valued – at least within DTC and The Jones – and thus employers are more likely to honor the meanings that troopers apply to their work. Indeed, I observed fewer relational mismatches among troopers and less severe sanctioning as a result. Further, while my data cannot adjudicate whether employees select the trooper framework as a route to success or if they are selected by organizations as a result of their orientation, it is the case that troopers are the most represented category within my data, particularly among more senior employees. Notably, troopers represent the relational package most closely aligned with today’s flexible capitalism, as this package enables a sense of mutual investment between employees and employers that is unencumbered by notions of loyalty or justice. Within this package, employers are not on the line to provide job security or even fair pay; troopers only expect their employers to give them valuable experience for their resumes. In this way, the labor market – not employers – carries the burden of assuring upward mobility. Indeed, troopers only ask for the opportunity to participate, something that employers want as well, and thus employers have little need to deny or challenge this stance.

On the other hand, martyrs and prisoners take a stance that is more problematic for employers, as evidenced by the symbolic and material sanctions managers lobbed against people such as Liz (a martyr) and Ken (a prisoner). Martyrs, while generally

submissive to employer demands, strongly resisted employer practices that minimized the visibility of their efforts, as in the case of Kent. Such resistance – while often not materially impactful – creates friction within environments and indeed a broader market context, that valorize efficiency and agility. Thus, while employers were generally likely to accept, and even appreciate martyrs approach to work, this was not always the case. Prisoners were the most likely to experience relational mismatches, and as a result suffered from substantial stigma and harsh sanctions. In making economic exchange central, prisoners reject the highly celebrated (in the U.S.) Protestant notion of a “calling,”¹² which emphasizes a greater purpose in one’s work. This stance elevates the inherent tension within the indeterminacy of labor power –that between the extraction of effort and payment – creating anxiety for employers. Additionally, in approaching work from a legible logic of trust, prisoners were a drain on company cultures, viewing work in transactional versus more intimate terms. This could, at times, create tensions between prisoners and their coworkers, further inhibiting their bargaining power.

Putting prisoners in the context of inequality, it is worth pointing out that pursuing a calling is arguably more difficult to achieve for those with fewer resources or for those who have been disenfranchised within the labor market. It is therefore unsurprising that only 9% of managers and 13% of white men – the most institutionally dominant group within these work settings – are characterized as prisoners, while 38% of non-managers and 34% of women and people of color adopt the prisoner framework.¹³

In looking across the two organizations, I find that troopers were more represented at DTC than within The Jones. In fact, almost two-thirds of DTC employees were categorized as troopers, while employees at The Jones were equally distributed

across the three consent categories. Moreover, among troopers at The Jones, the overwhelming majority were in more senior positions, usually working as floor managers. It therefore seems that workers typically needed to be in a position that was aligned with their future goals in order to adopt this consent category. As many servers and bussers at this particular restaurant were pursuing alternative career options, they were less likely to identify as troopers. Amanda and Jenna, two veteran servers at The Jones, were two exceptions to this pattern. Both women were passionate about pursuing careers in the performing arts, yet they acted in ways that reflected a genuine investment in the company and a desire for greater participation. Managers at DTC had gone out of their way, at times, to include these women in higher-level discussions, suggesting that managerial practices and workplace cultures can influence the adoption of consent categories. However, it is also important to note that both of these women came from upper-middle-class families, which arguably provided them with the cultural capital necessary to successfully navigate senior-level conversations¹⁴ and the financial security needed to risk the blind trust that this relational framework required.

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter offers a framework for understanding how workers make sense of their consent. Such an understanding is important, as it provides additional context for their decision to consent and demonstrates the ways in which trust can serve as an emotional leash. In addition, in highlighting the economy of consent, I have tried to show how these relational packages become stratified within the modern workplace. In the following chapter, I take a step back from DTC and The Jones, examining the role of trust in my two “new economy” sites: the tech start-up and the ride-hail circuit.

CHAPTER 6 NOTES

¹ Interested in maximizing surplus labor, Fredrick Taylor researched the labor process through his time and motion studies. He advocated for a division between the conception and execution of labor, which in transferring control over the pace of work from workers to managers, promised to increase worker output (Taylor 1911). Over sixty years later, Braverman (1974) suggested the same systems were still in place, although more institutionalized.

² Burawoy (1979) offered the foundational framework, which has since been applied in different ways across manufacturing, service and knowledge work (i.e., Vallas 2006; Graham 1995; Barker 1993; Kunda 1992; Sallaz 2002; Sherman 2007; Hochschild 1983).

³ While Burawoy (1979) and others tend to view consent as a process of managerial control, scholars such as Randy Hodson (2001) have argued that workers enact agency and resistance within when relations of consent.

⁴ I was able to identify a dominant consent category for 81 of my interview participants, and 41 of those individuals were categorized as troopers. People could adopt multiple consent categories at the same time, but typically only one was dominant at a time.

⁵ Indeed, this has been a dominant finding among labor process scholars (i.e., Burawoy 1979; Graham 1995; Kunda 1992; Leidner 1993; Smith 2001).

⁶ For example, while Jones employees would sometimes shout out “Be The Jones” in inappropriate situations, such as when out drinking with coworkers, they also used the phrase sincerely when calling attention to their own work or the efforts of others. This echoes Kunda’s (1992) findings about the ways in which employees can adopt culture both sincerely and earnestly.

⁷ Granovetter 1985; Uzzi 1997.

⁸ To further explicate the gendered dimensions of martyrs’ portrayal of their work as altruistic (as described in more detail below), it is necessary to review the deeply gendered binary of private and public life. Feminist scholars have traced how women’s labor is valorized within the private sphere, where they have been historically portrayed as the “keepers of morality,” while in the public sphere – constructed as a realm of rational self-interest – altruistic actions are frequently feminized and devalued. Hays (1996) has discussed how the “cult of domesticity” valorized women’s household labor, while also putting it at odds with the public sphere. Nelson (2006) and Zelizer (2002) have argued that the constructed boundary between private and public life is detrimental to women’s equality, and Folbre (2001) has shown how, when driven by altruism, some workers (especially women) may be willing to accept less financial compensation.

⁹ While Jenna was the one to identify and label this category, she herself was not a prisoner. She saw herself as a contributor and her relationship with The Jones as mutually beneficial. Thus, she is characterized as a trooper.

¹⁰ However, as was the case with Amanda (and Jenna) in the trooper category, the idea that this was a survival job, did not solely determine that one would be categorized as a prisoner. As discussed briefly in the conclusion, it may be that people who had other passions but felt economically secure may be less likely to be prisoners.

¹¹ People have called this the “flexible economy” (i.e. Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Kalleberg 2011; Snyder 2016).

¹² Weber 1905

¹³ Of course, gender and race categories overlap with workplace status categories.

¹⁴ Lareau 2003

CHAPTER 7**THE AMERICAN TECH DREAM: TRUST AND BETRAYAL IN THE NEW ECONOMY**

What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.*

*Or does it explode?
-Langston Hughes*

It was a hot, summer morning when I arrived at the old office building in downtown Manhattan. Two groups of people stood waiting separately in the 19th floor lobby outside of the Taxi and Limousine Commission's (TLC) office: people in suits and people wearing black t-shirts. The people in suits, I assumed, were corporate representatives of ride-hail companies like Uber and Lyft. As I moved closer, I saw that the t-shirts were branded with the logo for the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG), a quasi-union made up of ride-hail drivers. On the back, the shirts read "Drive with Dignity" in white letters. We were all here for the TLC's public meeting regarding a new rule that would require ride-hail companies like Uber and Lyft to incorporate a tipping option into the mobile application that coordinated rider-driver interactions.

Over the next hour, the room filled to capacity – with people in suits sitting on one side and those in black shirts on the other – and the meeting began. Journalists and independent activists lined the perimeter of the room. Despite the crowds and summer

temperatures, the room remained cool, and I pulled on my cardigan as the proceedings started to get underway. The Commissioner invited anyone with commentary on the proposed rule to speak at a microphone located at the front of the room. A number of drivers volunteered. First, a woman wearing an IDG shirt described how she was driving more than ten hours a day and struggling to pay for her expenses. Next, a man stepped up to the microphone. Referring to the ride-hail companies, he said, “they always work against the drivers. Always! They don’t consider the expenses, as the young lady just said before me...they’re not clear in delivering the policies.” He recalled a widely publicized miscalculation by Uber, in which the company admitted that it had been underpaying New York City drivers for the past two-and-a-half years, taking its commission out of the full fare as opposed to the fares after fees and taxes were deducted.¹ He said, “from this point on, I don’t trust how they calculate things.”

Another man stepped up to the microphone. He told the Commission that he was among the first 500 Uber drivers in the city. “When they brought me in, you know, they treated me awesome,” he said, but he added, “prices have gone down a lot since then...my take home has decreased in the past four years by 50 percent.” He continued:

I drive because I want to support my family. I have to make enough money. And tipping, this meeting was all about tipping...Initially, we didn't need tips. Right? And also, Uber told everybody the tip is included. And I said, you know, it's not included, but it's okay, cause I'm making enough money. By this point, I'm not making enough money. And Uber has -- they did not use the same marketing tools that they used when they told people that the tip was included to tell people now that it's really not included. And that's really been unfair. Everything -- I'm not, you know, just talking about Uber, because the other companies do the same things.

In total, eight different drivers stood up to tell their stories, describing extremely long hours and high operating expenses. At one point, the Commissioner politely and respectfully asked a driver: given the low pay by companies like Uber, had he considered other work options? The man replied flatly, “I don't have another offer. I just wait for

when our prices go a little bit higher.” The last driver to speak, ended by looking directly at the company representatives, “Also, one more question I have for the companies. Why do they treat drivers unfairly all the time? Why [do] we have to fight? Is that because we are immigrants, or we are minorities?” These drivers felt deeply – and personally – betrayed by companies that had promised them a decent living and then failed to deliver. None of the company representatives opted to deliver a response. Instead, they sat quietly in their seats, many attending to their phones.

* * * * *

The so-called “new economy” is said to change the nature of work.² No longer tethered to standard schedules and physical locations, new economy workers expect to enjoy greater flexibility and autonomy than the workers of previous eras.³ The touted independence of these workers is due in part to the eschewing of organizational hierarchies and formalized processes within new economy workplaces, as well as to the fact that many workers are not fully incorporated into the companies that employ them. As opposed to being employees, a number of new economy workers are contractors.⁴ As such, they negotiate the terms of their agreement through individualized contracts, typically working for one or more companies at a time on a contingent basis. In this context, it would seem plausible – even likely – to observe a withering away of interpersonal trust due to decreases in face-to-face interactions among workplace actors and to the specificity of contractual terms.⁵

Thus, I was surprised by the deep sense of betrayal I heard during the TLC meeting detailed above. The drivers who spoke described being deceived and cheated, and they displayed a raw sense of emotion while recounting the duplicitous practices of

their employers. As I continued my fieldwork in the New York City ride-hail industry and within the technology consulting start-up, which I refer to as Disruption, this profound experience of betrayal emerged as a common theme across my participants. Contending that betrayal cannot exist without trust and thus marks its continued salience, I use this chapter to explore what betrayal reveals about the collective project of trust in the new economy.

Betrayal in the new economy is closely linked to what I dub “The American Tech Dream.” I suggest that The American Tech Dream offers a cultural backdrop to employment relations in the new economy, as it represents the manifestation of Silicon Valley promises. Motivated by this dream, which affirms the possibility of a blend of material success, social fulfillment and individual freedom, new economy workers invest in tech-related ventures despite substantial uncertainty. The emphasis on high-risk, high-reward relations increases the salience of trust in this sector, but as I show, consistent failure without reward presents a challenge to ongoing accomplishments of trust. After discussing how reconfigurations of trust in the face of betrayal – a phenomenon observed at DTC and The Jones – are limited by conditions of new economy work, I then highlight the paradoxical power of organized resistance amidst the proliferation of disorganized labor.

The American Tech Dream

The technology sector has long touted itself as a utopia.⁶ Tech leaders present the sector as an alternative pathway to success, particularly as traditional fields become weakened or tainted within the American imaginary (i.e., the decline of manufacturing or increased awareness of corruption/elitism within professional work).⁷ Bolstered by buzzwords like

“disrupt,” “flatten” and “agile,” The American Tech Dream reimagines work in America. According to this dream, work no longer has to be physically, psychologically or morally constraining; tech workers can combine “doing good” (an altruistic statement) *and* “doing well” (a material statement) – and they can do this at a time and place of their choosing. Further, due to “low barriers to entry,” anyone with a good idea and an entrepreneurial attitude can enter this space. The only constraint is said to be self-imposed: a resistance to hard work and/or a resistance to risk. As Sheryl Sandberg, the renowned Facebook executive who has actively promoted women’s success at work, warns readers in her book, “the cost of stability is often diminished opportunities for growth” (2013: 61). In sum, The American Tech Dream serves as an update to the American Dream, American Dream 2.0, if you will.

As critics have long argued, and as recent events have made increasingly evident, The American Tech Dream originates from a position of privilege, offering a decontextualized vision that fails to take real-world realities into account.⁸ Technology sector leaders, often existing in homogenous social spaces, lack insight into the experiences of socially subordinated groups, creating blind spots both in their organizations and in their designs for technological solutions to social problems.⁹ Despite this, however, technology entrepreneurs continue to promote their “mission-driven” organizations, largely without hesitance, and individuals eagerly accept the risks and join the cause, themselves becoming “proselytizers for the transformation of society” on behalf of their companies.¹⁰ Despite its flaws, The American Tech Dream continues to have cultural cachet.

My two new economy sites, both located in the tech sector,¹¹ reflected this, with The American Tech Dream strongly embraced by my participants in both. Disruption, the startup, was founded in 2012 by two men: an Asian-American man named Shane and a white man named Tom. While Tom was originally quite involved with the company, he was no longer involved when I joined Disruption. Shane, however, shared his perspective on the company's founding vision, saying he previously had a series of "safe jobs," where "it was *so* political, and people were *not* nice and it wasn't fun." He (and Tom) wanted to build a company that defied conventional thinking – a company with a unique culture driven by passion, an unrestricted embrace of failure and a social contract developed by its members. Shane wanted to build an organization without organization – a business that was not a business. He rejected things like top-down management, saying "the person thinking of the objectives of an employee and setting those objectives for the employee, or giving guidelines, is the one saying, well, don't go too far, right?" To Shane, guidance served only to limit workers' thinking and thus put a cap on the ideas and innovations of which they might be capable. Recalling an excerpt from the book, *Freakonomics*, in which people were more willing to help friends move as a gesture of friendship than for payment, Shane told me he wanted Disruption to be a place where:

People are willing to do more out of loyalty, a feeling of belonging, just liking you, professional courtesy – all of these sort of...hard to quantify things. [People] are much more likely to help you out then than when you want to structure a business relationship and put a dollar value on it.

Shawn's only stated rule was "do no evil."

At its founding, the company consisted of two main pillars: Disruption Labs and Disruption Institute. Disruption Labs was a project incubator, helping clients – and employees – develop technological solutions to pressing global problems. Disruption

Institute was a knowledge-sharing forum, through which the company designed and led private and public courses on topics such as mobile development, big data and entrepreneurship. The idea was that – through these two pillars – the company would simultaneously support knowledge growth and business development, both internally and for paying clients.

In my conversations with veteran employees, who had been at the company near the time of its founding, they described the early years in romantic terms. Harold, for example, told me, “I thought [Disruption] was interesting because, to me, Tom and Shane were sort of like weirdos who came from the bigger business side of things and were like, ‘we’ve seen how stuff works over there. We don’t like it. We want to make our own thing that’s not that.’” He recalled how there was an “idealism of the Institute that I really liked... there’s a personal growth aspect.” He added, “with the Labs, the incubator idea was where, it’s sort of like Tom and Shane being a resource for people to sort of discover their own way...I like the idea of it being operated as something that could give someone a bit of a leg up.” Similarly, Lionel, who self-identified as a staunch Marxist, told me that upon seeing the company’s “counter-culture” branding, he knew it was the place for him. He recounted how Disruption “had this whole idea of like, we do consulting, but then we’re gonna turn that money toward investing in our own employees’ projects.” He applied immediately, sending a long email about why he was a perfect fit. Reid, who now managed most of the human resources tasks within the company, told me, “I was kind of at a crossroads in my life. I had mainly worked in enterprise worlds, like more corporate.” He explained, “I’m obviously more unconventional ... and essentially, I was kind of almost living in a duality.¹² I would play

that part during the day, and then at night take off the suit and rip off the tie.” He said, “I didn’t want to compromise anymore ... this was the first job that I could totally just be myself and be open. It’s the first company in a long time where it doesn’t feel like a job...there’s a shared vision there with a progressive approach to things rather than a status quo.”

There was an underlying confidence among those at Disruption which reflects that of the broader tech community. Shane really thought that he could reinvent work. Funding the company initially through a generous severance package from his last employer and a highly resourced social network, he had the luxury of pursuing this project without worrying about profitability or shareholder demands. Workers at the company, who consisted of both full-time employees and contractors, were also in a position to demand more from their employers. Most were highly educated men – some from elite universities – without families. Working was not just a means of making a living; it was about finding something that aligned with their passions and identity. In this way, Disruption appeared to be a strong “cultural fit.”

The dynamics within the New York City ride-hail circuit were different, but there was also notable overlap. The ride-hail companies sought to upend typical employment models, connecting supply and demand in the area of transportation through a digitally-mediated market. The circuit officially launched, with Uber, in 2012. It was later followed by similar companies, such as Via in 2013, Lyft in 2014 and Juno in 2016.¹³ At a national level, founders promoted their companies as an opportunity to build community ties, protect the environment and save people money, thus incorporating the central tenets of The American Tech Dream.¹⁴ In New York, which was still recovering

from the Great Recession, they offered what seemed to be an ideal labor solution: good paying jobs that could keep people afloat through difficult times. For those struggling on the labor market, the emerging ride-hail circuit offered a pathway to middle-class American life.¹⁵ Further, ride-hail companies claimed to “democratize” transportation, positioning themselves as a more accessible alternative to the entrenched taxi and livery services that dominated the city at the time.¹⁶

In the first few years, the city was littered with ride-hail advertisements targeted toward potential drivers. Uber, for example, advertised the ability to earn \$5,000 a month – or \$1,250 a week – during the first month of driving. For a period in 2014, they extended this offer to all full-time drivers, regardless of their tenure with the company.¹⁷ That same year, the company boasted a median salary of \$90,000 for drivers operating within the city.¹⁸ The companies also vaunted the freedom and flexibility provided through ride-hail work, inviting would-be drivers to “be your own boss” and “set your own hours.”



Figure 9. Ride-hail Companies' Public Communications to Drivers

Drivers were enticed and excited. Ferdouse Hasan, who had been a cab driver in the city for four years told *The Verge* in 2012, “I love the total idea of this business...if I pick you up, I’m making the money.”¹⁹ Fahad, a Pakistani immigrant with over twenty years of experience in the New York City taxi and limousine industry told me he originally thought the ride-hail companies offered something different and exciting. He recalled, “I Mosseri

trusted them. I thought they are not the mainstream, like corporate America. They are young people so they understand. And I think most of the people working in these companies, they are like, in regular life, they would be like activists.” Others told me about how the ride-hail model fit well within their lives. Diego, whose electronics repair shop could not be sustained through the recession, explained how the ride-hail industry seemed like a perfect solution at the time:

So I decided, you know what? Let me drive. It gives me a chance to think, and it's the flexibility. That's basically the reason why I'm doing this. It's flexible. At this stage in my life, it's flexible. Um, after working so many years for myself, it's really hard to have a boss telling me, uh, "Do this, do that, pick this up, uh, let's do this, let's do that." I can't. So, uh, I've made, you know, this is what I decided to do. I'm pretty much self-employed. I still have to answer to the customers, but I'm used to answering to customers.

Another driver, a middle-aged white man named Greg, recalled how the companies “used to advertise more time with your family, more money in your pocket.” With his body hurting from years of restaurant work, ride-hailing seemed like a good fit. In the beginning, it was. As the driver who spoke at the TLC meeting testified, the money was good in the early years, which in turn facilitated a greater flexibility in driver hours. At that time, the companies had a strong reputation. As a driver named Angel told me, “I [trusted them]. I did because everybody knew about it, but you never heard anything negative about it.”

Ride-hail companies offered drivers a tangible promise: good pay and flexible hours. They also offered the city the chance to “do good” by creating jobs, building community and reducing carbon emissions.

A Trust Betrayed: Challenges to Reconfiguring Trust

Across the two sites, people were disappointed when their employers failed to live up to these initial promises. After an early growth spurt, Disruption struggled to keep up with overhead costs. As Shane recounted in a mocking, yet self-deprecating tone, “it

turns out that it takes a lot of sales activities and selling success and really strong marketing to keep thirty-five people on billing.” With Tom already stepping back from the company, Shane felt overwhelmed. He hired a new CEO, Palmer, who implemented a more bureaucratic structure at the company and increased the pressure regarding profit-oriented goals. This alienated a lot of employees.

Logan, who was not a consultant but instead was on the operations team, explained, “a lot of people bought into that idea [of Disruption Labs and Disruption Institute], and I think they were really disappointed when it just couldn’t happen. They saw why it couldn’t, that it wasn’t financially attainable, but it was disappointing and disenchanting.” Harold, who was a consultant, recalled, “a lot of different employees came in with [building their own startup] as a serious consideration...and then, in a sense, sort of got the rug pulled out from under them.” Lionel’s sense of betrayal was evident in his voice as he commented on the dissolution of Disruption Labs and Disruption Institute, saying, “yeah, they dropped those pretenses.” Acknowledging the financial reasons behind the shift, he admitted, “it was very pie in the sky, and I knew that.” He then added sheepishly, “I don’t know. I did believe in it a little bit.” He recalled how he had interviewed a potential job candidate, whom the company later hired: “I gave him that whole spiel, and immediately felt like an asshole like a month later when I realized everything I told him was a lie, like they had told me.”

Ride-hail companies also fell short of their promises to drivers in the city. According to a study commissioned by the TLC, 85% of the city’s drivers make below the \$15 minimum wage, after taking into account expenses, taxes and a paid-time-off supplement.²⁰ In fact, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed a complaint in 2017

against Uber, claiming the company exaggerated potential earnings to recruit drivers.²¹ While Uber had promoted a \$90,000 annual median income for UberX drivers, average annual earnings for drivers in the city were only \$61,000. The company paid \$20 million to settle the charges, but it admitted no wrongdoing.²²

Promises of driver autonomy within the ride-hail industry also failed to fully manifest. As Alex Rosenblat (2018) has reported, ride-hail companies exert a great deal of control over drivers through algorithmic management practices.²³ Drivers are encouraged to work certain times and in particular areas through “surge pricing” heat maps that highlight busy areas where fares may be temporarily inflated²⁴ and targeted communications that predict potentially busy periods and locations. Echoing many others, a driver named Angel commented, “you don’t really get to pick the schedule. I mean, you could, but you won’t make that much money.”

In addition to not living up to their promises, the dominant ride-hail companies also engaged in questionable practices. Juno, for example, launched a program through which drivers could earn company shares if they worked on the platform for at least thirty hours each month. Yet, when acquired by another company, Gett, Juno terminated its driver stock program. The “driver-friendly” company cashed out driver shares, calculating their value at less than five cents per share.²⁵ One driver, Rashidi, described the sale, saying, “[the founder] just sold like last month to Gett for \$250 million. The drivers all got screwed on the stocks...he was on television being interviewed like, ‘yeah, the drivers are part of the startup.’ It ended up being all total bullshit. A lot of drivers I think got nothing, or fifty bucks, for all their stocks.” Combined with Uber’s public acknowledgement of underpaying NYC drivers for over two years, as the IDG driver in

the opening vignette highlighted and many of my participants reiterated, people became increasingly cynical.

Fahad, the driver who initially saw employees of the ride-hail companies as “activists” expressed his disappointment, saying, “it seems like everyone is corporate America, even when they don’t claim it.” A similar sense of drivers’ betrayal emerged within online forums and the media. For example, in a highly publicized interaction with Uber’s then-CEO, Travis Kalanick, driver Fawzi Kamel asked the CEO why he kept lowering prices. Frustrated by Kalanick’s market-based explanations emphasizing competition, the driver stated, “you had the business model in your hand. You could have the prices you want. But you *chose* to buy everybody a ride.” He continued, saying “people are not trusting you anymore. Do you think people will buy cars anymore? ... I lost \$97,000 because of you. I’m bankrupt because of you. You keep changing every day. You keep changing every day.”²⁶

While betrayal was not uncommon at DTC and The Jones, it was typically resolved through creative reconfigurations of meanings or a departure from the employment relationship. At Disruption and in the NYC ride-hail circuit, my participants experienced greater difficulty in reconfiguring trust, leading to a more sustained discourse of betrayal. This begs the question: what unique challenges to reconfigurations of trust exist within new economy work sites?

I argue that there are three things occurring in this context that shape workers’ willingness and ability to reconfigure trust in the face of betrayal. First, the less personal logics of legible, versatile and righteous trust are much more prominent in these sites than are the logics of intimate and allied trust. When these three impersonal logics are

betrayed, workplace actors cannot contrast them or balance them out with more personalized interactions. As I came to understand through my research across all four sites, people are neither wholly trustworthy or untrustworthy; rather they can be trusted (or not) in certain ways within certain contexts. Drawing on how another has acted trustworthy, at least in one context, can allow one to accomplish trust, even in the face of betrayal. However, the dearth of face-to-face interactions, both at Disruption, where workers were often embedded in client offices, and in the ride-hail circuit, where drivers operated out of their cars, served to limit the amount of “data” available to inform relations of trust. Trust processes become simplified when there is less information to complicate evaluations. When the dominant logics of trust are betrayed in this situation, it is difficult find evidence that can redeem employers. The relatively smaller pool of information available for negotiating trust may also help to explain why my participants were more likely to trust their new economy employers – and indeed why, as a nation, we have tended to trust the tech community. As a still relatively new player at the national level, tech sector employers do not have to contend with the baggage that comes with longevity, making trust a viable possibility.

Second, crises within these two new economy sites were experienced inversely to how they were experienced at DTC and The Jones. In those more traditional sites, *crisis of work*, or extreme moments related to the successful completion of work, were experienced collectively, and they created an opportunity for trust-building. In contrast, *crises of dignity*, focused on moments of personal or social degradation, were often experienced individually. At Disruption and DTC, workers were more dispersed and workplace problems, although occasionally discussed over digital platforms, were usually

somewhat unique to their particular circumstance and were thus dealt with individually. However, flattened hierarchies among workers at these sites meant that most of my participants experienced employer practices a similar way. Rather than connecting through the shared adversity and triumph of market-defined work challenges, my participants in these sites bonded through their shared sense of suffering. When employers broke their promises or failed to meet worker expectations, workers at these sites felt collectively disrespected and betrayed. Trust was still built through crises, but it was through crises of dignity. Shaped by an “us versus them” mentality, this process contributed to worker solidarity at the expense of trust in employers.

Third and finally, the currency of trust appears to be slightly diminished within these new economy workplaces. As I have argued, being trustworthy carries value at work; in particular, displaying trust in others – especially in the face of uncertainty or even betrayal – signifies resilience and a willingness to be vulnerable. Yet, the accomplishment of trust, to confer value, requires an audience. Given the more siloed experiences of work in these sites, the audience for trust displays is limited, potentially reducing workers’ motivation to trust. In other words, the template for workplace relations is less relevant in these sites.

In sum, workers in the new economy were less willing and less able to reconfigure trust with their employers in the face of disappointment. This does not, however, mean that trust is irrelevant here. Trust is extremely consequential as people enter into new economy employment, where risk and uncertainty are high. Indeed, this characteristic is exactly what drives the potency of betrayal in these sites.

Organizing Disorganized Labor

Comparing my observations in these sites to those at the more traditional sites, I find a distinct relationship between trust and resistance. Considering the three forms of worker resistance – exit, voice and sabotage – I reveal how trust influenced each in different ways across sites. At DTC and The Jones, the orientation to trust served to quell worker resistance. Specifically, trust increased workers’ feelings of both obligation and loyalty, limiting their willingness to exit the company. Trust also increased workers’ belief in the value of communicating with managers when they were discontent, similar to Hirschman’s (1970) arguments about loyalty, yet this often led to a reframing of their concerns and/or a reconfiguration of trust as opposed to meaningful workplace change. Finally, intersections of vertical and horizontal trust complicated worker solidarity. This complication, along with the pay structure of service work (i.e., tips, percentage of sales), made sabotage a risky and perhaps self-defeating approach.

At Disruption and within the ride-hail circuit, I observed how betrayal could ignite critique and amplify worker solidarity, particularly given the experiences of collective suffering that resulted from flattened organizational structures. Solidarity, in increasing worker power, made all three forms of resistance more feasible. Yet, sabotage remained a self-defeating endeavor due to the pay structure of the work, and this was particularly true for ride-hail drivers who were often struggling to make ends meet. Exit was easier at the startup, especially when high worker solidarity could potentially help to offset the negative effects of “burning bridges” within a relatively small community. In the ride-hail circuit, a mass departure, facilitated through strong bonds of solidarity, could certainly have impact on employers. However, drivers already worked for multiple companies at a time, and their opportunities to find alternative work were more limited

that those of Disruption consultants.²⁷ Thus, while both ride-hail drivers and Disruption consultants voiced their concerns to employers in the face of betrayal, this voice was particularly amplified within the ride-hail circuit, where other forms of resistance were more limited.

Drivers' solidarity and motivation to voice critique in the face of betrayal influenced their engagement with IDG. Describing his interactions with and through IDG, Luís, who had become a member, explained, "it gave me a sense of, okay, there is an organization that I can belong to that is actually trying to help drivers." He thought others appreciated it, too, saying "some people, they find IDG, and they find a comfort...because even though things are tough, I think just the idea that you have somebody that's willing to fight with you is a comforting thing...I don't want to be emotional, but you know, it makes me feel good."

I observed how the collective experience of betrayal could serve as a mobilizing resource one day when I accompanied Fahad to pass out IDG flyers in the airport parking lots. We walked up to a group of about seven or eight men all standing together. The backs of their cars were open, and a few were sitting on the tailgates. All of their phones were lined up on a concrete slab. I saw on one man's phone that he was number "31" in the airport ride queue. Fahad introduced himself and me, and he asked the men, somewhat rhetorically, if they thought drivers had a problem. They all nodded and laughed, "yes." One even picked up his phone, showing us his queue number, as a reason for his frustration. Fahad pushed, "what are our problems?" The men grumbled about the low fares and the high commissions taken by the companies. Fahad asked, "who will

solve this problem?” When they joked that IDG would, he revised this answer, saying “no *we* have to solve the problem together. *We* have to do this together.”

The effectiveness of drivers’ united voice is still yet to be determined. They have seen some initial success. With the help of IDG and the TLC, drivers in New York City have secured a mandated tipping option on ride-hail apps, ensured the ability of luxury drivers (who invested in luxury vehicles) to opt-out of cheaper ride options without penalty and obtained a more reliable means of communicating with companies during problem situations, such as deactivation from the app.²⁸ Further, in 2018, the TLC, after receiving substantial pressure from drivers, passed two major rules poised to improve driving conditions: a minimum-pay formula that would guarantee \$15/hour for drivers (after expenses) and a cap on ride-hail licenses to manage the over-saturated market.²⁹

Nevertheless, a number of challenges lie ahead. Major ride-hail companies, like Uber and Lyft, have noted the power of trust in moderating worker relationships, and they have launched robust public relations campaigns in recent years to repair and rebuilt trust with drivers. Earlier this year, both companies also announced programs through which long-time and highly active drivers would receive cash bonuses to buy stock in anticipation of the companies’ upcoming initial public offerings (IPOs). These efforts may prove to challenge driver unity, but as in the case with drivers’ voice, the overall impact of these efforts in the ride-hail circuit are yet to be seen.

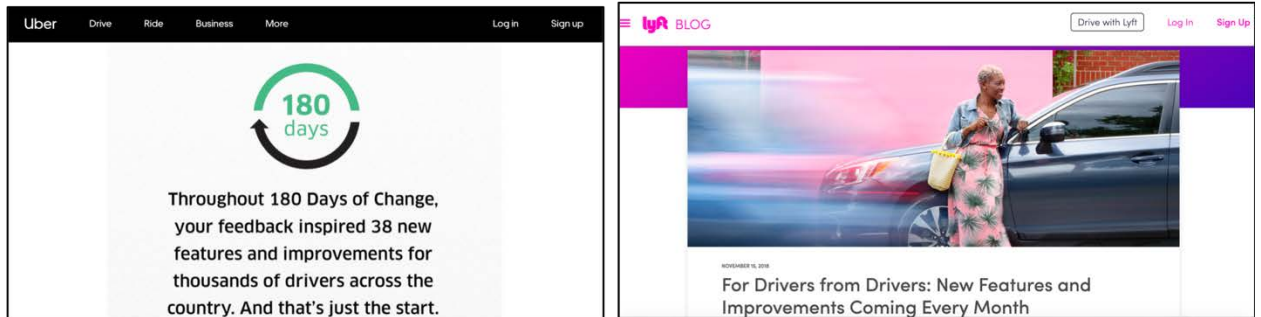


Figure 10. Uber and Lyft Driver-focused Campaigns

Conclusion

While the characteristics of new economy employment – namely, a dispersed and mediated workforce – would seem to weaken trust, I find evidence that trust remains pertinent within the new economy. I argue that this is, in part, due to the cultural backdrop, what I call The American Tech Dream, that gives meaning to the labor process within the new economy. Workers are motivated to trust their tech employers as they present a less constraining, equally lucrative and socially fulfilling work life.

The importance of trust in the new economy and the cultural meanings that motivate it provide insight into the depth of betrayal I observed here, especially among ride-hail drivers. This betrayal appears to be more eviscerating, perhaps because it is experienced not just as a violation of the employer-employee relationship, but also as an erosion of the ability to sustain hope for the future of work in America.

I also observed a potential silver lining. Specifically, I observed the potential of betrayal to serve as a mobilizing apparatus among new economy workers. Thus, in the context of current debates about the limits of worker power in the new economy, I paradoxically observe workers organizing in the midst of what is otherwise highly disorganized labor.

CHAPTER 7 NOTES

¹ Bensinger 2017

² These sites are within an arena that has variously been labeled as the “new economy,” “post-industrial work,” “post-Fordist work” and the “flexible economy.” The term “new” economy is somewhat misleading as historians have traced many of its characteristics back to 19th century America (Capelli 1999).

³ Powell and Snellman 2004

⁴ Barley and Kunda 2004; Kalleberg 2009

⁵ Cook et al. (2007) argue, for example, that we now have cooperation without trust.

⁶ In a 2013 *New Yorker* article, for example, George Packer notes, “the phrase ‘change the world’ is tossed around Silicon Valley conversations and business plans as freely as talk of ‘early-stage investing’ and ‘beta tests.’”

⁷ Corruption has been exposed by things like the subprime mortgage crises, the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme and the accounting scandals of the 1990s and early 2000s.

⁸ Facebook’s recent “fall from grace” represents one example of this.

⁹ Tufekci 2015

¹⁰ Losse 2019

¹¹ While many ride-hail companies categorize themselves in the transportation sector, I contend that they are fundamentally tech companies.

¹² While Reid was not “obviously” unconventional, I think he was perhaps referring to his LBTG identity, or perhaps to his Latin American background.

¹³ Parrott and Reich 2018

¹⁴ i.e., Olanoff 2013

¹⁵ Ride-hail driving has a lower barrier to entry than some other jobs, for example (Katz 2017; Parrott and Reich 2018; Rosenblat 2018)

¹⁶ See coverage of this by Jeffries 2012. The narrative of Silicon Valley as a progressive force has even enticed a number of liberal politicians and civil rights advocacy groups (Heller 2017; Youngdahl 2018).

¹⁷ Uber blog 2014

¹⁸ Beres 2014

¹⁹ Jeffries 2012

²⁰ Parrott and Reich 2018

²¹ Federal Trade Commission 2017a

²² Burns 2017; Federal Trade Commission 2017b

²³ See also Rosenblat and Stark 2016

²⁴ Like Rosenblat (2018) reports, I also heard “don’t chase the surge.”

²⁵ Griswold 2017b

²⁶ Bhuiyan 2017

²⁷ Katz 2017; Parrott and Reich 2018

²⁸ Etherington 2017; Flamm 2018; Fox 2017

²⁹ Matthews 2018; Wodinsky 2018

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Trust has been described as both “glue” and “lubricant” within economic life. As glue, trust brings economic actors together through shared agreements and assumptions.¹ As lubricant, it eases economic transactions, enabling dynamic and efficient exchange.² Yet, in our never-ending quest for more trust within today’s flexible economy, it is easy to forget that glue not only connects but binds, and that lubricants not only facilitate action but also slippage. This study goes beyond sanguine narratives of trust, examining how trust materializes and is experienced within the economic setting of the contemporary workplace.

What is trust at work?

I began this project intrigued by the high rates of interpersonal trust reported within the workplace, especially given deteriorating job quality and the erosion of trust more broadly. I wanted to understand what people meant when they said they “trusted” others at work.

Far from a stable characteristic embedded within individuals or social structures, I reveal that trust is an emergent and negotiated social process. People do not simply trust or distrust at work; rather they stretch and reshape their understandings of trust in ways that match their current realities, enable them to solve problems and help them to be accountable to others. Specifically, workplace actors mix and match different logics of trust that enable its achievement even, in some cases, in the face of dishonesty, inequality and abuses of power.

This accomplishment helps people cope with the volatility and adversity of modern work, facilitating purpose and social connection, not to mention productivity, within the workplace. Trust helps workers to make sense of their, frequently undervalued, work efforts and to reframe disappointing managerial words and unjust actions in ways that protect and maintain their dignity. Trusting relationships create the perception that workplace processes can and will be negotiated, providing workers with a sense of empowerment. Further, as a moral currency, trusting and being trusted confers status. Trusting actors are perceived as unguarded, agile and resilient, valued qualities in today's work landscape, while the trustworthy are viewed as strong leaders and reliable workers.

However, mechanisms of accountability, such as race and gender bias, constrain performances of trust for some groups. In particular, women and people of color find it harder than white men to enact the authenticity and flexibility required in celebrated performances of maverick management. At more junior levels, cultural biases make it easy for women to perform neoliberal fealty, yet in doing so, the reward is often more work with only limited compensation. In addition, performances of trust in peer relations often contradicted performances in vertical relationships, requiring junior level workers and middle-managers in particular, to carefully negotiate workplace relationships.

Moreover, the imperative to trust binds people in relations of obligation, trivializes the risks entailed and obscures underlying conflicts, particularly between workers and owners. Processes of trust, for example, normalize constant work crises, excuse abusive behavior and rationalize consent. In replacing more formalized

processes, processes of trust do create the opportunity to negotiate terms, but they also remove the secure backstop for when negotiations fall through. Flexibility requires ambiguity, and ambiguity typically – as in the case of Ken’s firing at The Jones – favors the more powerful. Thus, I conclude that processes of interpersonal trust represent an emergent and powerful structure of stratification and control within the contemporary workplace.

* * * * *

This dissertation makes three important contributions to existing social scholarship. First, my theoretical framework establishes a new way of thinking about trust: as an interactive process of meaning making and social construction. Approaching trust in this way redirects attention away from the bucketing of trust into different categories and the tallying of trust across groups and settings and towards more nuanced investigations of how trust “works” within various social contexts. It focuses attention, for example, on how trust is constructed as the solution to particular problems and how that construction shapes identities, relationships and social actions. In contending that trust is not simply an antecedent or outcome of other social phenomena but is itself worthy of analysis, I avoid the common tendency toward reified notions of the concept. Furthermore, my analysis not only moves the scholarship on trust beyond its self-imposed functionalist limits, but I also suggest that it presents trust as a useful analytic lens for investigating the dynamic interplay between power, structure, culture and agency, making it a resource for theory building across the discipline.

Second, this dissertation contributes to relational theories of workplace inequality by describing how processes of trust shape the distribution of resources and rewards at

work. While calls for relational accounts of workplace inequality have been many, the number of empirical studies answering this call remains relatively small.³ I address this gap, demonstrating how trust – as a cultural-relational process – is both mechanism and marker of value within the workplace, conveying resilience and integrity and legitimating status and inclusion. However, opportunities to build trust were often limited for marginalized groups, who were more likely to be excluded from trust-building moments, like crises, and whose performances of trust were constrained by social status expectations, as discussed above. Further, trust processes unfold within the existing “inequality regimes”⁴ of organizations. For example, gendered organizational hierarchies at both DTC and The Jones made it harder for women managers to engage in work crises, limiting their ability to earn workers’ trust and undermining their managerial status. In addition, racialized feeling rules made it difficult for black men, in particular, to effectively perform maverick management. In this way, trust reinforced the strength of the powerful, and amplified the vulnerabilities of the marginalized. In elucidating these processes, this study extends beyond narrowly material and narrowly symbolic analyses to provide a more holistic account of how structures and meanings are combined in ways that (re)produce workplace inequalities.⁵

Lastly, this project contributes to theories regarding the labor process by identifying interpersonal trust as a powerful structure constituting, organizing and regulating workplace relationships within the flexible economy. While labor process theory has long been praised for the political lens it applies to workplace relations, more recently, some have questioned its continued relevance within a post-industrial context where traditional work structures have become fractured and decentered.⁶ In particular,

changes in the landscape of work have reignited critiques against overly deterministic arguments within labor process theory, accusing scholars of minimizing worker agency and oversimplifying workplace relations by treating managers and workers as distinct and homogenous oppositional groups.

My analysis of trust at work helps to reinvigorate labor process theory in two ways. First, it expands the theory to incorporate a more cultural and subjective process – trust – through which control and resistance occur. In this way, my analysis builds on recent articulations of a trust/control duality by scholars such as Möllering (2005) and Reed (2001). Rather than trust and power being orthogonal to one another, trust informs power and vice versa.

Second, my analysis reveals how *both* workers and managers can become subjugated to discursive practices that transect existing organizational arrangements.⁷ Workers must constantly replenish trust within their work relationships to enjoy its rewards, continually proving themselves in times of crises, handling significant work responsibilities on their own and serving as proxy managers without authority or material reward. Managers, too, must constantly work to accomplish trust by engaging in ongoing work crises, performing authenticity and addressing perceptions of betrayal. Thus, relations of trust compel both of these workplace groups to overcommit themselves in ways that can leave them overworked and vulnerable to economic insecurity.

The critique of stable and homogenous work categorizations is a problem that is not limited to labor process theory; indeed, it extends to the broader sociology of work. Increased fragmentation and complexity in the landscape of contemporary work raises

new challenges in research design for those interested in studying work experiences and outcomes.

The Practical Problems of Complicated Categories

When I began this comparative research, I expected to find significant differences in the experiences of trust between social demographic groups, between workers and managers and between those working in high- and low- status work. Yet, two things happened in the field that complicated this process. The first is what turned out to be a notable finding. Across my sites and worker groups, I observed a common thread in the ways in which people experienced trust at work: trust, which has become a workplace mandate, requires significant sacrifice but also provides a sense of meaning and fulfilment.

The second, however, is a more practical problem, that nonetheless has potent theoretical implications: the problem of fixed social categories and groups. I follow a long line of gender scholars in challenging essentialized categories of gender and race.⁸ In my study, I therefore did not enter *a priori* with a sample design based on specific race and gender categories. Instead, I used dominant social status categories as “sensitizing concepts” to help me identify the salient social dynamics within each site.⁹ Thus, social demographic categorizations emerged based on the ways in which they “mapped onto” each settings’ organizational infrastructure. I referred to this process as “modal sampling,” and it resulted in the ability to make different comparisons, and observe distinct processes of intersecting inequalities, than would have otherwise been possible.

For example, at lower level positions within DTC and The Jones, I found that women of color had more in common with men of color and white men than with white women, who made up the majority group in that role. However, at higher levels of the

organization, white women, women of color and men of color experienced more commonality than difference as all three groups represented numerical minorities within management. Thus, among workers, I compared white women with all other groups, and among managers, I compared white men with all other groups. This approach shaped my findings by enabling me to see how trust emerges and unfolds in different ways across relational geographies. Without modal sampling, I would have asked how different racial groups or gender groups experience trust at work, without being attentive to the ways in which social and organizational hierarchies intersected to produce unique manifestations of trust.

Yet, the problem of reified categories is not limited to social demographics. As I observed, and as other workplace studies have found,¹⁰ workers and managers are not clear-cut, mutually exclusive groups. At DTC and The Jones, middle-managers are perhaps the most prominent example of this. These individuals play multiple roles. Sometimes, they are leaders of a team. At other times, they are accountable to those at higher levels of the organization. Thus, they are both managers and workers, but their experiences may also be distinct from both. Wherever possible, I've tried to highlight these differences in my findings. Moreover, in some cases, I noted that managers were exposed to similar processes of control as workers, and in others, they experienced *fewer* workplace benefits and rewards. For example, at The Jones, managers often worked longer hours and earned less than many servers and bartenders. At Disruption, the operations team made greater financial sacrifices and worked longer, more intense hours than many of the consultants. This upended hierarchy could lead to the devaluation of

managers, with workers perceiving they could handle the role, yet not fully understanding the associated costs. Thus, trust did not always fully legitimate managerial status.

I observed a similar problem in my comparisons of “high status” and “low status” work. What differentiates these sites from one another? While restaurant workers have been called “interactive service workers” due to their constant interactions with clients, I also observed substantial and continuous worker-client interactions at DTC and Disruption. In some cases, my participants at these high-status sites described speaking to clients more often than to colleagues. Current income levels also failed to vary substantially across the two sites, with some entry-level workers at DTC, for instance, making less than servers and bartenders at The Jones. Similarly, high-level Jones’ managers had salaries on par with DTC managers. Hourly versus salaried employee comparisons were also complicated by the introduction of temporary workers, often paid by the hour or by the project in high-status sites. A final potential differentiator between high- and low-status work sites may be earnings potential and/or upward mobility. Yet, even here, such distinctions were hard to make. The majority of workers at both DTC and The Jones had a college degree, and most would be forced to shift organizations in order to achieve upward mobility. All this overlap suggests that, as others in the field have begun to highlight, polarized understandings of work may be too linear, as polarization varies across different dimensions of work.¹¹ Thus, it may be time to develop new models for thinking about work and the labor market. In terms of trust specifically, the division between high and low status may have led to the conclusion that trust was more important in “high status” knowledge work,¹² yet I found that trust was equally important across my sites.

In sum, the traditional categories that inform the research design for workplace studies are becoming increasingly blurred. In general, we – researchers, government agencies, policymakers and business leaders – risk misrepresentation whenever we make distinctions among groups. When we classify middle-managers as managers, we miss how they experience subordination, and we also miss how these managers may differ from other organizational leaders. When we classify restaurant workers as low-status workers, we risk over-exaggerating differences and missing important commonalities between these workers and their “professional” counterparts.¹³ We also risk stripping restaurant workers (or ride-hail drivers) of the dignity they find in their work by labeling them as “lower status.” In this way, researchers can inflict symbolic violence on their research participants and promote a trajectory of knowledge that may, unintentionally, reinforce existing structures. Such potential perils have always been present, but the erosion of traditional work structures makes them even more likely.

Evaluating Trust in the Future of Work

This dissertation has shown that trust is a mechanism of power and inequality in the contemporary workplace. Thus, some may read my text as a treatise on the need to eradicate “flawed” human relationships from the workplace. In the age of deinstitutionalization and rising workplace automation, such readers are likely to propose one of two options. On the one hand, regulators may amplify calls for formalized procedures and policies to limit the role of interpersonal biases and malfeasance. Such protections are very much needed, but this solution by itself is not enough. On the other, business owners concerned with labor costs may look to artificial intelligence and algorithms as a means of circumventing processes of interpersonal trust altogether.

While there is room for these continued technological developments in the workplace, this solution underplays the dominance of work in Americans' emotional, moral and social lives.

Regarding the partiality of the solutions above, it is important to note that formalized processes and automated systems, often designed by homogenous groups, have been shown to reflect the deep seated-biases of decision makers.¹⁴ Further, seemingly neutral processes and procedures can be applied within particular relational spaces in ways that reinforce inequalities. Thus, alone, they cannot provide a comprehensive solution to the problems outlined in this dissertation. In addition, human emotions are a powerful source of action. As we saw in the case of Disruption and the ride-hail drivers, the sting of betrayal triggers outrage over injustice and can motivate resistance. In overly bureaucratic or automated environments, apathy and disempowerment are likely to reign in the face of machines that are not easily shamed or guilty.

Third and finally, this dissertation is not a critique of trust. Rather, it is a commentary on the processes and implications of the capitalist appropriation of trust. The construction of trust in the workplace – a deliberate, adaptive response to the legitimate critique of work as oppressive and alienating – serves as means for recruiting individuals into the capitalist project.¹⁵ Trust, as a product of managerial discourse, reorients potentially productive workplace critique and conflict towards productivity. The answer is not to abolish relations of trust from the workplace, but to think more critically about what employers mean when they proclaim a desire to increase trust

among and between workers. As opposed to mindlessly pursuing trust for the sake of trust, we should ask: what have employers done to earn Americans' trust?

I suggest two recommendations – one within workplaces and one within the public sphere – for bolstering a more expansive form of trust at work. First, drawing from Katherine Kellogg's (2011) research on the factors promoting transformational change within organizations, I suggest that employers offer employees safe spaces for expressing critique among one another, in the *absence* of those interested in defending existing systems. Kellogg, in her research within healthcare organizations, found that “relational spaces” – areas where reformers and potential reformers within the organization could openly discuss concerns and experiment with potential solutions – were key to promoting real workplace change. While employee surveys and town hall meetings offer one pathway for vocalizing critique and pursuing transformation, these forums are typically managed by defenders of the status quo, and thus they frequently become a means of ferreting out and shutting down, albeit often quite diplomatically, challenges to existing practice and systems. Just as some managers told me that they supported transparency “to a point,” internal organizational critics deserve spaces for communication that are shielded from the purview of managerial interests. Thus, I suggest the creation of oppositional relational spaces within work settings, providing a space in which criticisms can be freely aired and alternatives expanded upon without the immediate interference of those defending the status quo. Of course, each organization would need to determine what such spaces look like within their specific culture, but the important point is to provide enough *trust* to challengers to give their concerns an opportunity to grow and flourish before coming into dialogue with defenders.

Second, I suggest the creation of a national watchdog group that supports the interests of workers in the flexible economy. As evidenced by the foundations of the U.S. democratic system, trust does not nullify the need for checks and balances. Thus, workers across the country should be represented by a group that sees its role as critically monitoring employer practices and alerting the public when they become aware of actions that go against worker interests. While unions have historically played this role, the changing nature of work requires a broader platform.

At the most general level, I have tried to demonstrate that trust is not an inherent good within the workplace, but instead a relational process that is both binding and contested. When engaged in reflexively, trust can become a powerful mechanism of control, tethering people to unequal systems, unjust practices and unhealthy relationships. I suggest that workplace actors be more deliberate in where and in whom they invest their trust and that they hold employers accountable through those relations.

CHAPTER 8 NOTES

¹ Coleman 1988; Luhmann 1988; Putnam 2000

² Fukuyama 1995; Williamson 1979

³ Roscigno and Wilson (2014), Tomaskovic-Devey (2014), and Vallas and Cummins (2014)

⁴ Acker 2006

⁵ In their review of the existing literature, Vallas and Cummins (2014) direct researchers toward this very type of analysis.

⁶ Hodson 1995; Knights and Willmott 1990; Storey 1985; O'Doherty and Willmott 2001.

⁷ As Vallas and Hill (2012) argue, such practices are becoming increasingly salient in the post-industrial context of work.

⁸ Fausto-Sterling 2000; Kessler 1991; Lorber 1994; Winant 2000

⁹ I borrow the term "sensitizing concepts" from Blumer (1954)

¹⁰ Sallaz 2002; Vallas 2003

¹¹ See discussions in the symposium on Arne Kalleberg's book in the October 2012 edition of *Work and Occupations*.

¹² See Adler 2001, for example.

¹³ As Gorman and Sandefur (2011) highlight, there are four attributes of professionalism: expert knowledge, technical autonomy, service orientation and high reward. In my study, servers and bartenders were socialized into the job through substantial training, during which they attained expert knowledge and gained a normative orientation to service. Additionally, these workers did not necessarily earn lower rewards or have greater autonomy than my marketing professionals.

¹⁴ Tufekci 2015

¹⁵ This critique is aligned with the broader critical project outlined by Boltanski and Chiapello 2005.

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APPENDIX A**OVERALL INTERVIEW SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Social Status Category	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total Sample (122 people)
Organizational Status		
Manager	47	39%
Worker	75	61%
Gender		
Cis-Male	60	49%
Cis-Female	60	49%
Trans	2	2%
Race/ethnicity		
White	79	65%
Black	16	13%
Latinx	17	14%
Asian	9	7%
Age		
Twenties	50	41%
Thirties	43	35%
Forties	21	17%
Fifties	5	4%
Sixties	2	2%

*Status categories based on self-identified characteristics

**I did not ask specifically about sexuality or immigrant status, but 7% of my sample voluntarily shared that they identified as LGBTQ and 15% voluntarily identified as immigrants.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS BY SITE

	The Jones		DTC		Disruption		Ride-hail	
Social Status Category	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (39 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (51 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (14 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (18 total)
Organizational Status								
Manager	15	38%	25	49%	3	21%	4	22%
Worker	24	62%	26	51%	11	79%	14	78%
Gender								
Cis-Male	15	38%	22	43%	10	71%	13	72%
Cis-Female	24	62%	29	57%	2	14%	5	27%
Trans	0	0%	0	0%	2	14%	0	0%
Race/ethnicity								
White	28	72%	36	71%	10	71%	5	28%
Black	6	15%	4	8%	1	7%	5	28%
Latinx	3	8%	7	14%	1	7%	6	33%
Asian	2	5%	4	8%	2	14%	1	6%

	The Jones		DTC		Disruption		Ride-hail	
Social Status Category	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (39 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (51 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (14 total)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Site (18 total)
Age								
Twenties	21	54%	18	35%	6	43%	5	28%
Thirties	13	33%	21	41%	3	21%	6	33%
Forties	5	13%	8	16%	3	21%	5	28%
Fifties	0	0%	3	5%	1	7%	1	6%
Sixties	0	0%	1	2%	1	7%	0	0%
Education								
H.S. or less	11	28%	2	4%	3	21%	12	67%
Bachelors	25	64%	42	82%	11	79%	5	28%
Grad Degree	3	8%	7	14%	0	0%	1	6%
Income Category								
Less than \$25K	5	13%	1	2%	0	0%	1	6%
\$26K-\$65K	23	59%	26	51%	4	29%	11	61%
\$66K-\$100K	2	5%	11	22%	7	50%	1	6%
\$100K+	5	13%	10	20%	3	21%	0	0%

*Key demographics for primary sites combined: managers (44%); workers (56%); men (41%); women (59%); White (71%); Black (11%); Latinx (11%); Asian (7%).

**Of ride-hail drivers, 43% were affiliated with IDG.

APPENDIX C**SITE CHARACTERISTICS**

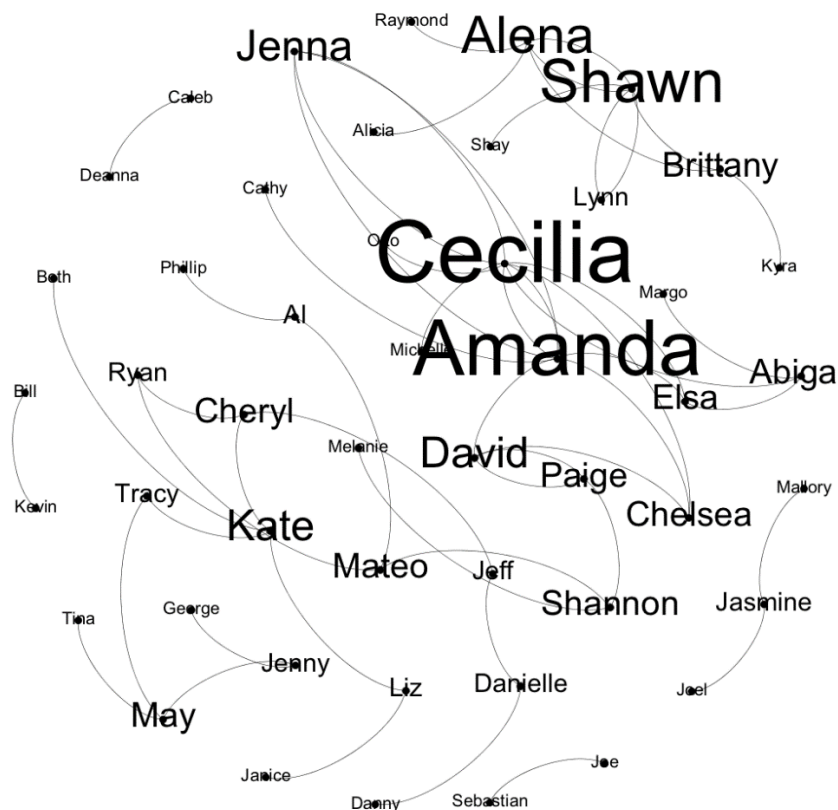
Characteristic	The Jones	DTC	Disruption	Ride-hail
Location	NYC	NYC	NYC	NYC
Service Area/Industry	Food and Hospitality	Marketing and Communications	Technology – Professional Services	Technology – Transportation
Year Founded	2001	2003	2012	2012 (NYC)
Location Employees (National Employees)	100-200 (800)	100-200 (5,000-10,000)	14 (14)	130,000 (1 million, est.)
Organizational Structure	Formal hierarchy, roles, procedures; variable schedules	Formal hierarchy, roles, procedures; some physical dispersion	Decentralized power, physical dispersion	Decentralized power; physical dispersion; variable schedule
Growth Trajectory	Startup -> regional expansion -> national expansion	Startup -> national expansion -> global expansion	Startup	Startup -> national expansion -> global expansion

APPENDIX D

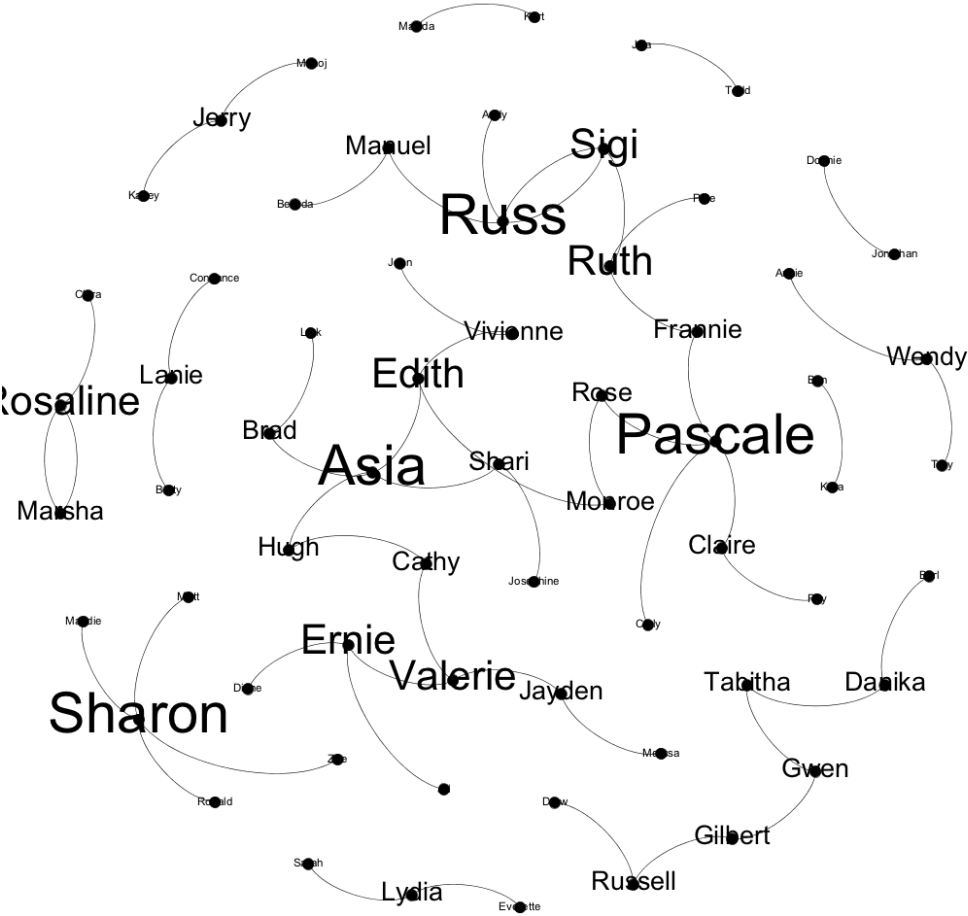
SOCIAL NETWORK MAPS

Social network maps are based on a survey question that asked participants to list with whom they feel closest at work. Maps were developed using Gephi.

1. The Jones



2. DTC



3. Disruption

