Aspirational Economies of Self and City:  
The Values and Governance of Independent Crafters in 
Columbus, Ohio

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

Scholars, politicans, and planners posit entrepreneurship and cultural industries as central to economic growth. My examination of crafters’ mentalities, practices, and material conditions for starting and maintaining their businesses shows that such faith in entrepreneurship requires critique. When entrepreneurs try to start new businesses they not only produce new monetary value in a calculated quest for profits, but also consume goods and services within the urban economy and beyond in an effort to earn multiple types of fulfillment (e.g. personal satisfaction, autonomy). Crafters’ consumption yields income for others, signifying their importance in the circulation of capital, even if they reap little to no monetary rewards themselves. Thus, the majority of aspiring craft entrepreneurs experience entrepreneurship as a consumer industry that is booming on their backs rather than a new paradigm for economic growth and sustainable livelihoods. They consume more monetary value through their purchases than they earn from their sales, thereby resulting in a credit debt. Aspirants see through their neoliberal subjectivities these failures to earn a livelihood as personal faults, which can be corrected by self-disciplining for stricter adherence to discourses built on market logics.

Craft economies serve as one example of what I call ‘aspirational economies,’ systems of production and consumption of resources that embed multiple notions of value, and are practiced by people who focus more on experience and hope for future
successes than on immediate material gains. I mean for this concept to trouble the static categories associated with professionalized occupations and consider the lengthy and uncertain trajectories people negotiate in order to establish and sustain livelihoods. Researchers tend to focus on professional artists and formal arts events when studying arts economies, but examining only professionals obscures the informal arts economy and an often larger subculture of aspiring artists and practices of arts production in everyday life.

I use qualitative methodology to analyze crafters’ practices, values, use of space, governance, and subjectivity in Columbus, Ohio. I have identified key features of crafters’ mentalities from multiple discourses and practices (online and brick-and-mortar retailers’ selling policies, ‘the market’ as craft consumers individually and in the aggregate, and crafters themselves). Although many crafters understand their work as an alternative practice of capitalism that embraces other types of value (e.g. pleasure) crafters still require monetary value (either from craftwork or self-subsidies) to be sustainable. I critique the online craft marketplace Etsy.com. I reconceptualize aspirants and professionals relationally and dynamically. Crafters’ status is constantly in flux across identities as entrepreneurs and artists and caregivers. These identities help form crafters’ everyday decision making processes, experiences, and uses of space, and intersect with other identities and responsibilities (e.g. care of children and paid work).

The arts labor market exemplifies neoliberal and post-industrial employment trends regarding tendencies of risk, flexible specialization, project work, low or no-pay, and self-employment. Although I use craft economies as a lens through which to understand aspirational phenomena, arts economies and aspirational economies are not
interchangeable, but such aspirations may drive behaviors across numerous types of activities beyond the arts.
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I feel overall it is more worthwhile for me to be making less money but doing what I love than making more money and not doing what I love.

- Yao Cheng, full-time business as an artist

My labor is a gift. I pretty much consider that if I get my materials covered I don’t get much for labor. And yet you think about, if anybody ever argues with me on the price, well, that’s too high, I say well would you work for a penny an hour, because that’s about what I’m getting? [laughs] Pennies on the hour.

- Mary Proven, part-time aspiring craft business, full-time accountant nearing retirement

The struggle is the constant hustle and the constant sacrifice for it. And that’s harder with a kid too. I mean it’s hard but at the same time I’m like what else would I be doing? I’d be having a full-time job, paying day care costs. We wouldn’t end up that much different at the end of the day so I should just be happy with what we have. And the fact that you know, we can do this and it’s gonna work for as long as it’s gonna work. So yeah, the down is just the struggle, the constant hustle, that’s down, but there’s so many more ups than downs.

- Olivia Bratich, fulltime business as owner of Wholly Craft handmade goods store, caregiver of her child

If a client wants me to make a quilt that I’ve made a bunch and I’m bored of I will just quote them super-high. I’m like I’ll do that for $600. And sometimes they pay it and I’d be dumb not to but I’m like and now I’m gonna spoil this business. I’m just a terrible business woman. [laughs] I just wanna sew.

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group member, part-time business as a quilter, other waged work

Introduction

When crafters talk about their experiences of entrepreneurship in the quotes above we can see how their practices juxtapose sparse monetary values and high personal values and subvert traditional business logics emphasizing monetary profits. The popular
press, government discourses, and anti-poverty programs increasingly encourage people, particularly women, to become entrepreneurs despite high rates of failure and often low monetary returns. In 2012 about 9 percent of adults in the U.S. were in the process of starting a new businesses and more than 12 percent of the population had intentions of starting a business, nearly double the percentages from 2009 (Kelley et al. 2012).

Aspiring entrepreneurs labor intensely and consume many business products and services to pursue their dreams of earning a sustainable living from their work. Thus, the consumption of arts entrepreneurship is a big and growing business. Although these efforts rarely produce significant income streams for aspirants, consuming supplies, marketing, service fees, and providing free or discounted content provides monetary values for industries that capitalize on these aspirations and regional economies. For example, aspiring musicians often perform at local festivals for no pay to receive publicity and may pay more fees to web distributors such as iTunes to sell their songs than they will ever receive in sales. Most aspiring entrepreneurs’ work is informal. Their income is not reported to government authorities, so we have little documentation of these experiences and there is no oversight regarding worker welfare. These trends can be seen across various industries with increasingly precarious and flexible labor, but nowhere is it more entrenched than in the arts industries where personal pleasure and the pursuit of profit have long intermingled. I argue that understanding the practices of amateurs aspiring to professional status should be an increasingly important factor for analyzing work, livelihoods, and consumption in the culture industries and the changing nature of neoliberal work practices more generally.
The culture industries are a large part of world economies, worth $2 trillion per year and growing (Aageson, Loy, and Snyder 2010). Academics and regional planners have regarded work in arts and entertainment as the future of employment and economic growth in many postindustrial regions (Zukin 1997; Howkins 2001; Florida 2002; Chang and Lee 2003; Scott 2004a, 2004b; Markusen 2006b; Florida, Mellander, and Stolarick 2008; Currid 2009; Evans 2009; Sacco and Tavano Blessi 2009; Jakob 2010; Stern and Seifert 2010; Strom 2010). Thirty-two million Americans consider themselves artists and about 10 million of them receive compensation for their work (Madden 2004). Arts activities have also been cited as a ‘feasible development option’ in developing countries (UNCTAD and UNDP Special Unit for South-South Cooperation 2010).

Researchers tend to focus on professional artists and formal arts events when studying arts economies, but examining only professionals obscures the informal arts economy and an often larger subculture of aspiring artists and practices of arts production in everyday life. Analysis of cultural industries has tended to privilege economic logics that leverage artists as a catalyst for economic development (Scott 1996; Scott 1999a; Florida 2002; Scott 2004b; Markusen 2006b; Currid 2007b; Phillips 2010). Thus many researchers have made professional/amateur and formal/informal distinctions because the contributions of amateurs and informal arts economies were deemed less important or useful by researchers in terms of economic contribution and due to difficulties in data collection (Markusen and Schrock 2006). Multiple types of informality pervade craft economies, such as largely self-employed people attempting to make a living outside of the regulated economy (Snyder 2003) and organically, not city-planned, craft spaces (Chapple, Jackson, and Martin 2010). However, craft is a historically informal economy.
that is formalizing in terms of government reporting of income. With the growing popularity of peer-to-peer online selling and an increasing reliance on mobile credit card transactions at craft fairs (via mobile credit card payment services such as Square on smart phones) the U.S. Internal Revenue Service now requires reporting of payment card and third party payment transactions. People who sell more than a certain threshold (200 sales or $20,000 gross via a particular service such as Paypal) have that gross income reported and receive a 1099-K form. Other types of value created through informal arts practices and the nexus between amateurs and professionals is under-explored in the literature, although a few studies have looked beyond art professionals, such as Wali, Severson, and Longoni's (2002) study of the social and community impacts of informal arts in Chicago and Alvarez's (2005) study of informal participatory art groups in California's Silicon Valley.

**Problem statement and research questions**

Scholars, the media, politicians, and planners posit entrepreneurship as central to economic growth, but my examination of crafters’ mentalities, practices, and material conditions for starting and maintaining their businesses shows that such faith in entrepreneurship requires critique. When entrepreneurs try to start new businesses they not only produce new monetary value in a calculated quest for profits (hopefully), but also consume goods and services in an effort to earn multiple types of fulfillment (e.g. personal satisfaction, autonomy). Few people realize monetary success through the process of entrepreneurship, but many people take it up. Aspiring entrepreneurs shift resources from nascent entrepreneurs to multiple organizations that sell paths to
sustainable self-employment that often lead to precarious and underpaid work. Crafters’ consumption yields income for others, signifying their importance in the circulation of capital, even if they reap little to no monetary rewards themselves. Thus, the majority of aspirants experience entrepreneurship as a consumer industry that is booming on their backs rather than a new paradigm for economic growth and sustainable livelihoods. They consume more monetary value through their purchases than they earn from their sales, thereby resulting in a credit debt. Aspirants see through their neoliberal subjectivities these failures to earn a livelihood as personal faults, which can be corrected by self-disciplining for stricter adherence to a plethora of discourses built on market logics.

This dissertation examines aspiring entrepreneurship through the experiences of independent crafters in the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area (including the city, suburbs, and surrounding region) (see Figure 1.1 map below). But rather than being bounded by the context of the city as a uniform container for relations, the context of my research is the problem itself: whether or not indie craft practices are a sustainable part of diversified livelihood strategies for aspiring artists and community development within smaller cities. My starting point is practices within the city of Columbus, but I employ a process-based approach that gives attention to the diverse realities and relations of multiple agents that expand beyond the local context (e.g. crafters from outlying towns selling at craft fairs in Columbus or crafters from Columbus selling their goods online to people throughout the world) (Massey with the collective 1999; Amin 2004; Fraser and Weninger 2009).
I identify crafters for the purposes of this study as people using hand-making processes, such as needlework, woodwork, pottery, and jewelry making, to create objects for sale or exhibit with utility and aesthetic properties. Specifically, I examine art makers who produce commodities sold directly to consumers by focusing on indie crafters. ‘Indie’ refers to both an independent means of production, not affiliated with a major corporation, and an attitude supposedly embodied in the production and consumption of
items that values creativity and personal connections between makers and consumers (Frith 1996; Shultz 2011). Some artists have taken up indie as a critique of capitalist mass production and consumption, built from do-it-yourself (DIY) ethics of punk and feminist scenes in the 1980s (Bratich and Brush 2011). I recruited and selected research participants for this dissertation project on the basis of their use of processes and practices of hand-making and attempting to sell these objects as commodities within established craft networks, rather than on specific categories of artwork. Starting with processes connects the research to crafters’ everyday practices that might span multiple categories of work.

Craft was a $29 billion industry in the United States in 2010 according to a Craft Organization Development Association report (2011). 50 million people make artisan crafts with 32 percent of makers selling their items online. Five million people earn part of their income and 30,000 to 50,000 earn all of their income from artisan crafts amounting to $6 to $10 billion in incomes and $3 to $6 billion in craft-related spending (e.g. supplies and services). My overarching research question is: How do aspiring entrepreneurial crafters’ practices in this social and economic context impact individual and regional economies? Embedded within this overarching question are numerous questions: How is entrepreneurial indie crafting practiced and sustained for aspirants in Columbus? How are aspiring entrepreneurial indie crafters' rationalities governed? What values are generated through aspirant practices and to whom and where do these values accumulate?

Entrepreneurial crafting is largely practiced and sustained for aspirants in Columbus as an activity that provides a few with income to supplement household
livelihoods and requires most to self-subsidize from waged work or government benefits. However, income generation is not the main reason for people to take up this work. Most crafters have a compulsion to ‘make,’ which produces material objects that they try to disseminate by selling. Many crafters also derive great satisfaction from the making process itself and the autonomy of controlling their times and spaces of work. The experience of trying to start and maintain a craft business is often much more challenging than aspirants expect in terms of the time, money, and skills that are required, and intersects with other life responsibilities such as childcare and waged-work. By their work, crafters contribute amenity values to regional economies, purchase business services from local and distant retailers, bring in small export-oriented income streams, and build community through their events and organizations. Their spatial practices are more oriented towards work at home, temporary events (such as craft fairs), and online selling than the typical geographies of arts infrastructures (e.g. studio spaces, flagship cultural centers, and gallery districts).

**Conceptual Framework**

I employ a post-structural understanding using Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' as an analytical framework (Dean 2010; Ettinger 2011) to identify and explain practices (such as work routines, performances, values, and use of space), how these connect to specific mentalities (such as individualization, marketization) that crystallize as objects (such as crafts, money, spatial configurations) and institutions (such as craft organizations, online crafting stores like Etsy.com, and government agencies), and I give attention to the relationships produced in society (such as production /
consumption relationships and flows of value). Indie artists create themselves through a web of regulation: everyday rules, norms, and understandings of space, constituted by discourses and practices among artists, consumers, corporate actors, and government representatives. My research examines understandings of craft entrepreneurship, everyday practices, governance, and possibilities for resistance to detrimental practices.

Governance can be understood as the ways that individual subjects produce and reproduce social norms (Rose 1996). I have identified key features of crafters’ mentalities from multiple discourses and practices (online and brick-and-mortar retailers’ selling policies, “the market” as craft consumers individually and in the aggregate, and crafters themselves). Crafters understand that to make a living from their work is difficult, but popular press and blog discourses suggest unrealistic expectations by highlighting seemingly successful sellers. Crafters interpret a failed business as a personal failure – an individualized problem that can be fixed by governing themselves better by conforming to market logics. Although many crafters understand their work as an alternative practice of capitalism that embraces other types of value (e.g. connections to people, authenticity, artistic practice) (Leyshon, Lee, and Williams 2003), crafters still require monetary value to be sustainable (either from the craftwork or self-subsidies).

I analyze the practices of aspirants through my concept of 'aspirational economies.' Aspirational economies are systems of production and consumption of resources that embed multiple notions of value and are practiced by people who focus *more on experience and hope for future successes than on immediate material gains*. I mean for this concept to trouble the static categories associated with professionalized occupations and consider the lengthy and uncertain trajectories people negotiate in order
to establish and sustain livelihoods. Such aspirations may drive behaviors across numerous types of activities, but art related activities offer an outstanding example due to the often noted blurring of leisure and work (Leadbeater and Miller 2004; Hagstrom Miller 2008; Dawkins 2010). For example, crafters often create work for leisure and then try to sell it. The blurring of leisure and work has been criticized as the colonization of leisure time by economic rationalities (Banks 2009) and as an encroachment of work into everyday life, which has been particularly apparent in the culture industries and has become the norm across more industries (McRobbie 2002c; Ellmeier 2003; Gill and Pratt 2008).

Departing from the binary of aspiring and professional artists, I reconceptualize aspirants and professionals relationally and dynamically. Crafters’ status is constantly in flux across identities as entrepreneurs and artists and caregivers. For example, an entrepreneurial crafter may create work at a professional level of artistry, but receive insufficient sales to consider themselves a professional entrepreneur. These identities help to form crafters’ everyday decision making processes and experiences and intersect with other identities and responsibilities.

Arriving at this project

The nature of the knowledges I generate through this case study are partial, messy, and situated through the filter of my own positionality. I draw on Crossa's (2012) notion of relational positionality to consider how my understandings of myself and my relationships to others inform my research strategies and outcomes. I came to the topic of indie crafters through a lifetime of personal and academic experiences and developed my
research questions based on problems I encountered in my own life: How do we make a living doing something that we enjoy? How are we governed and how can we not be governed so much? How do we balance responsibilities for work and care of others (such as ourselves and our children)?

I grew up in a white, lower middle class family in the rural midwest that valued the arts and that sense of value is instilled in me. My father did artistic woodworking. His work filled my childhood home and people would often tell him that he should try to sell it. My Dad understood himself as an artist, not a salesman, so sold only a few pieces. However, my Mom’s full-time work sustained our household, so my Dad did not have to make a living. When I was about 16 years old I sent away for a kit to earn money by making crafts at home. I quickly realized making beaded hairpieces was not as lucrative as promised, it was no fun, and I was not good at it. However, I realized that I had paid for the kit in the hope it would be a way to work on my terms, so for a short time I tried to create and sell guides to working from home. This was the 1990s, when punk, indie, and DIY cultures laid the foundation for my own values and what would become the indie craft movement. Although these cultures value relations of equality and access they are largely white in terms of race (Fonarow 2006; Frith 1996). I have been an aspiring musician since that time and put mostly unrequited time, money, and energy into numerous projects (e.g. donated plasma for money to release records, run-up credit card debts paying for gas to get to shows). I had also spent the last 15 years in often low-paying precarious work – project based IT support, then part-time flexible factory and customer service work.
When I began graduate school and read scholars like Florida (2002) who promoted artists as the engine of economic development I was critical, though I could see the benefits to the community. I had seen first hand how individual artists struggle to get by and subsidize their artistic efforts through other work. My husband and I also started a business selling vintage items through the e-commerce site eBay, and I saw the tensions between autonomy, governance, and precarity as we felt the freedom to work on our terms, the insecurity as we struggled to make money, and the uncertainty as the rules of the marketplace changed as we went along. The experience seemed to fit within the theoretical framework of Foucault's (2008) notion of governmentality insofar as eBay uses various tactics to incentivize behaviors so we would govern ourselves. The Etsy marketplace for crafts was growing rapidly and it seemed to be an excellent context for studying the tension between the autonomy of amateurs aspiring to make money doing arts work and corporate governance. Etsy was full of female small business owners, and feminist geographers such as Hanson (2009) emphasized how entrepreneurship is a gendered geographic process. During the time I was formulating and conducting this research project, I gave birth to my first and second child. Negotiating my desire and responsibilities to be their caregiver with my work as a graduate student and teaching assistant was a constant struggle and influenced the questions I asked the research participants. I came to this dissertation project through these experiences, aware of my struggles as an artist and critical of chasing dreams and the people selling them.

I thought that a lot of these indie crafters were like me (white, female, lower middle class, educated, 30-somethings) and many of them were. Other researchers also have noted the gender and racial homogeneity of the indie craft scene (Dawkins 2010;
We could speak a shared language referencing the same cultural codes (e.g. Riot Grrl punk rock group Bikini Kill and television comedy sketch show *Portlandia*). I developed my plan for fieldwork anticipating it would be easy to gain access to the craft fairs and shops where I connected with research participants and many of them were willing to talk with me. I looked like most of the shoppers and after the crafters’ initial disappointment that I was not talking to them because I was going to buy something, many were willing to help me with the project. They seemed to want to share their stories, to have someone listen and validate that what they do is important. We often talked far beyond our allotted interview times. However, many of them spoke through the lens of the sales person – not that they were trying to sell me something, but that they were in the habit of presenting the business and their experiences in an entirely positive light. My methodology led to a sample who largely had gotten through cultural gatekeepers to access these craft selling spaces, missing the aspirants who had been unable to get access. Although I attempted to recruit aspirants through postings on craigslist.org and posters in community spaces there was little response.

There is a danger here in researching people we perceive to be like ourselves. I might make assumptions that they are like me when they are not. My choice to study the mostly white indie craft community unintentionally builds on the segregation of the craft market to, implicitly obscuring the exclusions wrought by race and gender. The audience for this research is often just as homogenous (e.g. the sessions on craft at the American Association of Geographers meetings are largely white women). I show why craftwork matters, not only for those who practice it, but their communities, and the wider economy.
Research design

To answer the research questions I have outlined above, I employ a case study of how indie-craft making impacts livelihood strategies and communities by examining practices, values, mentalities, relations, and material conditions and spaces. Columbus is a useful context for such a study as a second-tier or mid-sized city, because such urban spaces have been found to be conducive to independent arts and craft production (Markusen and King 2003) and have higher than average concentrations of Etsy accounts because crafters use online distribution to overcome geographic constraints (Shultz 2011).

Few researchers have examined critically craft microenterprises and most focus on crafters’ processes and their minimal and/or supplementary economic impacts (Oberhauser 1995; Bachrach and Main 1998). Recent scholarship has begun to examine the practices, spaces, and values of crafters selling on Etsy (Abrahams and Roberts 2008; Bratich 2010; Shultz 2011, 2013; Jakob 2012; Luckman 2013; Solomon 2013). I presentknowledges of the everyday experiences, livelihood trajectories, opportunities and constraints, conceptions of value, spaces, and governance of aspiring entrepreneurial indie crafters. My study expands the research on crafting by generating knowledge of how these practices function within a particular context and what values are generated; offering insights into understanding how amateurs aspire to professional status more generally; examining how independent crafters are governed as neoliberal subjects; and
considering tensions and exclusions within the crafting community. I will elaborate further on the positioning of my research in Chapter 2.

I use the strategy of crystallization as introduced by Richardson and St. Pierre (2000) as a methodological framework to incorporate multiple forms of data, analysis, and representation to form a partial account of a phenomenon. The data that I collected for my case study of entrepreneurial indie crafters includes interviews, focus groups, surveys, participant observation, direct observation, documents, and archives. These multiple techniques of data gathering offer a rich base of data for interpretation and analysis. I have received Ohio State University Institutional Review Board approval for this project (Protocol #2010E0330). My data comes from qualitative online surveys of 43 crafters, in-depth interviews lasting 45 minutes to an hour with 25 crafters, a one-hour focus group session with 8 participants, and interviews and participant observation at numerous craft fairs and events in the Columbus area.

I collected data in numerous ways relative to the analytic categories I used. To understand the values related to crafting I asked crafters through interviews, surveys, and focus groups about monetary incomes and outputs associated with their work and about other benefits and burdens generated by their efforts. I also gleaned information from Etsy regarding the monetary and non-monetary values generated through their marketplace. I contacted Etsy to request more in-depth information and comments, but they declined to offer further information or to speak with me. I used numerous reports (such as *Redefining Entrepreneurship: Etsy Sellers’ Economic Impact*) and blog posts authored by Etsy employees as well as queries of the marketplace regarding various topics and made estimates of values flowing through the marketplace. To understand
governance I asked crafters in interviews and focus groups about the formal and informal rules of craft entrepreneurship and examined the application criteria and rules for various fairs and selling spaces. Etsy has extensive rules and regulations articulated through their seller guides, terms and conditions, do’s and don’ts, help, and message boards. These rules changed over the course of the research project (2011 to 2014). To understand the spaces of craftwork I attended craft events (such as fairs) and selling spaces (such as craft malls and gift shops), solicited photos from crafters of their workspaces, interviewed crafters in their workspaces, and drew location-based information from the internet (such as listings for craft events and sellers representations of their work spaces). To try to gather data on the experiences of amateurs and professionals, I posted calls for research participation on Craigslists, in craft establishments (e.g. malls and resale shops), and at local community centers (e.g. grocery stores, libraries). I also connected with craft affinity groups such as Etsy Team Columbus. However, the most productive strategy for gaining research participants was attending craft fairs and talking to individuals face-to-face about participating in the project and following up with e-mails and phone calls. The research participants in this project are somewhat more established, in that they had gained access to these selling spaces, but I found they were still very much aspiring.

I identify people quoted throughout this dissertation in various ways. I asked the crafters I interviewed if I could quote them and use their names or if they preferred to remain anonymous. Many craft entrepreneurs are semi-public figures, in that they present a persona of themselves when selling at fairs and online through their shops and blogs. I identify quotes when possible to connect the quotes describing crafters’ experiences to the overall personas they present and their embeddedness within the community. Crafters
who completed an online survey and participated in a focus group were anonymous. When crafters have given me information that could be harmful to their status in the community, for example, talking about tensions and exclusions, I have omitted their names. Therefore, attribution styles for research participants’ quotes vary throughout the dissertation, for example:

- Name, commitment and craft, other pertinent roles
- anonymous, commitment and craft, other pertinent roles
- anonymous crafter

The research participants are largely white women in their 30s and 40s, which reflects of the majority of sellers I saw at the indie-craft events I attended and the networks to which I gained access. Women have historically dominated participation in handicrafts and this demographic also makes up the majority of sellers on Etsy. Some of the crafters questioned a lack of people of color and tried to explain it through essentialist logics of aesthetic difference (e.g. different styles for different races). Dawkins (2010) reported similar rationales from crafters in her analysis of white hegemony and lack of diversity at indie-craft fairs in Detroit. The demographic homogeneity of the indie-craft scene will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Numerous organizations provided funding that was instrumental to my completion of this research project. I received support from the Ohio State University Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and the Coca-Cola Critical Difference for Women Research Grants on Women, Gender and Gender Equity. I also received research funding from the Ohio State University Department of Geography through the Rayner Fieldwork Scholarship and writing support through the Thomas Graduate Student Fellowship.
Structure of the dissertation

In Chapter 2: Situating aspirational economies of independent crafters I introduce the notion of aspirational economies as a new way of understanding craftwork that considers the hidden contributions of aspirants. I contextualize this approach within scholarship on creative and cultural economies, theories of livelihoods and entrepreneurship, and the impacts of arts work on regions, economies, and practitioners.

In Chapter 3: Crafting entrepreneurs – practices and governance of independent crafters I use Foucault’s (2008) notion of governmentality as an analytic framework to understand the governance of independent craft sellers. I identify crafters’ regimes of practices and related mentalities and I explain their connection with reference to discourses and techniques of power. I analyze the discourse of online retailers’ selling policies, marketplaces, procedures, and representations of craft working and selling by the Etsy corporation, an online retail distributor of craftwork. I also examine the discourses and techniques of power used to manage crafters by brick-&-mortar craft selling spaces (e.g. retail shops and fairs), “the market” as craft consumers individually and in the aggregate, and crafters themselves. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the relationships and conflicts among various mentalities.

In Chapter 4: Crafting subjectivities I examine how subjectivities, or how people understand themselves, conform to, reinforce, and resist the often conflicting mentalities I outlined in the previous chapter. I employ a Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity to analyze the formation and characteristics of subjectivities related to entrepreneurial crafting by examining the values and feelings related to craftwork and crafter/artist/maker, entrepreneur, and caregiver as unique but interrelated subjectivities. I give particular attention to how these subjectivities are imbued with
neoliberal tendencies. I then examine specific instances of resistances and counter-conducts that critique and attempt to change some of the mentalities of crafters. In Chapter 5: Conclusions – Aspiring to remake capitalism I assess the future of the independent crafter movement in terms of sustainability for most practitioners and the growth potential for entrepreneurship. I conclude by discussing how the notion of aspirational economies is applicable to a wide range of activities within post-industrial economies and positioning my findings in geographic scholarship.
Chapter 2:
Situating aspirational economies of independent crafters

Entrepreneurial indie crafters’ efforts have received little scholarly attention and are poorly understood although they impact individual livelihoods, boost regional economies, yield corporate earnings, and reinforce neoliberalizing social tendencies of individualization and competition. In this chapter I situate the aspirational economies of independent crafters in literatures on creative / cultural economies, entrepreneurship, and neoliberal tendencies. I elaborate on the notion of aspirational economies as a way to examine the hidden contributions of amateurs aspiring to make a living through their craftwork. I offer a critical review of scholarship regarding arts workers in general and crafters in particular to consider the multiple types of value created through their practices, the various spaces used for their practices, and the impacts on regional economies and crafters’ livelihoods. I situate the contributions of aspirants by examining how artists and amateurs have been defined and valued. I then examine the challenges of trying to include aspirants in research. I pay particular attention to how crafters’ practices are structured by and help reinforce general tendencies towards entrepreneurship and marketization within neoliberal governance and how entrepreneurship has been traditionally understood in relation to economic development and livelihoods.
Growth of indie art and craftwork

Artistic work has grown in the United States according to official statistics (Menger 1999) and many people are attempting to earn monetary value through their artistic efforts (Bruder 2009) including the one million shops sellers have opened on the Etsy online handmade and vintage marketplace. In this study I focus on people’s practices of arts creation through “acts of art making, creative activity, and content creation,” in which 45 percent of U.S. adults reported participating according to a 2008 National Endowment for the Arts survey (Novak-Leonard and Brown 2011). I am particularly interested in the motivations of, and the values created by, aspiring artists, people who engage in the arts but do not earn significant income from their efforts, hold other jobs to support themselves, and whose arts work often remains informal (Gibson 2003; Currid 2007a; Williams 2010). By examining aspiring artists, I also address the increased accessibility of art production (Leyshon 2001, 2003, 2009; Hoyler and Mager 2005; Leyshon et al. 2005; Katz and Barsdate 2009; Novak-Leonard and Brown 2011) in that more people have access to the means of production and distribution of some forms of art through information and communication technologies (ICT), which shifts the understanding of arts practices from exclusively socio-cultural to economically contributing to local economies. The internet enables more people to try to make money from their art by selling their work online. For example, online peer-to-peer marketplaces such as Etsy increase independent crafters’ access to global distribution networks, potentially connecting micro-entrepreneurs to consumers around the world. As aspiring artists pursue arts production as a livelihood, they also consume arts entrepreneurship.
Little attention is paid to entrepreneurship as a consumptive act insofar as many types of business services such as marketing often are purchased. For example, Jakob’s (2012) work on crafting revealed the most growth among suppliers and services sold to crafters, not crafters selling their goods to consumers.

Although most independent crafters’ work generates relatively small monetary values for themselves, arts practices enhance livelihoods and create other circuits of value within their cities and to consumers and businesses in distant areas (Gibson 2003; Lee 2006; Markusen 2006b; Currid 2007b; Fraser and Ettlinger 2008; Dawkins 2010;). I trace the circulation of value (Lee 2006) (broadly understood to include monetary value, cultural capital, and emotional value) materially and virtually from indie arts production through multiple scales including: the microscale of personal experience, the local scale of urban millieu and rural hinterlands, and the global scale through worldwide arts industries. These values originate from and accrue to numerous actors, firms, and organizations (e.g. money for listing fees to companies, cultural capital to artists) who are motivated by multiple and sometimes conflicting rationales. Markusen and Schrock (2006) have argued regional circulation of value from arts production provides import-substitution and brings income from exports, but their evidence was based on full-time arts workers who likely make up a minority of arts practitioners and did not include craftspeople.

**Framework for research on aspirational economies**

Researchers know little about aspirants’ specific experiences to date because of difficulties of data collection and the privileging of economic knowledges. Reported
economic data is a major source of measurement for research, so the lack of data due to relatively small incomes and the informality of most aspirants’ business pursuits challenges researchers to find other means of data gathering. The situation is similar to difficulties encountered in studying the informal economy in general (Williams 2006) and may also call for additional ethnographic studies (Williams 2010) to understand the everyday practices of aspirants. For example, examining the everyday practices of aspiring crafters can provide an estimate of how much labor and money they spend on their fledgling businesses when no official statistics capture this information. Some empirical studies of informal economic practices within particular contexts illustrate the messiness of people’s rationales in that actors’ decisions are based on multiple factors and circumstances, such as finding personal pleasure in the work they do (McRobbie 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Power and Hallencreutz 2002; Saldanha 2002; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Kong 2011). Informal arts participation has been deemed a missing or invisible sector and is largely ignored in cultural economies discourses and marginalized by much work in arts policy (Peters and Cherbo 1998), although some case studies have begun to explore aspects of informal arts work (Wali, Severson, and Longoni 2002; Alvarez 2005). Aspirants’ efforts need to be considered to give a more in-depth understand of making livelihoods and lives.

I analyze the practices of aspirants by developing the concept of aspirational economies as systems of production and consumption of resources that include multiple notions of value and are practiced by people who focus more on experience and hope for future successes than on immediate material gains. Aspirational economies blur the boundaries between professional occupations and amateur avocations and consider the
ongoing processes of becoming (or not), in that aspirants’ eventual success is not
inevitable and often fleeting if achieved at all. For example, one crafter in this project had
achieved a professional level of income generation – about $30,000 per year – only to
lose her main market the next year due to a change in corporate policy that reduced her
yearly income to about $5,000. The hope that drives aspirational economies can bind
aspirants to precarious work in many industries, but art-related industries in particular are
thought to be at the vanguard of such tendencies (Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005;
Banks 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Bain and McLean
2012; Luckman 2012; Waitt and Gibson 2013). For example, a crafter may put in hours
of unpaid labor trying to sell her wares at a community festival motivated by the short-
term gain of exposure and hope for future success.

I investigate how ‘aspirational economies’ are constituted and the impacts on
practitioners, their communities, and the industries that capitalize on them. The key
strategy to inquire into aspirational economies is examining individuals’ everyday
practices of arts production, because their work tends to be rendered invisible through
formal statistical measures. For example, considering the practices of a crafter who
makes a small income from creating and posting items for sale on Etsy, but does not
report her craft income on her taxes. Using an actor-based analysis to examine economic
geographies gives a bottom-up sense of how economies are enacted (Ettlinger 2010).
Analyzing cultural work at the scale of industries, urban areas, or even neighborhoods
can be problematic because such approaches miss the intricacies of individual actions and
possibilities, whereas an actor-based, relational analysis at the scale of the everyday is
better suited to trace the complex trajectories of material and discursive value created by
individual actors and how these connect with regional dynamics (Ettlinger 2010). Such strategies also meet Gibson’s (2012, 282) call for researchers to study economies through “ethnographic interrogation of how humans access, use, exchange, and value financial and material resources as moral and social beings.” An actor-based analysis is particularly salient for aspiring independent arts workers, whose everyday efforts have limited similarities with formally employed arts industry occupations and to whom values circulate in very different ways.

**Focusing on artists and missing the crafters and aspirants in the margins**

Growing interest in cultural work has yielded numerous approaches to understanding how artists’ work contributes to regional economies. Thirty-two million Americans consider themselves artists and about 10 million of them receive compensation for their work (Madden 2004). Cultural economies discourses have grown within the academy and regional planning where cultural production has been regarded as a possible future of employment and economic growth in many postindustrial regions (Chang and Lee 2003; Scott 2004b; Markusen 2006a, 2006b; Florida, Mellander, and Stolarick 2008; Currid 2009; Evans 2009; Sacco and Tavano Blessi 2009; Jakob 2010; Stern and Seifert 2010; Strom 2010). Researchers often struggle within these discourses to delimit just what makes up cultural economies and what terms are useful to describe these activities. Informal economies are often obscured and undervalued by how researchers have defined artists in ways that exclude crafters and aspirants.

Craft is a challenging word to attempt to define and scholars have approached it from a number of different angles. Multiple definitions of crafters rely on the nature of
the work product or the process of production. Craft artists are defined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as workers who “create or reproduce hand-made objects for sale and exhibition using a variety of techniques, such as welding, weaving, pottery, and needlecraft,” distinguishing between craft artists as creating “objects designed to be functional” and fine artists creating original works of art for aesthetic rather than functional value (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Whether something is designated as art or craft often carries a value judgment with crafts being seen as lacking in aesthetics and undervalued due to an assumed inferior social distinction of the makers (e.g. undervaluing women’s work such as needle craft) (Markowitz 1994; Adamson 2007; Luckman 2013). U.S. Census Bureau data on crafters categorizes them along with independent artists, writers, and performers, but only includes employment statistics for firms who file federal taxes and does not break down statistics on crafters as a separate category. These issues, along with the tendency for crafting to be a secondary occupation, mean such measures miss a lot of the small-scale economic activities undertaken informally by crafters. Many researchers choose to take up the BLS and Census definitions as they conform with major sources of information on artistic employment, but there are multiple critiques these measures missing many artists. Adamson (2007, 4) attempts to shift this mainstream definition of crafts and craftwork from particular types of objects and people to the processes used to create, as “an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action.” Craftwork often includes an individual’s control of the design and production process, rather than the divisions of labor associated with industrial production (McCullough 1996). I concur with Adamson (2007) and McCullough’s (1996) process-based approach and use it in identifying crafters in this dissertation project.
My research on people working in the creation and commodification of crafting can be understood as part of cultural economies from numerous perspectives. *Sectoral* approaches include specific types of production of symbolic content such as entertainment, communication, and self-image making (Lash and Urry 1994; Scott 2004b; Gibson and Kong 2005; Cherbo, Vogel, and Wyszomirski 2008; Higgs, Cunningham, and Bakhshi 2008), with the core arts industries being the traditionally defined creative arts: music, visual arts, crafts, performance arts, etc. (Throsby 2001). *Labor market organization* approaches are based on worker conditions of flexible specialization working on an informal or subcontracted basis for small firms within wider production networks (Gibson and Kong 2005). The *creative index* approach understands creativity as innovation and learning, important across all industries, and people doing this type of work as the creative class (Florida 2002; Gibson and Kong 2005; Higgs, Cunningham, and Bakhshi 2008). The *convergence* approach understands cultural economy as trade in intellectual property especially as content for corporate entertainment and communication companies (Howkins 2001; Gibson and Kong 2005).

Indie craft making fits within all these conceptualizations of the cultural economy in that symbolic content is produced, labor markets are largely constituted by self-employed informal workers; the work requires innovation in terms of creating new products as crafts; and crafts may be marketed on technological platforms such as Etsy.com with copyright protection for non-clothing items under intellectual property rights laws. Indie craft making often is grouped with arts work more generally. My concern is with how indie crafters’ practices of making and selling may be divergent from art norms. Although crafting falls within the arts industries sector in terms of making symbolic
content, the products of crafting have not yet been dematerialized and devalued in the same ways they have been in the music and film industries (e.g. free shared music and movie downloads). Market saturation due to the huge increase of producers selling in online global marketplaces such as Etsy has devalued many craft goods. Craft labor markets largely consist of individual sellers rather than crafters working for small firms. The ability to capitalize on intellectual property rights does apply to the majority of crafters work because clothing items are unprotected and the process of utilizing such protections is beyond the means of most independent crafters (e.g. legal fees).

Creative index approaches have received particular attention in development schemes as popularized through Florida’s (2002) notion of the “creative class,” which understands ‘creative’ people as the key resource through which places can grow and compete economically. The term creative economy also was taken up as part of neoliberal political agendas of competitive development in the United States and United Kingdom (Peck, 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2008; Miller 2009). For Florida (2002), a wide range of occupations from engineers, to artists, health care professionals, and managers make up the creative class. However, the fuzziness of this concept based on occupations and educational attainment as an indicator of creativity in practice is problematic because it homogenizes diverse actors with different work trajectories, incomes, and politics (Markusen 2006c). The correlation of artists with ‘development’ by city planners and policy makers does not establish directional causality. For example, artists can live in high-income locations because people may have more disposable income to purchase art. Despite this relatively under-tested relationship, artist-based revitalization strategies are popular for regional development because they require fairly small investments. The
presence of artists is thought to contribute regional economies by drawing creative workers through local cultural amenities (Florida 2002; Currid 2009), redeveloping and raising values of the built environment (Currid 2009; Evans 2009; Stern and Seifert 2010; Strom 2010;), branding places as cultural milieus (Drake 2003; Currid 2009); and creating arts jobs and revenues (Currid 2009). Arts in the creative class literature tend to be largely an aspect of consumption in regional development in that artists are part of this grouping, but they tend to make much lower incomes and work under more precarious conditions than other members of the creative class (Ellmeier 2003; Markusen 2006c), often leading to displacement from the gentrified neighborhoods they help create (Ley 2003; Lloyd 2004; Long 2010; Felton et al. 2010). Creativity can be understood as a process, rather than an object that one possesses (Pratt 2004). Analyzing an individuals' work process for creativity rather than saying certain groups of workers are or are not creative has the advantages of revealing hidden practices of innovation (Ettlinger 2010). Occupation-based creative index approaches might also miss artists who receive their primary income from apparently non-‘creative’ endeavors.

Although crafters fit within typical cultural industry and creative class categorizations, my focus on practices and independent work aligns with critiques of defining specific industries as cultural or creative. Mato (2009, 73) argues “all industries are cultural because they all produce products that besides having functional applications are also socio-symbolically significant.” For example, the fast food industry produces objects with symbolic content and cultural meaning. Other researchers understand culture more comprehensively as a system of norms and that shape people’s behaviors in including their intertwined economic and social relationships (Negus 2002; Gibson 2003;
Yúdice 2003; Ettlinger 2010). Analyzing cultural work at the scale of industries or urban areas can be problematic in that such approaches miss the intricacies of individual actions and possibilities, whereas an actor based, relational analysis at the scale of the everyday is better suited to tracing the complex trajectories of material and discursive value created by individual actors and how these connect with regional dynamics (Ettlinger 2010). Studying aspirational economies builds on Ettlinger's (2010) call for an alternative conceptualization of culture and creativity that uses an actor-based and relational epistemology. She critiques the concept of creativity being located in occupations or places, and instead casts it as actor-based and enacted through everyday practices in a wide range of activities, including activities not usually understood as creative. For example, although aspirants’ practices might be creative, they may be obscured by the practitioners’ formal occupation in an “uncreative” job such as manufacturing or their craftworking could help them problem solve in their manufacturing jobs. An actor-based analysis is particularly salient for aspiring independent arts workers, whose everyday efforts have few similarities with formally employed arts industry occupations and to whom values circulate in very different ways.

Researchers have undertaken various approaches to identifying who is an artist and who is a professional. Many studies of arts work have relied on government occupational statistics for specific categories deemed arts related, such as musicians and visual artists (Scott 1999b; Throsby 2001; Markusen 2006b; Higgs, Cunningham, and Bakhshi 2008). Cultural occupations approaches give attention to practices of workers and include many self-employed workers (Markusen et al. 2008). Cultural industries approaches consider anyone working within particular industries with high symbolic
values to be creative workers, even though the actual practices of their jobs might be quite uncreative (e.g. working in a factory duplicating compact disks may be defined as creative work because it is within the music industry) (Storper 1994; Scott 1999b; Markusen et al. 2008). These studies have been useful in helping to understand the dynamics and spatialities of culture industries and professional artists, but have obscured the growth of craftwork specifically and missed the growing contributions of amateur aspiring artists. Researchers often miss crafters because they are excluded from the government statistics on artists (i.e. crafters have their own category), grouped with other cultural occupations that might have quite different processes (i.e. grouping artists, musicians, and crafters together), or most commonly unperceivable through formal measures in that for many craft is a secondary occupation. Most studies make a distinction between amateurs and professionals and once the distinction is made, studies tend to disregard the non-professional. For example, Markusen and Schrock’s (2006) examination of the artistic dividend draws their sample from U.S. Census Bureau data on people who self-report making a majority of their income from artistic work, ignoring people for whom arts making is a secondary income source.

To understand the difference between amateur and professional artists Jeffri and Throsby (1994) and Throsby (2001, 258) formulated a set of multiple attributes as necessary conditions for professionalism: peer acceptance, educational qualification and/or experience, time commitment, and earning income. Leadbeater and Miller (2004) attempted to blur the distinction between amateur and professions through notions such as “Pro-Am”: amateurs who work at a professional standard with similar levels of commitment, but are unlikely to earn more than a small part of their incomes from these
activities. Analysis of cultural industries has tended to privilege economic logics that leverage artists as a catalyst for economic development, and thus many researchers have made the professional/amateur distinction because the contributions of amateurs were deemed less important or useful by researchers in terms of economic contribution as well as due to difficulties in data collection (Markusen and Schrock 2006). Other types of value created through arts practices and the nexus between amateurs and professionals is under-explored in the literature, although a few studies have looked beyond art professionals, such as the studies by Wali, Severson, and Longoni (2002) on the social and community impacts of informal arts in Chicago; Alvarez (2005) on informal participatory art groups in California’s Silicon Valley; and Lloyd (2002) on art and neighborhood revitalization in Chicago. I expand on this research by considering other types of value that are created through arts practices and the nexus between amateurs and professionals. My research focuses on people who fit the pro-am distinction and maps the circulation of values based on empirical data and the sustainability of such practices because the values created through their work impact peoples’ livelihoods and communities, especially when non-monetary value is considered. My study focuses on aspiring crafts people because the field has a strong tradition of informal self-employed practitioners whose activities merge leisure pursuits that many find self-fulfilling with commodification of items to earn money. Aspiring artists are working towards, but are not yet earning, the majority of their incomes from their arts work.

Women’s involvement in homework, such as craft making, serves as an effective economic strategy for coping with downturns in the formal economy (Oberhauser 1995; McRobbie 1999; Jakob 2012). However, Bachrach and Main (1998) note how
microenterprise is often problematic and at times detrimental to women’s livelihoods due to choosing unprofitable businesses (such as crafting). Information and communication technologies have created possibilities of connecting crafters with consumers in distant locations via online commerce sites such as Etsy.com. The aspiring arts industries often have numerous aspirants whose efforts at production and marketing may be creating value not for the artists, but for big businesses that capitalize on their hopes (Sargent 2009; Williams 2009; Jakob 2012).

Few researchers have critically examined online craft entrepreneurship – crafters utilizing the internet to sell their work. Abrahams and Roberts (2008) interrogate Etsy’s negotiation of commerce and community. Shultz (2011, 2013) considers the geography of Etsy accounts clustered in midsized cities due to a lack of intermediaries, forcing crafters themselves to take on roles as intermediaries. Jakob (2012) critiques the growth of the craft industry for support companies (such as Etsy) while crafters struggle to make a living. Luckman (2013) and Bratich (2010) examine how a renewed interest in craft is revaluing women’s domestic work. Solomon (2013) examines craftivist resistance to neoliberal consumerism in DIY culture.

**Understanding livelihoods and entrepreneurship**

Livelihoods approaches are particularly useful to building an actor-based and expansive understanding of how arts work creates value in post-industrial economies, although these approaches are largely taken up in the context of understanding extreme poverty in developing countries. A sustainable livelihood is a “means of gaining a living”
through one’s capabilities and assets (including both material and social resources) that can be maintained into the future (Chambers and Conway 1992, 7). This conceptualization of how people gain a living begins with people’s practices and includes multiple dimensions (economic, social, environmental, etc.), and ‘multiple’ means such as waged labor, informal self-employment, social assets, and government services (de Haan and Zoomers 2003). Decision-making is conceptualized as how resources are allocated, opportunities are taken, and returns are utilized through strategic and unintentional behavior mediated by structural constraints (de Haan and Zoomers 2005).

Although livelihoods approaches often are conceptualized in terms of poor people in developing countries, the approach is increasingly germane to people engaging in multiple forms of flexible work in post-industrial economies. For example, a third of all employment in Europe is through micro-businesses, which are best understood as embedded in households and enacted through people’s everyday practices and multiple motivations (Oughton and Wheelock 2003). In 2009, 15.3 million individuals were self-employed in the U.S., about 1 in 9 workers (Hipple 2010). I bring a livelihoods approach to understand indie artists’ practices and expand the use of livelihood theories to developed-country contexts. I trouble the distinction of post-colonial theories as applicable principally to actors in developing countries (Mufti and Shohat 1997). Livelihoods approaches are also apt in the case of workers such as independent crafters who have been marginalized by dominant understandings of the economy. Crafters engage in entrepreneurship to build their livelihoods by starting largely informal craft businesses.
Entrepreneurs generally are conceptualized as individuals willing to undertake risks to realize new value or profits (Williams 2006). Schumpeter (1934) understood capitalism as a discontinuous process of innovation in which entrepreneurs take risks with uncertainty, destroying the old and creating new systems of production through creative destruction. Theories of entrepreneurship drawing on neoclassical economics conceptualize this behavior as undertaken by rational, individual actors, with perfect knowledge seeing opportunities to maximize profit (Andersson and Andersson 2006; Phillips 2010), but knowledge is unevenly distributed and transferred (Storper and Venables 2004; Grabher and Ibert 2005; Watson 2008; Jones, Spigel, and Malecki 2010). Bruyat and Julien (2001) have called for the field of research in entrepreneurship to encompass the relationship between the actor and creation of new value as an ongoing process within a specific context. Rather than thinking of entrepreneurs as simply individuals, they are embedded in a network of production and social relations in specific geographic contexts (Scott 2006; Hanson 2009). Also, entrepreneurship can be understood as a process in which people may move through roles as aspiring and nascent entrepreneurs to become founders of fledgling businesses (Rotefoss and Kolvereid 2005).

An oversupply of artists relative to the amount of available paid work has been typical of artistic labor markets (Menger 1999; Gibson, 2003). Amateur artists have free entry to cultural production, but incur most of the production costs, and rarely realize profits due to a skewed “winner take all” market (Andersson and Andersson 2006). This understanding gives a limited notion of motivation and sustainability, since many artists’ activities are based on multiple motivations (Banks et al. 2000; Gibson 2003; Ettlinger 2004) that are considered irrational from a singularly economic vantage point (Caves
or may be taken up in ways that minimize risk (Crewe, Gregson, and Brooks 2003). A more expansive understanding of entrepreneurship considers the creation of something new, whereby economic entrepreneurship creates profit, and cultural entrepreneurship creates something appreciated in the area of culture understood as the arts (Howkins 2001; Phillips 2010). For Wyszomirski and Chang (2009,4) arts-based entrepreneurship is practiced “at the scale of the artisan developing creative and cultural ideas, products, and services.” Neoclassical approaches offer little insight into where production costs come from to maintain and sustain struggling artists and where and to whom the values generated accumulate. Also, the atomization of independent artists and consumers may obscure important social and political aspects of people’s behaviors (McRobbie 2002c).

Another important aspect of understanding entrepreneurship is how the emotions of entrepreneurs may impact their behaviors and decision making. Research related to entrepreneurial emotion has found conflicting emotions are a predictor of risk perception among entrepreneurs (Podoynitsyna, Van der Bij, and Song 2011); an interplay of opportunity evaluation and emotion contributes to pursuing entrepreneurship (Welpe et al. 2011); and entrepreneurship should be conceptualized as a “lived experience” rooted in emotion and affect (Morris, Kuratko, and Schindehutte 2011).

I argue that a blend of emotions and rationality inform individuals’ logics (Ettlinger 2004), which encourages the extension of entrepreneurial tendencies throughout society to people beyond those involved specifically in creating new enterprises. An intensification of individualization and competition exemplary of neoliberalism encourages people to become entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault 2008),
using their own human capital to become producers and sources of earnings and applying economic analysis to multiple spheres of life (Ellmeier 2003). The arts labor market often is discussed as a prominent site of neoliberal tendencies of self-employment, risk, and poor pay (Banks et al. 2000; Ellmeier 2003; Gibson and Kong 2005). Many artists work informally, in that they do not report their incomes to their governments or have the safeguards of worker welfare laws (Williams 2006).

Independent, informal or self-provisioned work has been explained in Marxist, neoclassical, and poststructural terms (Williams 2006, 2010). Marxist explanations focus on exclusion from the formal capitalist economy and state benefits and the processes by which some labor is rendered redundant or superfluous (Harvey 2005). Neoclassical explanations emphasize voluntary exit to flee excessive regulation. Poststructural explanations highlight constrained agency, driven by factors other than money such as identities and social and redistributive rationales. Some empirical studies of informal economic practices within particular contexts illustrate the messiness of people’s rationales in that actors’ decisions are based on multiple factors and circumstances, such as finding personal pleasure in the work they do (McRobbie 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Power and Hallencreutz 2002; Saldanha 2002; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Kong 2011). Williams (2010) has called for additional ethnographic studies to flesh out more hybrid understandings of informal economies.

The arts have been linked to entrepreneurship in numerous ways. Swedberg (2006, 260) explains cultural entrepreneurship as a bifurcated field, in which “economic entrepreneurship primarily aims at creating something new (and profitable) in the area of the economy, while cultural entrepreneurship aims at creating something new (and
appreciated) in the area of culture.” For artists, profitability and artistic innovation are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily aligned goals, but negotiating these aims is likely complex and variable. For Leyshon, Lee, and Williams (2003), cultural entrepreneurs’ businesses are built on the commercial application of creativity often through the production of self-authored and self-produced commodities. Ellmeier (2003) conceptualizes cultural workers as blurring the lines between entrepreneurs and waged workers due to changes in the organization of work in post-Fordist economies, notably the rise in precarious employment and discontinuous employment biographies. These workers often receive wages for project-based work over a short time and move among multiple jobs and entrepreneurial activities to build a livelihood. However, Neilson and Rossiter (2008) note that precarity is likely the norm and Fordist organization of labor was likely an exception and Morini (2007) understands women’s work as having long been precarious. This dissertation contributes to this literature by examining the everyday practices of indie crafters to show how precarity functions in a specific context.

Many researchers have sought to understand arts workers and their contributions to local communities through a more holistic concept of economics and through poststructural epistemologies (Negus 1998; McRobbie 2002c; Negus 2002; Gibson 2003; Yúdice 2003; Gibson and Kong 2005; Leyshon et al. 2005; Fraser and Ettlinger 2008; Brennan-Horley and Gibson 2009; Sargent 2009; Long 2010). Such scholarship tends to build a more comprehensive vision of the economic to include social and cultural phenomena (Gibson 2003), a more nuanced understanding derived from attention to people’s practices (Ettlinger 2010), and a more expansive understanding of value to include discursive values such as quality of life, identity, and social relations as well as
material values such as money (Lee 2006). These values can be understood through material cultural studies as an interpenetration of production and consumption through commodity cycles (Jackson 2000; Gregson and Crewe 2003; Pratt 2004; Ettlinger 2010).

The entrepreneurial literature on aspiring artists is strong regarding the identification of overarching tendencies of successful entrepreneurs, yet limited in examining differences in experience particularly for those who discontinue their entrepreneurial pursuits. Although aspirants may see an opportunity for unrealized profit from selling their work, it seems unlikely that profit is their primary motivation because the returns are often relatively small for the amount of work required. Most crafters approach attempting to earn income from their work in ways that avoid the tendencies toward risk often associated with entrepreneurs. One way they minimize risks is using marginalized spaces.

**Use of space by indie art makers**

My research explores how uses of space by indie art makers such as crafters differ from formal arts economies. Craft making tends to be an informal economic activity and informalizes the spaces of work and selling. Agglomeration and clustering effects are understood to be integral to the development of creative industries. The patterns of production associated with many arts industries include work that is informal, part-time, or flexible specializations (Storper 1994; Scott 2004b), which may rely on the spatial agglomeration of firms and workers to take quick advantage of new configurations and stay in contact (Scott 1999a; Grabher 2001; Storper and Venables 2004; Gibson and
Kong 2005; Currid 2007a). These effects are amplified in cities with larger populations (e.g. New York and Los Angeles) because scale economies offer a larger market for arts employment and more skilled workers (Kloosterman 2005; Florida, Mellander, and Stolarick 2010). Spatial proximity (Morgan 2004; Storper and Venables 2004) is thought to be particularly important for learning and socialization, but other aspects such as relational proximity, (immaterial) support networks, and the virtual connections have also been considered of growing importance (Lloyd 2004; Watson 2008; Jones, Spigel, and Malecki 2010). Much research has focused on arts professionals in the context of huge agglomeration economies that function as hubs of global media networks such as New York City and Los Angeles or cities with particularly developed arts scenes such as Nashville, Tennessee and Austin, Texas (Scott 1999b; While 2003; Lloyd 2006; Markusen and Schrock 2006; Currid 2007b; Rothfield et al. 2007; Florida and Jackson 2009; Currid and Williams 2010; Long 2010).

However, such spatial configurations are less important to workers who are self-employed and create commodities sold directly to consumers through online retailers. Research by Shultz (2011) finds that independent craft producers in the United States cluster in second-tier metropolitan areas, because they can use the internet to access a geographically distributed customer base. Yet burdens of living in large cities such as cost of housing and rehearsal spaces or competition may cause arts practitioners to locate in other types of settings (Hracs 2009). More research is beginning to consider peripheral spaces of arts production such as regional, suburban and rural locations (Zukin 1997; Hracs 2009; Waitt and Gibson 2009; Felton et al. 2010; Hracs et al. 2011; Shultz 2011; Luckman 2012) and tendencies for de-centering artistic production due to accessibility.
through the internet and proactive development approaches to revitalize local economies (Markusen 2006b). The urban scale has been privileged in attempting to understand arts production, but there has been less scholarship breaking down specific people’s practices of spatial use within urban areas (Gibson and Brennan-Horley 2006; Breitbart 2013) and the artistic connections between urban, suburban, and rural areas (Gibson and Brennan-Horley 2006; Wojan, Lambert, and McGranahan 2007; Waitt and Gibson 2009).

Most indie craft makers have different everyday spatial practices of production than traditional artists who tend to be the focus of culture-based urban planning initiatives. Development of arts districts is often a focus of planners, although benefits rarely trickle down to the artists themselves (Chapple, Jackson, and Martin 2010). Brennan-Horley and Gibson’s (2009) research revealed spatialities of arts production within a small Australian city as spread between creative centers and diffuse atomized locations particularly for home-workers. Basu and Werbner's (2001) research on hip hop ethnic enclave economies revealed dense social networks of exchange that are often invisible on the landscape because they take place inside homes spread across space, rather than visibly concentrated in specific neighborhoods. Many types of artists use space in a fleeting matter, as shown in research by Klein (2011) on temporary clusters of knowledge exchange at music industry conferences and projects and by Fraser and Ettlinger (2008) on spatially diffuse and temporary drum and bass music events such as raves. Formal arts-focused development strategies often focus on centralized locations such as artists’ clusters or shared studio spaces, but these spaces are less frequently utilized by aspiring indie artists doing home-based work and selling goods at temporary
craft fairs or online. I examine how spatial practices of production differ for and among indie crafters and how their spatial needs may be met through various institutions.

Craft-making activities tend to have specific gender, spatial and temporal divisions (Bratich and Brush 2011). Crafting activities, such as weaving and sewing, tend to be female dominated (23 percent of U.S. female adult participation rate, 2 percent for males) and are often practiced through one’s lifetime, rather than aging out of the activity (Novak-Leonard and Brown 2011). The spaces of these activities are often private homes for the production and display of craftwork. Thus, the distinction of home as a private non-economic space is misleading because it often is a space of production, and moreover, is connected to wider markets (Pratt and Hanson 1991; Oberhauser 1995). Home production spaces also may be made public through marketing (e.g. blog posts and videos of homework spaces) (Luckman 2013).

**Contributions**

This dissertation project examines how aspiring artists take up, experience, and sustain arts entrepreneurship in Columbus, Ohio as an exemplar of a mid-sized U.S. city that has made big claims toward embracing independent arts. Second-tier or mid-sized cities (with populations between 500,000 and 4 million people), have been found to be especially conducive to independent arts and craft production (Markusen and King 2003; Shultz 2011). In 2007, the city council passed a resolution to officially name Columbus the “Indie Art Capital of the World” (Walker 2007). This branding attempted to harness the development potential of the arts in urban growth and highlight the role of entrepreneurial cultural workers. In 2009, 3,633 self-employer firms were listed as
“independent artists, writers, and performers” in Columbus with receipts totaling more than $50 million (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). However, if these receipts were divided equally between firms they would amount only to about $14,000 each before expenses and likely sub-poverty level wages.

This dissertation study contributes to the literature on arts economies in several respects. I estimate monetary values associated with the artistic dividend (Markusen and Schrock 2006) from aspiring crafters’ work in Columbus. I consider the tensions and exclusions often obscured within crafting (and other arts) communities. I assess and reconceptualize the divisions between professional and amateur crafters and consider how multiple identities overlap in crafters’ subjectivities. This study offers insights into understanding how amateurs aspire to professional status more generally and I question the pro/amateur binary through the concept of aspirational economies. I analyze the everyday practices, spaces, tactics, and discourse that govern independent craft workers, to give a sense of the nuances of productive power in fostering the creation, continuation, and possible rupture of neoliberal subjectivities. In the following chapter I use Foucault’s (2008) notion of governmentality as an analytic framework to understand the governance of independent craft sellers and identify associated practices, mentalities, discourses, and techniques of power.
Chapter 3: Crafting entrepreneurs – practices and governance of independent crafters

A survey of 5,500 U.S. Etsy sellers found most sellers earned only a few thousand dollars last year, yet the dream of craft entrepreneurship is selling as the Etsy marketplace has grown to more than one million active shops (Etsy 2013b). Why do so many people take up craft entrepreneurship when most earn well below a living wage from their work? In this chapter I present the everyday material practices crafters engage in – their regimes of practices – and use a Foucauldian governmentality framework (Dean 2010; Ettlinger 2011) to explain how neoliberal societal norms guide crafters to govern themselves towards becoming and being craft entrepreneurs. Three anecdotes of crafters’ everyday practices listed below illustrate how crafters invest labor and hopes in their craft businesses, but make very little income from their work. I have constructed these composite anecdotes from typical experiences described by crafters.

Jennifer works an office job fulltime, but dreams of quitting and starting her own soap business. She doodles package design ideas on the edges of her paperwork, she checks her smart phone while on break to see if she has sold anything on Etsy, she cannot wait to get home and use her hands to create. She will work long into the night to have enough inventory for the craft fair this weekend. She’ll load up her wares, drive to the fair, set up, and sit for hours smiling until her cheeks are sore at every potential customer who walks by, trying to achieve the right amount of friendliness and engagement to persuade them to choose her soap from the dozen soap makers there. She hopes she’ll make more money than last time, when she only sold enough to recoup her booth fee and lunch, but at least she made a friend of the crafter next to her as they talked about their trials and tribulations.

***
Heather is waiting for the kids to take a nap, so she can pack and ship the order that came in today for her handmade jewelry. When the kids are asleep she brings out her supplies and the kitchen table becomes her workspace for creating her jewelry, taking photos of her work, and packing. She wishes she could just make jewelry and didn’t have to worry about managing everything that goes into selling online. When her husband gets home, he’ll take care of the kids, and she’ll work on posting her newest work on Etsy and researching strategies to get more sales. Her partner works outside the home, makes enough money for them to get by, and has health insurance thank goodness! But her craft selling earns a bit of extra money since she quit her job to care for the kids. She uses the money for family fun like vacations and birthday parties. She loves being able to work from home, but it’s really hard to balance a business and caring for her kids. There aren’t enough hours in the day!

* * *

Angie pulls her knitting project from her purse as she waits at the doctor’s office. She brings her supplies with her so she can knit whenever she gets the chance. For years she has given her knitted scarves to her friends and family, now that she is unemployed she’s finally taken up their suggestions of trying to sell her crafts at local fairs, consignment shops, and online. She had a few sales, so she’s trying to build up an inventory for the winter season and apply for upcoming fairs. She’s learning about business from reading online blogs and books, but there’s so much left to learn. Her hands and eyes are beginning to ache from knitting so much. Thankfully, she’s gets a disability pension to live off of too, because she’s making less than minimum wage selling her crafts.

These anecdotes give an overview of the major regimes of practices that crafters engage in (italicized below). Crafters become entrepreneurs by starting a craft business and developing a market often due to a change in life situation, such as Heather wanting to work from home to care for children and Angie losing a job. They take on multiple roles within the business, such as Heather being maker, marketer, and product photographer who struggles to build her skillset and manage all the tasks involved. Crafters compete with each other for selling space and sales by applying to sell at venues and making their work “stand out,” such as Heather researching strategies to garner more views on her Etsy page. They learn to conform to community norms for behavior including being friendly and engaging with possible customers at shows, such as Jennifer
using her emotional labor to connect with customers and hopefully make a sale at craft fairs. The crafters in these anecdotes work hard for little money, such as Jennifer making enough to cover expenses but not her labor and Angie having few sales. All of these accounts show crafters’ work is diffuse in that marginal times and spaces are utilized for production and business, such as Jennifer checking on sales on her break at work, Heather using the kitchen table as a work space when the kids took a nap, and Angie knitting in the waiting room. I examine each of these regimes of practices in the sections below, but for the moment, I ask: how and why do crafters take up these practices?

An intensification of individualization and competition exemplary of neoliberalism encourages people to become entrepreneurs of themselves, (Foucault 2008) using their own human capital to become producers and sources of earnings and to apply economic analysis to multiple spheres of life (Ellmeier 2003). Such neoliberal mentalities, or taken-for-granted societal understandings, organize society and people’s relationships to work (Foucault 2008; Lazzarato 2009; Springer 2010), particularly for cultural workers (McRobbie 2002b; Ellmeier 2003; Gill and Pratt 2008; Dawkins 2010; Loacker 2013). Social norms, corporate actors, markets, and the state govern individual entrepreneurs, but not through strategies of constraint; rather, governance mobilizes subjects to become entrepreneurs. For example, the Etsy corporation blog encourages crafters to “turn their passion into a business” by selling their craftwork online.

I examine craft entrepreneurship to analyze the economic conduct of people who work to use their various abilities – human capital – as engaged and entangled in multiple enterprises (Foucault 2008). Human capital for Foucault (2008) is the means by which the working person uses their abilities in multiple enterprises, crucially, towards multiple
ends, including not only earning a monetary income but also satisfaction. For Foucault (2008), the enterprise form is generalized throughout society as a way to use one’s abilities, as opposed to signifying a business or a firm specifically. For example, a crafter invests her knowledge of making and design, time, and labor to create her craft and realizes profit in terms of monetary income if the craft sells and in terms of psychological profit or ‘psychic income’ from personal satisfaction gleaned from the making process (Foucault 2008, 244). For Foucault, human capital is understood in terms of abilities or skills that can be deployed in any one of a number of activities or enterprises, a machine that can produce an income or earning stream, and workers “appear[ing] as a sort of enterprise for himself” (Foucault 2008, 225). Foucault understands the neoliberal social fabric as constructed of generalized forms of enterprise, which allows competition to organize and regulate society. *Homo œconomicus* (the classical economic man) in neoliberal society invests human capital in various enterprises as an “entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault 2008, 226). For example, Lazzarato (2009) explains how temporary contract workers in the culture industries develop their human capital to compete with each other as individualized enterprises. Crafters leverage their human capital in the hopes of earning monetary and psychic incomes. How then is craft entrepreneurship practiced, rationalized, and governed for those who participate in it?

In the following sections I examine crafters’ specific regimes of practices, and subsequently I analyze what governs or guides these practices: the mentalities, the discourses that communicate those mentalities, and the techniques of power that ground
the mentalities in regimes of on-the-ground, material practices. I draw on my fieldwork and interviews with crafters to identify their practices, and I pursue a discourse analysis of online retailers’ selling policies, marketplaces, procedures, and representations of craft working and selling by the Etsy corporation, an online retail distributor of craftwork. I conclude the chapter by identifying and explaining relationships between various mentalities and the importance of this form of governance.

**Understanding the governance of independent workers**

Poststructural approaches utilizing the theories and scholarship of Michel Foucault as tools for understanding the governance of people and subjectivity have been taken up in geography and beyond. These approaches are especially useful for this study because independent craft workers have some freedom to make their own decisions, but are also constrained and guided by societal norms. For Foucault (1980a, 1980b, 2000b), power is diffuse, productive, and circulates throughout society. Power can be understood as a productive force working through diffuse networks of actors to create norms. Therefore, governance is expressed not only through a centralized power, such as the state, but relationally, through networks of multiple relationships throughout and between different levels in society. Although certain power relations may crystalize as norms at particular times, these power relations are not fixed, so there are opportunities for change. Truths are socially constructed through systems of power, with truth and power functioning together in a linked circular relation. A regime of truth is the discourses made to function as true and which is created by and creates effects of power. For example, the
discourse of “paying your dues” by doing arts work for little or no pay with the hope that this will lead to future success is part of the mythology of arts creation to which artists often subscribe and contribute by undervaluing their work or equating that work with leisure.

Foucault conceptualized governmentality to understand processes of governance and subjectivity. Foucault’s scholarship through the 1970s focused on people’s unconscious decisions to follow societal discourses. During this period, Foucault’s (1980b, 117) notions of subjectivity rejected starting analysis with a theory of the subject and instead called for analysis of what “can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework,” emphasizing external calculated techniques of governance as guiding behaviors. Foucault shifted his questions in the early 1980s to consider “how the subject constituted itself” (1997, 290) through consciously deciding whether or not to follow social norms. These different views of subjectivity are elaborated below and offer useful frameworks for asking questions of governance and the constitution of the self in relation to indie crafters.

Foucault’s conceptualization of governmentality can be particularly useful for understanding how indie artists understand and conduct themselves and how artists’ practices are both shaped by and help create discourses on arts production. Foucault explains ‘governmentality’ or the ‘art of governance’ as the “conduct of conduct” (2000a, 341); it is a complex form of power in which governance occurs at a distance and people make choices that normalize their own behaviors towards self-governance. For example, Etsy’s 500 employees craft strategies by which more than one million individual craft
sellers on the Etsy marketplace govern themselves in accordance with the web site’s norms and policies.

Individuals are guided from many different sources (including artists themselves) to engage in and produce mentalities and discourses via techniques of power, which are tactics and strategies of governance that materialize social norms in daily practice. In turn, daily practices also help to produce and reproduce mentalities. Dominant mentalities or ways of understanding the world via discourses that function as truths are grounded through these techniques of power and can affect people’s lives by leading to conformity to, and perpetuation of, norms (Foucault 2000a). For example, some crafters subscribe to neoliberal mentalities that position competition as the basis of social relations. Discourses are the ways a mentality is communicated such as people’s talk, blogs, and media representations. For example, Etsy creates a seller resources discourse to communicate their views of best practices. Major techniques of power include disciplinary power, which individualizes and encourages people to regulate their own behaviors in relation to social norms (Foucault 1995), and biopower, which is directed at managing populations, especially through statistical analysis to determine patterns (Foucault 2007a). Some examples of these techniques in relation to selling crafts on Etsy include: disciplinary techniques such as individuals incentivized to maintain high seller ratings to manage their business reputations by regulating themselves to provide fast shipping and customer-is-always-right service; and techniques of biopower such as creating statistics to establish norms for online sellers.

Techniques of power should not be thought of as mutually exclusive, but overlapping, constituting each other, and useful for understanding power targeted at
different scales of analysis. For example, techniques of disciplinary power working at the level of the individual contribute to societal scale projects (Ettlinger 2011). Techniques of power ground mentalities in regimes of practice, “practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect” and are considered acceptable (Foucault 2000a, 225). Practices and mentalities should be understood as mutually constituted in that mentalities influence practices and vice versa.

Much scholarship in geography and other disciplines engages with Foucault’s earlier work (through the 1970s) that emphasized the governance of populations through actors unquestioningly taking up dominant mentalities that lead to individual practices, such as his research on disciplinary techniques used in punishment (Foucault 1995) and biopower (Foucault 2007a) in governance of populations in modern nation-states. The nature of the questions Foucault asked in relation to this approach include identifying the techniques of power that ground different mentalities, asking whom particular discourses serve, and how all actors are enrolled in societal projects. Examples of geographers using Foucauldian frameworks for studying the governance of populations include: Hannah’s (1997) review of modern social control via disciplinary power; Huxley’s (2006) study on how urban spatial rationalities were used to regulate the conduct of subjects; Voyce’s (2003) study of how mall owners governed shopping practices of consumers through spatial practices; and Larner and Le Heron’s (2004) study on how calculative technologies such as benchmarking are formative of new economic spaces and behaviors. These notions of governance have been widely taken up beyond geography including cultural economies studies such as Yúdice’s (2003) examination of culture being utilized
as a means to internalize social control; organization studies such as Prichard’s (2002) study on identifying, classifying, and regulating ‘creativity’ in managing and organizing workplaces; and education policy studies such as Tikly’s (2003) research on how rationalities of governance shape possibilities for policy and invoke different forms of power.

Foucault’s scholarship on the governance of populations is useful for my research project as a framework for helping to identify mentalities of crafters and the techniques of governance that ground these mentalities in practices. These workers are independent and their behaviors are more likely to be guided through diffuse power relations and discourses than through centralized organization. A governmentality approach also acknowledges possibilities of people consciously questioning or resisting prevailing norms. These possibilities became the emphasis of Foucault’s later scholarship on subjectivity and the care of the self and are the focus of Chapter 4.

Crafters’ regimes of practices
The compulsion and crisis of creation: starting a business and finding a market

The crafters in this case study took many different paths towards becoming entrepreneurs. In categorizing these paths I identify a continuum that ranges from serendipity to strategy in how crafters approach making their hobby into a business. They explained how they started their businesses and my categorization is based off their telling of their experiences. Most crafters had been involved in craft, art, and/or the process of making for most of their lives. Some learned these processes in their youth
from family members and others developed an interest through exposure to cultural resources (e.g. workshops at community centers). The compulsion to create often leads to a crisis of creation where makers cannot help but to produce, and suddenly they are overwhelmed by their creations – a multitude of material objects that take resources and labor to create and space to store. Many hobby crafters use the items they make and gift them to friends, but when there is too much they eventually decide to sell their items for the monetary value, to have others appreciate their work, and/or to get the items out of their space. Crafters’ leisure production becomes an enterprise per Foucault’s analysis of neoliberalism (2008) and crafters shift from a focus on acquiring psychic income to monetary income as they become aspiring-artist entrepreneurs. Their production often comes before strategic thinking about how to create a sustainable business.

Life situations also play a large role in people’s decisions to try and sell their work. Having children and assuming the responsibility of primary caregiver for those children often led female crafters out of waged work outside the home to craft entrepreneurship where they can control the spaces and times of work to (ideally) fit with responsibilities for the care of young children. These practices are consistent with findings by Bachrach and Main (1998) that women often take up microenterprise as a strategy to “have it all,” even though women’s businesses largely remain precarious and marginal. For a few crafters the transition to selling or greater professionalization of their efforts came with changes in employment status such as losing a job, which is consistent with Jakob’s (2012) findings that workers who lost jobs after the 2008 recession took up crafting to supplement their incomes. Retirement also opens up opportunities for crafters to place a greater focus on their craft business due to more free time and income.
supplemented by pensions. However, the process of aging takes its toll in regards to the physical demands of the work on the body (e.g. moving inventory and setting up booths).

Crafters drew on multiple and diverse resources to learn how to start and manage their businesses. They often used online resources found through web searches on topics related to starting a business. For example, typing “how to start a craft business” into the search engine Google offers up about 116 million results (November 25, 2013) and the terms “craft” and “business” are searched an average of 838,000 times per month. In Columbus, people search for “sell crafts” an average of 210 times per month and “sell on etsy” an average of 720 times per month (Keyword Planner 2014). These results show a sustained interest from people within the city of Columbus in finding information on how to sell their crafts. The Seller Handbook on Etsy.com offers numerous articles on topics related to starting your craft business on the site and many crafters utilize this resource. Makers cite trial and error as one of their most commonly used strategies for learning to sell their work. Many crafters rely on books about how to start a business or a craft business specifically (e.g. *Craft, Inc.: Turn your creative hobby into a business*, by Meg Mateo Ilasco, 2009). A few crafters were able to draw on the assistance and advise of entrepreneurs in their own social network of friends and family. Engagement with the Small Business Administration and other organizations to help establish businesses was limited. Some crafters brought business knowledge from their own work lives (e.g. formerly working as managers or in business services). Crafters develop multiple and overlapping strategies to run their businesses based on these resources.

Crafters generally start their businesses with very little monetary investment. Most makers minimize the money required by working from home and using inexpensive
and free materials (e.g. fabric from thrift shops), equipment that they already had for their hobby (e.g. home sewing machines), or shared equipment in community spaces (e.g. kilns for firing ceramics at a community center). More generally, crafters minimize the risks inherent in entrepreneurship through practices as illustrated in the following quote:

> I was not going to spend any money on it, because I was like that. That was just something fun I’m doing. As I figure out what I want to do I’m just going to do this. So I didn’t go into it thinking I was going to start a business.
>
> - Amy D, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

The majority of crafters seem to come from the crisis of creation described above into haphazardly selling their work through whatever venues are most easily available. For most, this starts with non-juried spaces such as Etsy, local community craft fairs (held by churches and schools), or local flea and farmers markets. These crafters are often more focused on the creative and self-fulfilling aspects of the process than on the business aspects, which is consistent with Dawkins’ (2010) analysis of handmaking in Detroit. For example, they often price an object at whatever seems reasonable from a consumer’s point of view rather than calculate how much it actually costs them to produce an object, let alone earn a profit. A few sales sustain them because they have minimized the risks involved in trying to conduct craft as a business and only expect a supplemental income stream. Most do not make significant incomes from their craftwork and sell informally (e.g. not incorporated or reporting on taxes), but many still spend significant money and time consuming craft entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a hobby in these situations, something that is consumed through un-recouped costs (e.g. listing fees, supplies). Jakob (2012) argues that most economic growth in the craft industry comes not from the sale of crafters’ handmade goods, but from craft support and
services (e.g. supplies, retailing, training, and marketing). Over time, many crafters evaluate their process and eventually engage in more strategic analysis.

On the other end of the continuum there are some crafters who begin their craft businesses on a very strategic entrepreneurial path or adopt this approach eventually. They often do extensive research, analyze the market, and embody more risk by taking out business loans for startup costs or quitting their other job. Some of the crafters who pursued this approach had been educated formally in arts work, although they found that education did little to prepare them for running a business. Crafters who had been strategic about their business from the start or had become more strategic as their businesses progressed tended to see a higher level of monetary success, but most of the highest earners were only making about $20,000 a year. For example, one crafter who had been strategic in quitting her other job and building a craft business understood herself as successful but after a year only earned about a quarter of what she did from her former job and worked more (around 60 hours a week).

Many indie crafters built their practices around an aversion to waste that is an alternative to the throw-away culture of mass consumption (Shultz 2011). Finding a use for items that would otherwise be discarded by society is often part of the impetus for crafters’ production. Examples of upcycling, or using waste materials to create something new, abound in the experiences of crafters in my sample: a bookstore owner whose business closed upcycled her inventory by folding the books into art objects; a retired school teacher pulled discarded items from the trash at an interior decorator shop and began making them into jewelry; a stay-at-home mom knitted hats from sweaters from
thrift shops that shrunk in the wash – just to name a few such practices (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2 below).

Crafters in my sample attempted to sell their work through multiple venues. More than 80 percent sell their work online through Etsy.com and about 11 percent also sell through their own web sites or eBay.com. Etsy does not sell crafts, but rather uses its platform to coordinate exchanges between individual sellers and buyers; it mediates peer-to-peer transactions. Etsy makes the majority of its profits by taking a percentage of the sales revenues from these exchanges (3.5 percent), selling listing space for individual items (20 cents per listing) (Etsy 2014a), and selling advertising to craft sellers to promote their work (ads costing 1 cent to $5 per click) (Etsy 2014b). Etsy’s challenge is to manage the behaviors of all these individual participants and the entire

Figure 3.1: Marcy of Recycled Reads creates items like this folded book art sculpture to upcycle the inventory of a closed bookstore. Image Source: https://img1.etsystatic.com/000/0/5687233/il_570xN.307361205.jpg

Figure 3.2: Sharon Butcher of The Wrist Bandit creates jewelry like this leather and suede bracelet from upcycled materials found at thrift shops. Image source: http://img1.etsystatic.com/002/0/6109224/il_570xn.398056035_eklh.jpg
population of more than 1 million active shops in the aggregate. These online marketplaces have open access so their ranks have swelled as craft sellers bypass the gatekeepers of the traditional cultural economy (e.g. craft fair organizers, art galleries) (Shultz 2011).

Nearly 60 percent of respondents sell at craft fairs and 38 percent sell at local gift stores. Fairs and stores often are juried locations due to limitations in space available for merchandise, meaning that crafters go through a selection process to gain access to the selling space. For craft fairs, crafters often pay an application fee, fill out an application, include pictures of their work, and if they are granted access to a selling space at the fair they rent a booth or table space. For stores, crafters also show samples of their work and once a crafter is selected there is typically a consignment agreement with a percentage of the sales price going to the store and a percentage going to the crafter (e.g. when an item sells at Wholly Craft 55 percent of the value is earned by the seller and 45 percent is earned by the shop). Some stores also charge to rent spaces for selling craft items. Renting a space in some of the larger craft malls requires a one-year lease to ensure that the space is occupied beyond the peak holiday or tourist seasons.

Craft fairs are fleeting in space and time. Venues that host these fairs include churches, high schools, community centers, parks, festivals, movie theatres, exhibition spaces, etc. (see Figure 3.3). They usually occur on weekends to coincide with the leisure time of consumers who tend to work Monday through Friday. Numerous fairs occur throughout the year, but many major fairs often occur during the shopping season that precedes the Christmas holiday (November through December). The fleeting nature of
these events, poor weather conditions that impede the travel of consumers (particularly the Midwestern winter), competition between fairs scheduled on the same day, and other limiting factors can be detrimental to the success of an event and the crafters selling there, and more generally render this type of market precarious.

Figure 3.3: The times and spaces of craft fairs are fleeting such as this gymnasium at a community center that was the site for the 2013 Holiday Craftacular fair.
Entanglement in multiple enterprises: multiple roles in the business

Crafters’ practices also include taking on many roles within their microbusinesses (e.g. maker, marketing, accounting, etc.) due to necessity (not being able to afford to pay to outsource services) and a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic. Rather than outsourcing business services, crafters take on these roles themselves because most start their businesses with very little capital to invest. Entrepreneurial crafters learn new skills and develop their human capital as an investment in the enterprises of the self. Crafters may draw their skills from life experience or construct them through informal educational investments in research, self-training, and trial-and-error as described in the following quote:

I’m actually really happy that I’ve learned so much. There’s so much more still for me to learn of course. I actually pretty much just started reading books and researching and asking questions and trial and error after I started my business. [Laughs] I just took it as it came.

- Yao Cheng, fulltime business as textile designer and painter

Below is a short list of jobs and tasks crafters described performing in their microbusinesses:

**Table 3.1:** Entrepreneurial crafters' roles and tasks

- crafter / artist / maker
- designer
- materials sourcing
- assembly
- warehousing
- market research
- product photography
- copy writer (for item and company descriptions and store policies)
- web designer
- market analyst (via market analysis tools on Etsy)
- marketing
- advertising
- sales person
- teacher
- brand persona
- branding
- logistics
- packing
- accounting
- tax preparation
- legal consultant
- book keeping
- social network manager
- managing personnel (if there are interns or employees)
- customer service
- distribution manager (applying for fairs, wholesale, online selling)
- community outreach
Craft entrepreneurs report experiencing tension and stress in trying to become competent in all of these tasks and manage their time to complete them as illustrated in this quote:

I value that I’ve learned a lot of new skills as a result of this, but I wish I would have had the financial resources to outsource some of the things I don’t particularly care for doing . . . I hate product photography and I would have loved to have the money to be able to pay someone to do it right as opposed to me taking time away from what I really like doing to try and do something that I don’t really understand.

- anonymous, part-time business as soap and cosmetic maker, with other fulltime job

Many report feeling their work is never done, even when they may be working more than fulltime (some over 60 hours per week), and that there is always more to learn as technologies, techniques, and styles are continually changing.

**Achieving visibility in spaces of competition**

Most crafters put time and energy into adopting strategies to ‘stand out’ from the competition on Etsy (e.g. improving photos, ratings, policies, and sometimes buying advertising). Crafters struggle to get customers to purchase or even see their products.

There is an oversupply of crafters in the craft labor market (Jakob 2012), as researchers have found in other artistic labor markets (Menger 1999; Gibson 2003; Oakley, Sperry, and Pratt 2008; Comunian, Faggian, and Li 2010; Hracs et al. 2011). With over one million active sellers on the Etsy marketplace a search for a common craft item like “soap” brings up more than 150,000 items on 250 pages of results (June 1, 2014). Etsy gives sellers access to, and encourages self-analysis of, individual sellers’ own shop statistics to improve one’s business, including information such as volume of traffic, source of traffic, orders, and revenues. Some crafters who sell on Etsy analyze their
individualized store statistics to test strategies to enhance competitiveness. Most crafters spend a portion of their time doing market research by looking at competitors’ policies and products, often adopting these ideas into their own strategies (e.g. copying policy statements, store layouts, uses of technology) or reporting shops to Etsy for review that they suspect are competing unfairly (e.g. selling mass produced Chinese goods on Etsy).

Etsy buyers primarily find the items they want through the search function on the site, so sellers compete for visibility within the search results. A buyer enters the item and/or characteristics they want in the search field. For example, if a buyer wants a hemp necklace, they might type the words ‘hemp necklace’ in the search field. Etsy sorts search results by ‘relevancy,’ which is based on the match between the keywords of the searcher and the specific words in an item’s title and tags. Crafters research and experiment with different keywords and tags in the hopes of maximizing visibility as illustrated in the following quote:

I look at the successful sellers . . . and I look at what keywords they’re using and I copy them.

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

Factors with secondary effects on the sorting process include how recently the item’s listing has been renewed and ‘shopper search behavior in the aggregate’ (CindyLouDoesStats 2011). Until 2011 Etsy’s default way of sorting search results was recency (or how recently an item was listed). Crafters would boost the position of their items in the search results by renewing listings even though they had not expired. Listing an item on Etsy costs 20 cents and lasts four months (Etsy 2014a), but when crafters relist items daily they might pay this fee multiple times to try to sell a single item. Some crafters still practice renewing for placement as a marketing strategy because it has a
secondary impact on the search engine results and Etsy features a “recently listed items” section on the bottom of their front page.

When Etsy switched to sorting search results by relevancy it also began offering paid advertising called ‘search ads’ that places advertised items at the top of the search results page (see Figure 3.4). Sellers can buy search ads based on keywords and pay a per-click rate for the keywords up to an amount they specify as their weekly budget. For example, a soap maker might choose to promote her soap sampler. Etsy will suggest keywords based on the item’s title and tags. Etsy prices keywords ranging from $0.01 to $5.00 per click based on sellers’ use and search data. The keyword ‘soap sampler’ was

![Etsy search results](https://www.etsy.com/search?q=soap%20sampler&ship_to=US)

**Figure 3.4:** The top three items displayed in the search results are paid advertisements based on keywords. Crafters can pay for search ads to increase visibility for their items and hopefully boost sales. Image source: [https://www.etsy.com/search?q=soap%20sampler&ship_to=US](https://www.etsy.com/search?q=soap%20sampler&ship_to=US)
valued at $0.78 per click in June of 2014 (Etsy 2014b). The crafter will set a weekly maximum advertising budget for that item, such as, $7.80, which means that they will pay for up to 10 clicks. Etsy provides detailed statistics on the advertising campaign such as the money spent, number of impressions (or how many times the ad was displayed), number of clicks, orders generated, and revenue generated. At the end of the campaign the soap maker can quickly assess whether or not the advertising plan resulted in more sales. However, advertising costs can add up quickly and do not guarantee any increase in sales.

Crafters promote their Etsy shops using online social networking tools. They try to make connections through blogging, Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and photo sharing sites like Flickr, Tumblr, and Instagram. Crafters must build and maintain these online connections by frequently posting about their work process or upcoming events, which adds to their overall work load and stress as illustrated in the following quote:

I never have time to blog anymore. I mean I really need to do it. And I know. I know I need to. My blogging is so very sporadic it’s ridiculous. But Facebook is easier. I just snap a picture of something I just made on the wheel or I have a new lotion or something I can put a picture . . . it grabs their attention.

- Karen Buoncristiano, part-time business as soap maker and ceramicist, with other fulltime job

Besides creating posts, crafters also take time to engage with the work of others by sharing and liking other people’s posts to create reciprocal links that expand their networks to include social and business contacts. Being connected helps one earn more money because knowing what is going on in a community, or the ‘buzz,’ is thought to help coordinate the economy (Storper and Venables 2004) and allow “group-based self-generating exchanges of information and knowledge outside formal collaboration”
(Asheim, Coenen, and Vang 2007, 658). Online interactions via blogs and social
networks allow crafters to capitalize on ‘virtual buzz’ (Jones, Spigel, and Malecki 2010).

Crafter Amy D’s website shows the integration of sales with blogging and social
media (see Figure 3.5 on the following page). Her blog is among the main tabs at the top
of the page and also has graphical links along the bottom. People interested in reading her
blog can follow it and receive notifications of new posts, which brings traffic to her
website and hopefully increases sales. Along the bottom of her webpage are icons with
links to her presence on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest. Crafters also feature
each other in their posts. For example, Amy’s page has a blog post about a visit from
another crafter called Thea Starr.

Numerous crafters with whom I spoke said they felt they should be blogging and
using social networking more. However, it was often more important for crafters to build
a following through face-to-face sales to increase their online sales, as illustrated in the
following quote:

You’ve gotta get a couple sales under your belt before outside people will kind of
touch you . . . the first part of my sales were people that had seen my
products in person at a craft show or friends or family who knew what it was
and would say “oh I need a gift” and I would say “oh would you buy from my
Etsy shop because then it will show up as a sale?” . . . And the craft shows made a
huge difference because they’re able to see and feel and hold the products and
know the quality and so you build up that feedback and the number of sales
because now if you go on my site and if you click on my feedback people will say
it looks the same in person as it does online, you know, all kinds of feedback like
that and people trust – that’s why there’s reviews on Amazon, you know.

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children
Figure 3.5: Amy D's "Sassy housewares by AmyD" website features her products for sale and links to promotional strategies like blog posts and social media. Image source: www.MadeByAmyD.com
beyond the local scene (Sargent 2009). Even with the accessibility promised through a
global online marketplace like Etsy, many crafters still build their businesses based on a
loyal consumer market, which commonly is localized. Craft fairs in particular allow face-
to-face interactions between crafters and customers, which provide psychological
motivation for sales and facilitate socialization (Storper and Venables 2004). Also, Shultz
(2011) found it was easier for crafters to become established in smaller craft communities
such as midsized cities because there is less competition.

Crafters compete on two levels: for space to sell and for sales once they are at the
space. Those who sell at fairs and brick-and-mortar shops put considerable time and
effort into creating application packets and applying to numerous venues. There are many
more crafters vying for spaces to sell at shows than organizers have space to
accommodate. For example the 2014 Crafting Outlaws show in Columbus had 180
applications for the 95 available spaces, according to organizer Megan Green.

Much of the competition between crafters takes place at the level of the
application process. Fair organizers often choose the sellers based on quality, variety,
social networks, and reducing competition in different categories at the actual fair space.
For example, an organizer might limit the number of soap makers they allow into the fair
to leave space for a variety of different kinds of items and to reduce competition between
sellers on site. The following quote exemplifies tension between trying to practice
creating a non-competitive community and the reality of the market:
Whether there’s meant to be competition or not there is competition because there’s just so many shows out there and there’s only so many people who can buy . . . I think that most people are pretty good about trying to promote each other, but there’s always gonna be a little bit of competition especially if there’s five of you at a show that are selling jewelry, even if you’re selling different things there is some competition . . . I don’t think it’s competitive like oh I’m gonna back stab you or you win I lose. It’s just who’s gonna get the money?

- Vicki Oster, part-time business as scrapbooker, retired from other job

Crafters often reported avoiding direct competition with people who were in close proximity (e.g. in the Columbus area) or to which they were socially connected. For example, a crafter might not make the same sort of item as someone they know even if they believe they could make it better and be more successful selling it. However, crafters were more likely to compete directly with sellers who were distant on Etsy.

**Conforming to norms**

Crafters described numerous unwritten rules within the craft community. The crafting community emphasizes ‘playing nice,’ by being polite and courteous in interactions with customers, among crafters, and among retailers and sellers. However, in practice people sometimes experience tensions and exclusions.

Perhaps the most important unwritten rule is to treat each other with respect and courtesy and avoid conflict. One craft show organizer described this rule as “don’t be a dick.” Crafters who violated this rule were often no longer allowed at the events of those organizers by exclusion in the juried selection process. Crafters often contrasted their selling interactions on Etsy with sites such as eBay, saying Etsy was more personal and the clientele was ‘nicer.’ Most of the crafters with whom I spoke preferred Etsy and tried to maintain a high level of customer service. The emphasis on social networking to build one’s clientele and reputation requires friendly interactions and online connections (e.g.
‘following’ each other’s blogs, shops, by signing up for notifications when the updates occur). For the most part people found the community to be supportive and dismissed small tensions as normal to any social interactions as illustrated in the following quote:

I think like most sections when you get a little community there’s always going to be like that high school drama . . . We certainly have drama. Like there’s certainly gossip. But again I think it’s just from – we’re all in this creative environment and we all either socially online or together you know have a little bit of comradery. But at the end of the day I mean they’re your friends and they’re your peers. I always look at it in terms of you’re still set up right next to them . . . you want your peer to do equally well . . . I hope we have that support structure in place. I think that we do, but I know everyone gets a little bitchy.

- Megan Green, fulltime business as soap maker, craft fair organizer, caregiver of her children

In practice, many crafters blog and try to build a following, belong to various affinity groups within the community, and draw on their existing social networks to bring traffic to their fair spaces and Etsy pages.

Another unwritten rule that helps create a ‘nicer’ craft community is to not copy another person’s work – a copycat – even if a crafter thinks she could create a better product. Copying is particularly taboo if you would be competing in the local craft market and is shunned by many established sellers who are integrated into their local craft community as illustrated in this story quoted below:

When I was at a [craft fair] some woman was photographing our shit so she could make it. I don’t mind when people do that if they have a making personality. They’re not gonna buy it anyway . . . but she was making it to sell it . . . so she can steal it and sell it for money . . . I hate that. She’s like “well didn’t you just see it online?” And I’m like “No. Like I made this up. This thing, I made it up.” “Well, I just thought it was something you saw and you made.” It’s like [crafters] don’t do that. And I don’t like that people think that that’s what you do. You know? That that’s the norm. You just steal it . . . People don’t do that. You don’t do that and I don’t like the idea that people think crafters do that and other crafters doing it and making it the norm.

- AmyD, fulltime business as seamstress, caregiver of her children
In practice, some crafters who are outside these social networks will lift ideas, especially if they can do so in a way that avoids direct contact, such as being removed in time and space. For example, I met a mother and daughter team selling at their first craft fair in a rural area outside Columbus. They explained that they had seen a jewelry design by another crafter in a distant place and thought they could do that. They started their own business copying the design. Also, copycats are a big problem for crafters who sell on Etsy as illustrated in the following quote:

I do have a few copycats . . . I had a customer . . . she bought a set of my onesies and then she proceeded to photograph her twins in my onesies and use that photo to sell onesies just like mine . . . I reported it [to Etsy]. It went unresolved for months and I was furious because she was undercutting me too . . . I talked to a trademark attorney and he said it’s so tricky, we can write a letter, we can do a cease and desist, but it’s very tricky because you don’t have these licensed, you don’t have them trademarked and that is a long process.

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as seamstress, caregiver of her children

Other unwritten rules apply specifically to selling at craft fairs. As a rule, craft organizers try to avoid scheduling events that would compete with other shows. Although crafters often would discuss particular shows as good or bad in terms of sales, they would also avoid specifically discussing exactly how much money they made at particular events. One crafter explained:

. . . they were all saying they didn’t do well at that show. I heard a lot of that. And that’s unusual cuz they’ll lie. People in craft will say “oh yeah I made $1,000 last week,” and I’m going yeah right. Give me a break, there were two people that walked by here ok. So, anyway – and that’s a real bad habit, because nobody wants to say they’re not doing well.

- Sharon Butcher, part-time business as jewelry maker, retired from other job

People may avoid discussing money in order to protect each other’s (or their own) feelings, but to avoid discussing it critically may thwart collective action to improve
earnings for crafters. Another unwritten rule is for crafters to stay at a show until it is over, even if the show is poorly attended and they are not making many sales. Those who leave early without an acceptable excuse are often blacklisted from that organizer’s events.

Overall the norm of the craft community is being nice because crafters often form friendships within the community, share common problems, see each other at events, rely on each other to help organize, and network with each other to increase sales. However, differences in identities and struggles for power within organizations and events result in exclusions. Conflict is in the eye of the beholder, meaning that one crafter’s idea of constructive critique could be a point of conflict and tension for someone else and how it is resolved is based on power relations in context. Although most people within the craft community described interactions as friendly, a few people experienced tension and exclusion, as illustrated in the quote from this crafter:

I was a member of [a craft affinity group]. I am no longer a member of them. I just – I guess I just got pretty disillusioned with the – I hate to say this but mean girls club. If you’re not part of the clique then you’re not really accepted and god forbid you bring up different ideas and that kind of thing.

- anonymous crafter

Another crafter described what she felt was mistreatment of new crafters and herself by the leadership of a craft affinity group:

I felt that she was really kind of nasty to some of those girls cuz some of them were trying to figure out what to do and they were just starting out and they would ask questions and she would sometimes come back in an e-mail and you could just hear the sarcasm in what she was writing and that offended me, cuz I thought these are young women, they were starting out . . . they’re trying to get in with the group and be accepted . . . And I said something once and she kind of like in an e-mail – it was one of those kinds that go out to everybody – and she was real snippy with me.

- anonymous crafter
In response, this crafter limits her engagement with the group, but remains on the their e-mail listserv to get updates about shows. Another crafter described her sense of exclusion from the craft community due to age and lifestyle differences:

There is this very tight group here in Columbus that wherever you go you see all of them together even though they’re separate groups, but they all know each other and they all work with each other and they’re real tight, and they don’t always let everybody in I feel. I felt very not accepted by those to some degree and I think a lot of it has to do with age, because they’re all in their 20s and 30s and they’re all either – well, a lot of them are married, a lot of them have little kids, so they have all that in common, and they support each other.

- anonymous crafter

When crafters experience unpleasantness within particular community groups they tend to isolate themselves or to splinter into their own new groups rather than engage in further conflict or work to change organizations as illustrated in the following quote:

I mean I kind of took it personally when I didn’t get into [a craft show] one year. And cuz I’d applied and I’d always been there and all of a sudden I wasn’t in there. I was like I’m gonna start my own craft show. I mean why not? [Laughs] So I don’t know whether they like are mad at me for that or whether nobody cares.

- anonymous crafter

In general, the indie craft community in Columbus tends to be homogenous regarding gender, race, and lifestyle. Most participants were white women aged 20s to 40s, with 80 percent having at least some college education and about 35 percent caring for children. Etsy has similar demographics – 88 percent female and a median age of 39 (Etsy 2013b). Etsy does not track racial demographics, but in the first six months of 2014 90 percent of the shop owners pictured on the “featured shop” Etsy blog appeared to be white. Dawkins (2010) found a similar homogeneity in terms of ‘whiteness’ in the indie craft scene in Detroit that participants thought was rooted within aesthetics, privilege, and
understandings of belonging and difference within the community. Dawkins notes that this segregation was naturalized aesthetically in that “‘Indie’ craft is ‘white’ because it is not perceived to be ‘ethnically marked,’ and therefore ‘ethnically marked’ crafts are out of place at ‘indie’ craft fairs” (Dawkins 2010, 268). Dawkins (2010) found that organizers perceive the craftwork itself as ethnically marked, although craft fair applicants do not include specific indications of race (e.g. pictures of themselves or identification of race). Many non-white crafters create and sell in Columbus as evident by their presence in other marketplaces. For example, an ‘ethnic’ festival in Columbus, Festival Latino, features a community marketplace area for vendors selling “handmade, authentic, cultural merchandise” that considers the “culture and flavor” of the festival (Festival Latino, 2014). The few crafters in Columbus who had considered the ‘whiteness’ of the indie craft community also naturalized it through notions of aesthetics, shared culture, and the tastes of the mostly white women with disposable income who buy crafts at fairs. Such understandings create largely segregated craft markets on the basis of race, ethnicity, and place of origin. I discuss how indie crafters feel about this segregation in the following chapter on subjectivities. Scholarly work on crafting in the U.S. largely ignores race by working along these divides (e.g. on Etsy and indie crafts Shultz 2011; Jakobs 2012), rather than examining how these exclusions and categorizations function.
‘Psychic income’ or the desire to work: earnings from feelings

Crafters often pursue and continue their entrepreneurial attempts while accepting very low levels of monetary compensation (effective wage rates below government minimums). This practice underpins aspirational economies and is problematic due to self-exploitation. Crafters who do not earn adequate money to sustain their businesses are able to continue their pursuits by self-subsidizing their craft selling through other income sources (e.g. waged work, partner’s income, retirement pension). Crafters rarely critically examine this self-subsidization because it has grown out of an entirely subsidized hobby and they earn many non-monetary values from their work that makes such an investment worthwhile. Crafters’ practices exemplify how aspirational economies function insofar as the possibilities for future success by working harder encourages people to work through an immediate lack of material gain.

As neoliberal subjects crafters invest their human capital in these entrepreneurial enterprises, hoping to earn monetary income and often gaining what Foucault (2008, 244) called ‘psychic income.’ Psychic income refers to the mental and emotional profits people earn from investing their human capital, such as pleasure and a sense of personal satisfaction. For example, a crafter invests her human capital in making her craft and earns psychic income in the form of personal satisfaction from the process of creating. In aspirational economies such as crafting, monetary incomes are often relatively small and psychic incomes serve as a major motivator to sustain people’s efforts.

Indie crafters create monetary value for crafters and their communities. The ‘artistic dividend’ is a way to measure economic value created through artists’ work by considering incomes for artists and their regions via the consumption base and exports.
(Markusen and King 2003; Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron 2004; Markusen and Schrock 2006). The artistic dividend includes wages from artists’ work; sales of artists’ work locally as providing an import-substitution function (spending money within the region rather than spending it elsewhere); export revenue from sales of art work outside the region; and propensity for artists to consume local goods. The artistic dividend has been offered as a more complete understanding of arts impacts on regional economies. Attempts to measure the artistic dividend through tracing the actual contributions of artists has yet to be undertaken due to difficulty of gathering data. Instead the number of artists in a community according to Census data has been used for a proxy measure. However, the census data likely misses or undercounts aspirants.

The majority of crafters in this study received relatively little monetary value from their work. Figure 3.6 below is a chart displaying the self-reported craft income data from 35 of the crafters who participated in the survey or interviews. The incomes are skewed towards low values. A quarter of crafters made $100 or less. Median yearly earnings for crafters’ work totaled only $2,000. The majority were in the third quartile, which ranges from $2,000 to $15,000. The fourth quartile ranged from $15,000 to $24,000 and there was an outlier of $35,000. Most craft sellers on Etsy receive similarly low returns. Etsy does not release average sales volume statistics, but I construed from a 2013 economic impact report that most sellers only made about $3,500 per year (estimated based on Etsy selling contributing 7.6 percent to an average household income of $44,900) (Etsy 2013b). Many crafters in the nascent stages of entrepreneurship purposely reinvest any income back into the business in hopes of eventually growing the business to the point it pays them. For example, 69 percent of Etsy sellers reinvest their
Etsy income back into the business (Etsy 2013b). Monetary earnings from craftwork are relatively small at the micro-scale of the individual, although a few people do earn significant income streams.

Monetary values from craftwork in Columbus can also be traced through the mesoscales of the Columbus region and the national / global online craft marketplace. Although Etsy does not offer localized sales statistics or revenue reports I reveal a sense of the monetary values flowing to and from the region using some basic calculations and estimates with data publically available on Etsy’s website. A search for items categorized as being from Columbus, Ohio returned nearly 58,000 items for sale (June 29, 2014). The

Figure 3.6: Chart of crafters' yearly income from craftwork ($USD).
median price for these items was $17, with the most expensive being a $15,000 oil painting and the least expensive being $0.20 items such as chain mail links and quotes for customer work. About 20 percent of items listed on Etsy sell monthly across all categories (e.g. handmade, vintage, and craft supplies), based on about 25 million listings on the site and an average of about 5 million items selling per month through 2013. If that statistic holds for the Columbus area, I estimate that Etsy sellers in the aggregate in Columbus might sell about $200,000 a month of goods. However, this amount is not exclusively export revenue, because about 60 percent of crafters reported online sales to local people.

In just monthly listing fees (good for four months unless renewed for recency placement) Etsy would earn at $11,600 from items listed from Columbus. Etsy also earns 3.5 percent of the sale price for the items that do sell (estimated to be about $7,000), and revenue from any ads purchased for these items. Although this might not seem like a great deal of money for Etsy, it all adds up, as examined by Anderson’s (2006) notion of the “long tail” in online media and entertainment distribution. He explains how the aggregate of all the small sales from niche markets adds up to more income than produced by the few “hits.” The long tail is also applicable to Etsy’s success, which hosts but does not bear the cost of production (the burden of individual crafters). So, like digital media Etsy faces minimal reproduction costs, but unlimited potential to gain from the aggregate of small sales. For example, more than $1 billion of merchandise was sold from around the world through Etsy in 2013, earning the company $350 million, but the majority of crafters who sell on Etsy grossed a few thousand dollars or less for the year. This monetary income earned from the work of 1 million sellers circulates to Etsy’s
headquarters in New York City and its organization, which employs about 500 people. In
relation to the artists’ dividend (Markusen and King 2003; Markusen, Schrock, and
Cameron 2004; Markusen and Schrock 2006) these estimates show a net gain to the
Columbus region’s Etsy sellers in the aggregate, but the impacts on most sellers’
livelihoods are minimal when considering the numbers of sellers and skewed distribution
of sales.

There are various ways cities might be able to glean monetary benefits from the
presence of aspirants. Cities may be able to capitalize directly on free or discounted labor
from aspiring artists who are trying to build their reputations. For example, a city may
hold a festival that vendors pay to apply to and for which aspirants provide free
entertainment and content, while the city is able to earn money from the event and draw
tourists. Crafters often experience tension between being an amenity draw for community
events such as festivals and earning enough income at the individual level as illustrated in
the following quote:

I really think at the moment we’re kind of a fad . . . we’re like the current thing to
have at your festival and that always makes for poor sales . . . it’s like oh I get
something pretty to look at . . . That makes me really really mad, because it’s a
huge part of your day. Like you have to put up a tent. You’ve gotta sit there and
smile for X amount of hours and you’ve made $30. Some instances you make
your table back and that’s great but you didn’t make a lot outside of that.
Someone like myself, I don’t have time to do that.

- Megan Green, fulltime business as a soap maker, craft fair organizer,
caregiver of her children

Fulltime crafters tended to become strategic about what events they invested their time in
as time becomes one of their most precious resources. For example, more strategic
crafters will turn down opportunities to sell at venues that do not offer a proven track
record of sales.
Crafters’ work also creates monetary values that circulate at the mesoscale for the communities where they are located. An event such as a craft fair can earn monetary incomes for the organizers of the fair and the community. Crafters’ work sold at local fairs and gift shops produces an artistic dividend (Markusen and King 2003; Markusen, Schrock, and Cameron 2004; Markusen and Schrock 2006) for the Columbus area. For example, the 2013 Craftin’ Outlaws winter fair was held in the Veterans Memorial exhibition hall near downtown Columbus and attracted 3,000 – 4,000 customers. About 180 vendors paid $15 each to apply to the fair and the 90 vendors who were selected paid about $150, raising about $16,000 for the organizers to plan, market and manage the fair and pay the related expenses such as $5,000 to rent the venue. Organizing fairs can be a way for crafters to earn additional income, although pay is often relatively low. Crafters from outside the region might have paid for lodging, gas, and meals. The majority of crafters selling at the fair were from the region, so there is an import-substitution effect if consumers buy gifts from regional producers rather than buying from online retailers such as Amazon.com or distantly produced items at local chain stores (e.g. items produced in China and sold through Walmart). Further, the artistic dividend posits tendencies for art workers to source their material locally, which contributes to the regional economy. Crafters who took my survey spent an average of $1,000 per year on supplies and 61 percent reported buying supplies at local supply shops, about 58 percent at online retailers, and about 51 percent at national craft supply retail chains (such as Michael’s and Hobby Lobby). Therefore, monetary values accumulate at the meso-scale through local businesses from crafters’ local sales and supply purchases, but also to local branches of national retailers and to distant online sellers.
Extending the artistic dividend to aspirational economies encompasses aspirants attempts to become established in how arts impacts are calculated. Large numbers of aspiring crafters investing in trying to reach external markets but failing to make returns can drain regional resources. For example, an aspiring crafter trying to build an audience for export via distributor web sites like Etsy.com spends money outside the region to list their work for sale. If a crafter does not sell her work, money is lost to the artist and the regional economy while gained by the outside corporation Etsy.com.

Crafters experience a tension between attempts to earn money by maximizing sales and profit and the nature and ethic of handmade production. For most, money is not the key motivator for their work. However, they need to earn some compensation to make their efforts worthwhile. Many crafters want their business to make some contribution to their livelihoods. As hobby crafters transition into aspiring-artist entrepreneurs they bring with them diverse experiences and skill sets, but learning how to run a business requires a great deal of effort. The majority of crafters initially take a serendipitous approach to selling that I term hobby selling. The following quote illustrates one crafter’s differentiation between hobby and professional sellers:

I know people just wanna make what they like making and that’s great, but it’s just a hobby. It’s just a hobby until you’re selling and for many people Etsy is a hobby and that’s fine. And it’s something fun that they wanna do and they can tell their friends and – but they can’t expect a lot of sales or a lot of traffic and I guess – I’m always getting asked how do I get to your level, how do I get to – and it’s – you’ve gotta put in a lot of work.

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

Although most of the hobby-sellers consider their efforts a business, they value their business through a broad spectrum of values such as psychic income (Foucault 2008) and do little to scrutinize the monetary values earned from their work. For example, hobby
sellers might understand success as having sold a few pieces that will cover the cost of lunch at a fair, their booth fee, and materials breaking even, but not consider a lack of monetary compensation for their production labor. Crafters participate in hobby selling even when monetary returns are low, perhaps in part because their work like other art workers (Wyszomirski and Chang 2009) often is subsidized through other sources of monetary value such as waged employment (i.e. piggybacking) or support from other members of their households (Jakob 2012). The chart below (Figure 3.7) illustrates the yearly household incomes reported by survey respondents. Crafters reported a wide range of incomes, but most earn about $50,000 to $75,000, comparable to the median household income for the U.S. of about $51,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). Over time, many crafters evaluate their process and eventually engage in more strategic analysis.

Figure 3.7: Chart of craft survey participants’ yearly household income ($USD).
Most crafters experience a sense of constant struggle to try to earn and sustain income from their craft businesses as illustrated in the following quote:

That’s the struggle, is the like constant hustle and the constant sacrifice for it . . . And the fact that you know, we can do this, and it’s gonna work for as long as it’s gonna work.

- Olivia Bratich, fulltime owner of Wholly Craft handmade gift store, caregiver of her child

Although Olivia owns and operates one of the most visible craft-related spaces in Columbus (see Figure 3.8) she receives relatively little monetary reward for her work and is without any guarantee of sustainability. Her store Wholly Craft sells handmade gifts from crafters, artists, and makers on a consignment basis with the retail price being split 55 percent to the consignor and 45 percent to the shop. According to her own estimates from 2012 she earned less than minimum wage for her more than full-time labor (often

Figure 3.8: Olivia (Olivera) Bratich of Wholly Craft featured in weekly alternative newspaper Columbus Alive is a very visible member of the craft community.
70 hours per week) after running the shop for around five years. Her income from the shop helps provide for her family, but her husband is the primary breadwinner and his job provides health insurance.

Megan Green, a soap maker and craft fair organizer, is another prominent person identified with the craft community and often featured in local media. For example, *Columbus Alive*, a weekly alternative newspaper, featured her in their 2011 ‘People to Watch’ list as “on the front lines of Columbus’ crafty future” (Mantey 2011) and *Columbus Parent* magazine included her in a feature called “Etsy Moms: Checking in with Columbus’ craftiest mothers” (Weekley 2012). Although many aspiring crafters view her as a success story, she experiences a sense of struggle and precarity as illustrated in the following quote:

It’s really hard. Like you struggle. I can’t stress that enough. And again if somebody were to say like oh you’re making it the way that you maybe have suggested a couple of times – I almost laugh at that. Because I’m not. Like I’m struggling. I find that it’s sustainable. I’m having a really hard time trying to find a way to make it profitable and I think those are two very different things.

-Megan Green, fulltime business as a soap maker, craft fair organizer, caregiver of her children

Makers accepting low prices for their craft products may signal that they are receiving other social values such as recognition and cultural capital; or highlight the tendency of society and women themselves to undervalue women’s work; or constitute gift economies in that makers are gifting the value of their labor time to consumers. The following quote illustrates a crafter’s tension over what wage the market will bear and how they accept their rates by considering their labor a gift:
My labor is a gift. I pretty much consider that if I get my materials covered I don’t get much for labor. And yet you think about, if anybody ever argues with me on the price, well, that’s too high, I say well would you work for a penny an hour, because that’s about what I’m getting? [laughs] Pennies on the hour.

- Mary Proven, part-time aspiring craft business, fulltime accountant nearing retirement

Some people eventually become more strategic in terms of their business as discussed above and analyze their production process to price their items according to supply inputs and putting a monetary value on their labor. Some crafters only conduct such analysis at the bequest of significant others who become critical of the amount of effort the crafters put into their work versus the amount of compensation they were receiving, as illustrated in the following quote:

[Returns at craft fairs have] been embarrassingly bad actually this summer. . . my boyfriend actually had a lot to do with helping me figure out a better direction to take my business because he’s the one that would see me coming back from these events, sometimes actually in tears, and just being like what am I doing this for? So, he was like look at what’s going well for you . . .

- anonymous, part-time business as a soap maker, with other job

Money was important for most of the entrepreneurial crafters I spoke with, but far from the most important value gleaned from their work.

Crafters gain value through the process of making and sharing their creations with others. This value is related to Bourdieu’s (1993) notion of cultural capital, an embodied competence in deciphering cultural relations and artifacts drawing on forms of cultural knowledge, which is used to legitimize social differences. ‘Cultural capital’ has been taken up rather widely in the culture industries literature. Generally the term connotes work in the arts that entails a high degree of social recognition for the successful artists (Menger 1999), a quest to be recognized socially as creative and artistic, and the desire of aspirants for respect (Alvarez 2005). Aspirants may draw on existing stocks of cultural
capital to try to realize economic capital (e.g. knowledge of fashion applied to designing and selling clothing) or use their work as an aspiring artist to build their reputations as people who possess cultural knowledge. The beneficiaries of values from cultural capital include the artists themselves as their recognition for cultural competence grows, consumers who are able to gain cultural capital through their discriminating consumption (e.g. buying handmade and local), and cities that are able to brand themselves as hip locations (Ley 2003; Lloyd 2004). The drive to acquire culture capital is apparent in the following quote:

I am addicted to it. It’s very awesome to make things yourself, cuz you look back and you have a realization that I made that and it turned out really awesome. It’s very fulfilling that way . . . I like it when people come up to my table at craft shows and they’re like did you make all of this? And they have these eyes that are like popping out of their head out of disbelief and that’s very rewarding.

- Karen Buoncristiano, part-time business as a soap maker and ceramicist, with other fulltime job

Crafters also highly value the social connections made through their practices of craftwork and selling. Social capital can be conceptualized “as the connections, including networks, among individuals that engender trust and norms of reciprocity, and the benefits that accrue to the members of community as a result of these connections” (McCarthy et al. 2005, 83). From this vantage point, arts participants gain value from human interaction benefits such as enhanced personal relationships and expanded social networks (Brown 2006; McCarthy et al. 2005) and opportunities for visibility and leadership (Alvarez 2005). The following quote illustrates the importance of social capital to one crafter’s practice:
I’m not just a stay at home mom, I get out in the real world and I talk to other adults and I don’t know, I just – it helps me keep my sanity, because when you stay home with your kids everyday all day 24-7 it gets to you afterwhile.

- Renee Ballah, part-time business as a crafter, caregiver of her children

Although social capital undoubtedly is important to allow aspirants to build networks of support for their work, as discussed above there may also be tensions associated with competition between aspiring workers, power struggles within the crafting community, and general disagreements. Artists and the communities they engage both accrue values associated with social capital.

Control over time and space of work is another important personal-scale value, particularly for women assuming a role is primary caregiver for young children (Oberhauser 1995; Bachrach and Main 1998; and Hanson and Steiner 2013). About one third of the crafters I spoke with were responsible for childcare and the quote below illustrates the allure for mothers of the control over work environment:

“"I'm able to stay at home with my 4 year old twins, instead of working a job I don't like to send them to day care”

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

However, this control of work is often tenuous and requires constant negotiation as crafters try to work from home.

The multiplicity of enterprise in space: work as spatially diffuse

The work of entrepreneurial crafting is spatially diffuse in three different ways. The work space of crafters is diffuse through blurring the alleged division between private home and public work sites. The location of crafters’ work in regions is diffuse in that it is spread through multiple sites rather than concentrated in urban arts districts.
Craft community space is able to function as diffuse across the region because it is mediated by online communication networks.

The times and spaces of work are unbounded for entrepreneurial crafters and bleed into and overtake times for leisure and family. Work creep makes them feel they should/could always be working on their businesses. More than 90 percent of research participants do their craftwork at home. Women working in the home for money exposes gendered imaginings of space – that paid work takes place in public spaces and unpaid domestic work happens in the home. However, this division obscures the reality that homes have long been sites of economic production and the distinction between these realms is thought to be blurring (Pratt and Hanson 1991; McRobbie 2002c; Bain 2004; Leadbeater and Miller 2004; Ettlinger 2009a; Lazzarato 2009). Crafters’ home workspaces are often marginal and changing based on the needs of the household (see Figures 3.9 – 3.11 below). For example, many crafters describe their workspaces as having moved throughout the house over time from the living room to a spare room, (which then can no longer be spared due to events such as the birth of children) and the basement. Home often is the preferred place of work because of lack of funds to rent additional spaces and the ability to quickly access home spaces in during marginal times (e.g. in the evenings after their waged job).

The amount of actual production and material storage space required and utilized by individual crafters varies greatly depending on the craft practiced, the availability of the space within the home, and volume of production. A knitter may be extremely mobile and able to carry a project and materials within a bag for work while on the couch watching TV or attending college classes. By contrast a ceramicist may require access to
water to adjust the pliability of the clay, a potter’s wheel on which to shape pots, a large area for curing pots, a kiln to fire and glaze their pots, and much more storage space for the finished products.

One of the key uses of space for most crafters is the “stash.” The stash is all the supplies that go into making one’s craft. Often managing the stash becomes problematic.

Figure 3.9: Adrienne Raimo brings her knitting projects in her purse everywhere she goes (including our interview session) so she can work on them when she has spare time.
Figure 3.10: Amy D has moved her work / storage space throughout her house and it is currently located in the basement. She limits her supply purchases to be sure she does not overtake the other section of the room where her teenage son spends time.

Figure 3.11: Bars of soap cure on the dryer in a soap makers’ production and storage space / laundry room / furnace room / toilet.
in that crafters tend to hoard materials with the intention of using them for future projects. Organization of the stash becomes particularly important when crafters are upcycling materials because there may be less uniformity in their supplies than one would find with buying bulk supplies. Large stashes often are thought of as ‘unruly’ and a source of frustration and tension – disordered, annexing space, and a source of tension in the household (Stalp and Winge 2008). I interviewed some of the crafters in their homes where they often showed some reluctance and anxiety about showing me their workspaces. Most apologized for the “messy” state of their workspaces.

The craftwork is diffuse in space because crafters’ workspaces are located throughout the Columbus area. Much research on the location of arts workers has focused on arts professionals in the context of huge agglomeration economies with concentrated arts districts (Scott 1999b; Lloyd 2002; While 2003; Markusen and Schrock 2006; Currid 2007b; Rothfield et al. 2007; Florida and Jackson 2009; Currid and Williams 2010; Long 2010). Creative city policies have been widely heralded as ways to remake derelict urban spaces into vibrant communities by leveraging artists as gentrifiers (Zukin 1997; Florida 2002; Lloyd 2002; Jakob 2010). However, most crafters’ work spaces are located in homes in Columbus suburbs or outlying cities and towns, with less than 10 percent in studio spaces in the urban arts districts and warehouses that arts-based development agents with the City of Columbus encourage with gentrifying development schemes. For example, the city has designated East Franklinton as a “creative community” with the potential for revitalization via the arts (City of Columbus 2014). But the prospect of having a studio in such an area was unappealing to most of the crafters with whom I spoke because they work from home and people have made decisions about where to
locate their household based on the location of other waged work or the quality of the school systems for their children. Figure 3.12 below is a map showing the locations of work for crafters who participated in this project. Although the map offers only a small, non-representative sample of the population of indie crafters in Columbus, it is notable that the workspaces mostly are homes diffused through the city, especially in the neighborhoods and suburbs thought to have better environments for raising children. Figure 3.13 below is a map of Columbus area school districts with GreatSchool ratings of 5 or more and the location of crafters’ workspaces. About a third of crafters reported having childcare responsibilities and they tended have live / work spaces in suburban areas or sections of town with better performing schools. Crafters might not be in areas with the best performing schools because these tend to be located in the more wealthy areas of town and most crafters earn middle class incomes. The crafters who have located in wealthy suburbs for the purposes of their children’s schooling often experience tensions regarding their level of income as illustrated in the following quote:

So don’t say we’re poor because that’s rude to poor people. You know what I mean? Like we don’t have any money. We have no savings, because all of our money is in this house, so our kids can get into a good school because we can’t afford college.

- anonymous crafter

Crafters’ live / work spaces are notably few in the downtown area where there are no well performing schools. My findings are consistent with recent studies that examine the artistic connections between urban, suburban, and rural areas (Gibson and Brennan-Horley 2006; Wojan et al. 2007; Waitt and Gibson 2009). Although face-to-face interaction is important for entrepreneurial crafters to socialize, communicate, and make sales, a spatial fix implicated in agglomeration economies is unnecessary.
Figure 3.12: Map of locations of crafters’ workspaces for research participants.
Crafters have built community and a number of affinity groups that connect through multiple, diffuse, online and physical spaces. Much of the contact for these groups occurs in online spaces via social networking services such as Facebook.com, Twitter.com, Pinterest.com, blogspot.com, and Etsy.com discussions. These virtual spaces are the most utilized by group members, allowing contact that fits individuals’
time and space constraints. Events and meetings also occur in physical spaces such as crafting classes at stores that sell handmade goods and group meetings at community centers. Often only a small portion of the group will attend the physical meetings. For example, I attended two Etsy Team Columbus monthly meetings that had about 10 people in attendance, mostly consisting of the leadership of the organization, but more than 140 members are listed as part of the organization on their Etsy page. Sometimes craft communities are utilized specifically for access to production resources they provide. For example, one crafter described taking ongoing classes specifically to gain access to a kiln for firing parts that go into her jewelry. Owning and operating a kiln on her own would be too costly, but taking a class at a local community center for a marginal fee gives her access to this resource.

* * *

Crafters’ regimes of practices discussed above show the tremendous efforts these entrepreneurs put into their businesses and the scant monetary rewards they often receive for their work. How and why have so many people taken up craft entrepreneurship when so much work is involved and the chances of success are so slim? In the following sections I examine what governs or guides these practices. I begin with mentalities or commonly held societal beliefs in entrepreneurial potential and the apparent hegemony of market logics. These mentalities are guided by and help enact neoliberalizing social tendencies. I also include a hybrid economies mentality that considers alternative values to conventional market logics, although these attempts at resistance largely are co-opted by and incorporated into neoliberalism. I then analyze the discourses that communicate those mentalities and the techniques of power that ground the mentalities in material
practices. Etsy, juried craft fair organizers, crafters themselves, and the overall craft market through numerous discourses and techniques of power encourage these practices.

Mentalities of crafters
Entrepreneurial potential

One important mentality, or collectively held social understanding, among crafters is a belief in entrepreneurial potential, especially in the U.S. context. The entrepreneurial potential mentality connects neoliberal social beliefs (Foucault 2008) to crafters’ persistent efforts to start their businesses despite numerous impediments. About half of people in the U.S. think that they have the capabilities to start a business and that there are good opportunities to do so, according to a report by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Kelley et al. 2012). Americans’ perceptions of entrepreneurial potential were about one-third higher than the average of the 24 counties included in the report (Kelley et al. 2012). In 2012, about 13 percent of people in the U.S. acted on this belief and were involved in entrepreneurial activities, the highest level since 1999 when the survey began (Kelley et al. 2012). The mentality of entrepreneurial potential connects with Foucault’s (2008) conceptions of neoliberalism as an enterprise society based on individuals as ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ and organized by competition. This mentality informs crafters’ regimes of practices across space – encouraging crafters to start their craft businesses and to use their human capital to engage in multiple enterprises. For example, belief in the potential of earning income with home-based microenterprise encouraged practices of starting a business for multiple women in this study.
Crafters understand that entrepreneurship is wrought of both potential and precarity: it is really hard to make a living by crafting, but somebody does, so if you only work harder you can too. Associated mentalities relate to selling on Etsy – that Etsy offers an easily accessible site to realize your dreams of earning money from your craftwork and gives you control over your conditions, times, and spaces of work. The following quote exemplifies the sentiments of potential and precarity I heard repeatedly in my interviews with crafters:

I do consider it a business and I just wish I could make more money at it than I can. Ok, I shouldn’t say that – if I wanted to sell on Etsy and I really pushed and pushed and I figured out all the tricks . . . I’ve seen some women’s work around town and even out of town, so I know that they’re – they’re making it, they’re moving up, but that might be one or two people.

- Lynne Thomas, part-time business as a jewelry maker, with other waged work

Yet, from the crafters’ practices featured above it is evident that even these few crafters who appear to be “making it” with their work in gift and consignment shops, the major fairs, or featured in the local press laugh off such assumptions about their success and report relatively low incomes and a constant sense of struggle. Many of the key strategies crafters engage to “make it” are based on market logics.

**Market logics**

Market logics are another key neoliberal mentality that informs crafters’ practices:

*The way to be most successful (in a monetary sense) is to govern yourself better by conforming to market logics (e.g. being competitive, maximizing sales and profit).* For Foucault (2008), competition ensures economic rationality in the neoliberal market economy because “complete competition, can measure economic magnitudes and thus
regulate choices” (119). In neoliberal society most people operate with a “common sense” assumption that the market-oriented reasoning is the most rational, fair, and natural way to allocate resources (McGuigan 2005). For example, in the U.S. there is a proliferation of market-based solutions to social problems such as the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) creating a healthcare marketplace where private insurers compete to offer plans to individuals who need coverage. The market logics mentality also informs crafters’ practices of competition and desiring to earn income. For example, crafters use search engine optimization to compete for top billing on Etsy. Also the desire to maximize profits and sales to earn monetary income motivates many crafters as illustrated in the following quote:

Generally I’m just a machine. I make the same things over and over and over again, because for me at this point it’s just like holy crap I can turn this $6 ball of yarn into $32, so I’m gonna do that. [Laughs] You know? Which kind of actually takes away from the pleasure of creating things a little bit. And then I’m always more profit minded rather than like oh I’m gonna make myself a blanket.

- Adrienne Raimo, part-time business as a knitter, owner of a non-craft business

Market logics are particularly important in creating and influencing the norms and rules for the Etsy marketplace and crafters’ self-governance. The Seller Handbook (Etsy 2014d) and associated blogs promote numerous strategies to maximize the profits for crafters’ Etsy stores. It is in Etsy’s best economic interest to maximize sales and customer satisfaction. Even with Etsy’s status as a Certified B Corporation (Traub 2012), which emphasizes alternative values including social and environmental performance (discussed further below), it pushes the norms of the market. Etsy’s invocation of alternative values can be seen as a competitive advantage – it competes with other online retailers by offering a personalized experience, connection, and authenticity through stories of
commodities produced by individual craft sellers. It also draws on the personal connections of crafters to bring traffic to Etsy’s site. Although market logics are extremely important to the functioning of craft marketplaces from Etsy to local craft fairs, many other values guide crafters’ practices. The third mentality includes other types of values that inform an alternative understanding of economic activity for many aspects of crafters’ practices.

**Hybrid economies**

The mentality of hybrid economies takes account of alternative ethics and values as resistance to neoliberal tendencies that emphasize conventional market logics, although these alternative practices are often incorporated into neoliberalism. Craftwork can be understood as ‘alternative’ because it often assigns value to personally connected production processes and environmental sustainability (aspects that conventional accounting does not consider). However, these alternate valuations are achieved through a market-based approach and are co-opted by market logics as a way to create competitive advantage (e.g. products branded as handmade, local, and green for niche markets). Similarly, the alternative values of crafters are present within their capitalist practices of trying to earn a living. For example, Olivia of Wholly Craft began her store to offer handmade gifts as an alternative to mass produced items. However, creating a handmade product can be co-opted by market logics as a way to create competitive advantage for Olivia’s store or for big box stores that have incorporated handmade processes and aesthetics as pictured below (Figure 3.14). Crafters tend to think of
handmaking as an alternative economic practice, but many noted how it has become more incorporated into the mainstream economy as illustrated in the following quote:

I think we’ve gone from alternative to mainstream. When Craftin’ Outlaws [craft fair] was started – I think we’re on our eighth year now – you couldn’t find marketplaces like that. Like Etsy didn’t exist or had just started . . . So there wasn’t a place to sell things like what I would make or people were making . . . it was still very DIY, it was all very kind of rough and raw and it was really really cool. And over the years it’s become a little bit more polished. . . We’re much more mainstream. Now you can find handmade shops at the mall . . .

- Megan Green, fulltime business as a soap maker, craft fair organizer, caregiver of her children

Neoliberalizing social tendencies are thought to bring disparate activities under the regulation of market logics. Indie handcrafting has been co-opted by such tendencies and
shifted from a marginal economic activity accumulating much psychic and a little monetary income for individuals to a niche market accumulating substantial monetary income for corporations.

The consumption and production of craftwork therefore is a hybrid type of capitalism that includes multiple sources of value (e.g. monetary, aesthetic, therapeutic, etc.) and can be socially and environmentally responsible, connected, personal, and ‘nice,’ although these tendencies often are intertwined with neoliberalizing tendencies. Gibson-Graham (2003) critique the capitalocentrism of conventional political economy and call for attention to non-capitalist spaces. By using ‘hybrid economies’ I concur with Ettlinger’s (2009a, 2009b) understanding of emotion and ethics as present within capitalist practice, although the discourse of capitalism often situates these issues outside of capitalism. Craft creates alternative circuits of value that are beyond just the monetary values concerned. People often use earnings from regular wage work to support the unconventional values of crafting, such as Mary’s practice (discussed above) of gifting the labor cost in the price of the items she sells. They also enact aspirational economies by continuing to pursue their businesses with little monetary reward, hope for future success, and gaining alternative types of values. A hybrid economies mentality guides many crafters’ practices towards possibilities of enacting a more responsible, connected, and humane vein of capitalism than the standard practices of global neoliberal capitalism.
Discourses of craft entrepreneurship

Numerous discourses communicate the mentality of entrepreneurial potential encouraging people to take part in the regime of practices of starting a business described above. Many crafters feel social pressure from the media or their friends and family to make their hobby economically rational. They are continuously creating craft projects (e.g. knitting hats, making soap, making pots), spending money and labor on the process, and exhausting avenues to use the objects (self-use, gifting to friends, etc.). Craft media such as magazines and websites promote the notion of selling one’s craft work as seen below in the cover image for Craft & Click: The essential guide to crafting online with features on selling (see Figure 3.15). Many magazines are specifically targeted to the craft entrepreneur such as the Make & Sell Jewelry magazine featured below (see Figure 3.16). Such magazines line the checkout areas of craft supply stores. Crafters are often prompted by people within their social networks to start selling their work. The following quote exemplifies the process:

[Recipients who received her craft as a gift would say . . .] Oh my gosh you need to sell this stuff – and I was like hearing that from a lot of people so it was kind of like maybe I should start to sell this stuff. And so I did shortly after that. [Laughs]

- Karen Buoncristiano, part-time business as a soap maker and ceramicist, with other fulltime job

Many crafters read Etsy’s ‘how to sell’ introduction and internal seller blogs to learn the norms and practices of online craft selling. Etsy employees author these texts, sometimes drawing on selected voices of crafters. Etsy selectively uses the voices of people within the community to reassert the importance of following rules and suggested
Figure 3.15: Craft publications often include features on how to sell your work such as the "Stress-free shopping & selling" feature on the cover of *Craft & Click: The essential guide to crafting online*. Image source: http://the-gingerbread-house.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/crafts-magazines.jpg

Figure 3.16: Magazines such as *Make & Sell Jewellery* promote craft entrepreneurship. Image source: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9vkw9Q05sE1/UtU2ODh90FI/AAAAAAAAARM/SESoNKSXhlo/s1600/M&SJan14FrontCover.jpg
strategies. Sellers quoted in these blog posts often reference how playing by the rules or following the norms has helped them be successful. The following quote illustrates how many crafters engage with Etsy’s tutorials:

Based on newsletter e-mail type things – and I always read them because they have ones on improving your photography, marketing, how to use social media, pricing . . . it’s not anything that you have to do, but I think it’s useful information. I mean, I’ve done some of it. You know you try but . . .

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

Etsy presents itself through its website as an easily accessible site of potential for making a craftbased livelihood. The site prominently displays the potential for selling in the title of the html page “Etsy – Your place to buy and sell all things handmade, vintage, and supplies” and a “sell” link in the top left corner of the home page. Once a viewer clicks on the sell link, the “Learn how to sell page” (http://www.etsy.com/sell?ref=so_sell) (Etsy 2014a) loads with a simplified, stylized overview of the selling process that emphasizes ease of access and potential for a more satisfying relationship to work (see Figures 3.17 and 3.18 below). The page begins stating “Turn your passion into a business” with a button to “open an Etsy shop.” It continues emphasizing access to a global market place of 30 million buyers, more money for sellers, and expressing one’s creativity. Etsy emphasizes alternative values of passion associated with creative work, rebuilding “human-scale” economic relations, and control over times and spaces of work (especially for women with children). Personal testimonials on the bottom of the page reinforce these ideas, such as this quote from seller Seven Ply “I was instantly hooked on the idea that I could make a living doing what I loved most while staying home with my newborn” (Etsy 2014a). Entrepreneurial potential is also communicated through The Seller Handbook (Etsy 2014d), a collection of posts on The Etsy Blog. About twice a
Figure 3.17: "Learn how to sell on Etsy" webpage encouraging crafters to turn their "passion into a business." Image source: https://www.etsy.com/sell/?ref=ftr

Figure 3.18: From Etsy's "Learn how to sell" webpage encouraging crafters to grow their business with Etsy. Featured in the images are young women, couples, and families. Image source: https://www.etsy.com/sell/?ref=ftr
week Etsy community team members write posts with advice on business-oriented topics. About once a month Etsy community team members post an interview with a selected crafter on quitting your day job in the “Quit your day job blog.” Every two or three days they post a “Featured Shop.” Etsy’s web site also provides weekly business statistics that emphasize potential by showing continued growth of the craft market in the aggregate.

Etsy’s discourses help create and reinforce the norms of the marketplace by establishing rules and suggesting strategies. Often crafters whose shops are highlighted in these discourses for following the norms experience a boost in sales from the exposure, which also reinforces the importance of following the rules so your shop might be featured. Etsy’s discourse is built through the voices of crafters, but it is a selected and edited set of voices. Etsy has been accused by some of its members of deleting comments and/or revoking privileges to post on discussion forums when users question corporate decisions. Etsy’s policies for their community spaces call for treating others with respect and not disparaging a specific member, shop, or item with “nonconstructive, negative posts.” In the last two years 178 people were muted from the forums for violating policies according to an interview with Etsy Chief Executive Officer Chad Dickerson (Malik 2013). Etsy’s stories of individual success untempered by critical voices encourage aspiring entrepreneurs to take up online selling and continue pursuing it despite the chance of reaching such success oneself being rare. Crafters’ discourses about their entrepreneurship acknowledge the precariousness of trying to earn a living from their work and the importance of a DIY ethic. Most can cite a successful case of a person who is able to make a living from crafting, which serves as encouragement.
I have identified numerous discourses that communicate one facet of the market logic mentality, competition and the regimes of practices of achieving visibility in spaces of competition. Read (2009) describes neoliberalism as creating competitive subjects through various tactics. Many crafters build an understanding of their own potential as sellers within the craft market by reading Etsy’s ‘how to sell’ introduction and internal seller blogs. These discourses encourage crafters to be competitive, particularly in the context of standing out among the million shops on Etsy. The Etsy Blog often couches the calls for competition in language to soften the negative connotations associated with it, such as in this except:

. . . we sometimes think of “competition” as a dirty word. But being competitive doesn’t have to be ugly. Competition is what makes the Etsy marketplace so vibrant — sellers of all kinds are continually trying to satisfy customer needs in innovative ways.

- from The Etsy Blog, “5 Steps to Stand Out from the Competition,” by Jeff Shah

Etsy normalizes competition through such statements on its site.

Yet, many of the participants talk of crafting as an economy with alternative values and what they describe as alternative illustrates the how they imagine the ‘regular’ economy. The crafters’ discourse on the regular economy emphasizes pursuing profit; maximizing monetary value by mass producing items in low wage countries (e.g. China); producing standardized products of poor quality; and competing ruthlessly. However, in practice regular capitalism might be full of benevolent acts (Ettlinger 2009). The following quote from a focus group participant illustrates the yearning for creativity and authenticity through localized and personalized production in opposition to mass produced goods:
Human beings are naturally driven to create things and I think especially in a society where much of our interaction is online and many of the things we consume in daily life are mass manufactured by people that we’ll never meet in countries that are on the other side of the planet that it’s cathartic to get back, to get your hands dirty, you know?

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

Workers and scholars often view creative industries as alternative economic spaces in relation to hegemonic corporate capitalism and the socially unacceptable parts of the employee relations (Crewe, Gregson, and Brooks 2003). Although most crafters shared an opposition to mass production, they practiced it selectively. Many were major consumers of handmade goods such as soaps, clothing, bags, art work, etc. Yet overall crafters were immersed in a culture of mass produced consumer goods. Most had relatively inexpensive and accessible mass produced items such as smart phones, laptops, and automobiles that allowed these crafters the time and money to pursue their craft making. Even many of the supplies that go into their handmade objects are conventionally produced due to cost restrictions as explained in the following quote:

And I have stuff on [Etsy that says] like “do you want me to use organic or green or whatever, blah, blah, blah, local?” And then [customers are] like “no.” Well, because it does cost extra, I’m not buy $18 a yard organic fabric because I want, when you know it would cost an extra $30 or whatever to go this way and I’ve never had anyone take me up on it.

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

The discourses discussed above are some of the ways mentalities of entrepreneurial potential, market logics, and hybrid economies are communicated to entrepreneurial crafters, but there are also specific tactics and strategies used by various actors to ground these mentalities in crafters everyday practices.
Techniques of power related to craft entrepreneurship

Multiple techniques of power connect neoliberal societal mentalities with crafters’ regimes of practices. In the following section I examine these techniques in terms of how power functions at various scales. I categorize these techniques drawing on Foucault’s (1995) analysis of the micro-functioning of power and Gore’s (1995) related categories of surveillance, normalization / exclusion, distribution in space, classification, individualization / totalization, and regulation. I also use Ettlinger’s (2011) analytic framework to consider how power is mobilized to target different scales: individuals (disciplinary power), populations (biopower), or both (modern power).

Surveillance

Crafters encounter numerous techniques of disciplinary power targeted at individuals that can be classified as surveillance, such as “supervising, closely observing, watching, threatening to watch, and avoiding being watched” (Foucault 1995; Gore 1995). Crafters’ online and in physical selling spaces compete by continuously watching each other to adopt practices (e.g. effective display techniques) and monitoring violation of selling space rules as illustrated in the following quote:

There was a guy who said he did original wood carvings and stuff and they were imported and so everybody at the show reported them . . .At the time I didn’t have enough guts to complain, but then I guess all the other people complained and that booth was not there this time.

- anonymous

Etsy enforces its marketplace policies by requiring sellers to “maintain a transparent shop” (Etsy 2014c). Sellers are audited if aspects of their shop have been flagged for review by the Marketplace Integrity and Trust and Safety Team (MITS), a computerized
detection system called SCRAM (Systems for Catching Resellers and Abusers of the Marketplace) that analyzes 60 different indicators for suspect behaviors, or other Etsy users. Etsy calls on the community to report violators, but crafters also use surveillance and subsequent reporting of violations as a competitive strategy. For example, the following quote from a blog on the craft business explains how surveillance might be used as a tool for crafters to compete:

Someone on Etsy, YOUR COMPETITION, most likely, turns you in to the company that owns the rights to the images or copyrights. They don’t turn you into Etsy, Etsy doesn’t care, if they did there wouldn’t be one Disney or Pixar or the million other things that are blatant copyright infringement. The companies DO care, but they aren’t pouring over Etsy looking either, because they would have to hire full time people just for that . . . Someone HAS to report you to them for them to act on it. [Emphasis in original]

- You have all heard it – “My shop on Etsy was shut down for copyright infringement” from Handmadeology: The science of handmade

Crafters with copyright violations on Etsy can have their items removed and their shops closed. Beyond copyright violations surveillance is also used to police the copycat issue described in the practices section above. For example Kelly Z used surveillance to turn in her competition on Etsy for copying her designs. To meet the standard of selling handmade items on Etsy sellers have to list and describe the contribution of everyone involved in collective production on the shop’s About page. Crafters who are audited for questionable handmaking have to submit extensive documentation for review including photographs of the various steps in their making process (some of which might give away trade secrets). For example, the following quote on a craft business blog illustrates the process:

Etsy’s integrity department sent me a questionnaire which included 3 parts and about 15 questions . . . The e-mail went on to explain that they had reason to believe I wasn’t complying with their rules. It was made clear that I needed to
defend myself, but they did not state what they were accusing me of. I thought I was complying with all of the rules on Etsy, so I was very confident in filling out and returning the integrity report. They required receipts for my supplies, pictures of my workspace, and photos of myself and the person who works with me.

- Lisa Jacobs, Etsy shop suspended! What you need to know, from Handmadeology

As a result of this audit Lisa’s shop was closed, which brings us to the next techniques of power: normalization / exclusion.

Normalization / exclusion

Crafters are guided by techniques of power that normalize through “invoking, requiring, setting or conforming to a standard, and defining the normal” (Gore 1995, 171) and conversely exclude through “tracing the limits that will define difference, boundary, zone, and defining the pathological” (Gore 1995, 173; Foucault 1995). I identify these techniques below and elaborate on them in the following paragraphs. Low barriers to entry and creating discourses on selling encourage the mentality of entrepreneurial potential and connect it to crafters’ practices of starting a business. Changes in Etsy rules to allow scaled up production normalize the neoliberal mentality of market logics guiding crafters to try to maximize profits. Etsy conforms to standards of the B corporation certification connecting the mentality of hybrid economies to corporate practices. Banishment from the Etsy marketplace for violating rules and the removal of critical talk from their forums are techniques of exclusion that connect to crafters’ practices of following rules and conducting critical discussions off site.

Low barriers to entry in various craft marketplaces invoke the mentality of entrepreneurial potential and connect it to crafters’ regimes of practices of starting a
business and finding a market. Hobby crafters see other people with craft businesses and try to mimic them, exemplifying a DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic. The DIY ethic prevails in the craft industry because of the individualized nature of much of the work and the relative ease of entry. Minimal barriers to entry for non-juried craft sales spaces (although there are relatively few of these) and Etsy.com operate at the scale of individuals as a disciplinary technique of power to foster their participation. The majority of the research participants sell on Etsy.com because of the large potential market, ease of entry, and control of time and space of work. Signing up with the Etsy website and creating a store only takes a few minutes and minimal Internet skills. The Etsy market space is not juried (so any work can get in). There is a minimal investment of 20 cents to list an item for four months and 3.5 percent of the value when and if the item sells (Etsy 2014a). Basic internet skills (such as uploading pictures and filling in text boxes) are the only technical skills required. By using the internet for peer-to-peer distribution crafters can work from home as long as they have access to a fairly fast internet connection (that can upload images), means of shipping, and the supplies and spaces to do their craft as illustrated by the practices of numerous crafters in this study. Shultz (2011) has found that midsized cities contain higher concentrations of Etsy accounts, which challenges the dominance of large population cities in cultural production. However, due to these low barriers to entry that help to mobilize crafters to become entrepreneurs, there are now about a million shops on Etsy, which makes it difficult for individuals’ work to get attention.

Creating discourses on selling is another technique of normalization that invokes the mentality of entrepreneurial potential and connects it to crafters’ practices of starting a business and finding a market. Etsy and craft media invite crafters to sell and explain
best practices through seller discourses discussed above such as blogs, guides, magazines, and books. Crafters learn to sell and conceptualize their work through these important resources.

A recent shift in Etsy policy has served as a technique of normalization invoking crafters to conform to market logics to maximize sales and profits by scaling up production. When Etsy began in 2005 it restricted shops to selling items “handmade by the seller” (Engelhardt 2012), which largely limited sellers to individual production. Successful sellers were unable to scale up production and create and sell more volume. For example, an individual crafter can only knit so many scarves in a day no matter how many orders come in. The inability to scale up also limits Etsy’s ability to increase profit through increasing sales volume of their successful sellers. In 2007, Etsy began allowing collectives (multiple people working together to sell through the same account) and production assistants (who handle outsourced aspects of production). Collective members were required to share the same physical space to help with production or shop management (Etsy 2013a). Etsy changed its handmaking policy in autumn of 2013 to allow crafters to increase the scale of production by hiring help and working with outside manufacturers. Collaborations are no longer geographically bounded, which was formerly a violation of Etsy’s handmaking policies. The rule change allows further diffusion of crafters’ spatial practices, although it was too soon to see how the rule has changed crafters’ production and only a few crafters in this study were at the level of needing to scale up production. Critics of the policies think this shift goes against the original ethic of Etsy and will make it more difficult for individual sellers / producers to compete. This quote by a successful seller shows her conflict regarding the policy:
I think that’s what made Etsy so cool, was that when you bought something on Etsy you knew that somebody made this themselves and now you don’t know anymore . . . some of them have become so popular that they need other people to help them – it’s a double edge sword, because I’m almost there . . . it will still be handsewn by a mom it just may not be me personally doing it and it’s good that Etsy will allow that, because I feel like I am almost there to that point.

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

Etsy conforms to standards connecting the mentality of hybrid economies to corporate practices. Etsy has become a Certified B Corporation™, a technique of power that brands it as a company with alternative values (Traub 2012). The certification is based on an external evaluation of social and environmental performance that considers impacts of corporate decisions on employees, suppliers, communities, consumers, shareholders, and the environment.

Techniques of exclusion include banishment from the Etsy marketplace for violating rules and Etsy removing talk critical of the site from their forums. Sellers found in violation of Etsy policy can be removed from the site and can no longer access the marketplace and the business they have built there. For example, the following quote from a craft business blog describes the sense of loss felt upon being excluded from the Etsy marketplace:

I’m not going to lie, I actually wept. I had invested two years of dedicated work and tens of thousands of dollars. All of that vanished in an instant . . . To be honest, I felt betrayed! Not only had I built this successful shop on Etsy, I had brought hundreds of customers to the community. I’ve paid thousands of dollars in fees. I have ruthlessly promoted the site and the promise of success to its sellers on my blog. And with a single click of the mouse, they erased me.

- Lisa Jacobs, Etsy shop suspended! What you need to know, from Handmadeology
In practice, most sellers conform to Etsy’s rules in order to maintain access. Crafters with critiques of Etsy often voice their concerns offsite, through websites such as blogs like EtsyBitch, the Better Business Bureau website, or Consumer Affairs.com.

**Distribution in space**

Techniques of distribution include “dividing into parts, arranging, and ranking bodies in space” (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995, 176). Crafters’ practices of production within their home spaces helps to isolate and individualize crafters, making it difficult to form collaborations and scale up production. In the virtual space of the Etsy marketplace, search results are a technique that displays items for sale arranged by relevance. This guides sellers to practices of maximizing search visibility through keyword optimization and online advertising on Etsy and through search engines such as Google (e.g. Google AdWords), which helps bring traffic to individual sellers’ items and on to the site. Etsy also ranks items in the space by selecting items to be displayed on the front page of the site as “handpicked items,” “featured shops,” and recently listed items. In the physical spaces of craft fairs and shops, techniques of distribution are also at work to divide areas into various booth spaces and displays. Gatekeepers of these spaces such as craft fair organizers and shop owners arrange these items based on aesthetics, flow of traffic, categorizations (e.g. grouping the displays for paper crafts together at a shop), and differentiations (e.g. placing multiple soap vendors at a craft fair in different areas), friend networks (e.g. placing vendors who are friends in adjoining booths), and crafter choice (e.g. fair applications where crafters indicate their preferred spaces). At some fairs
crafters can pay an extra fee for placement in premium spaces, such as corners, faux corners, and prime locations. Due to the market logic mentality of competition crafters compete for the best placement in selling spaces to give their craft items the highest visibility.

**Classification**

Techniques of classification include “differentiating individuals and / or groups from one another” (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995, 174). Bain and McLean (2013) note the neoliberal economic imperative in arts work for competitive specialization as opposed to eclectic production. This tension is apparent in talking to crafters and gatekeepers of craft market places. Crafters who have success at selling a particular product often get tired of the repetition of creating it over and over.

“That’s like me in the fall with our Ohio State scarves . . . I did so f-ing many of them in fall that I wanna throw up.”

- *Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant, knitter, female*

Yet, most crafters do want to make money from their work and, like this crafter, will continue knitting the scarves she is tired of to have a better chance of making money. Although crafters tire of producing the same items, coherence in the product line helps build overall brand identity. Individual crafters who do produce eclectic product lines will often separate the products in presentation (e.g. with separate Etsy stores and dividing booths at fairs between different products), sometimes even establishing separate businesses for various lines. Gatekeepers to craft fair spaces such as shop owners and fair organizers often described their evaluation process as looking for people who
have specialized on producing a particular good or related set of goods as opposed to the “kitchen-sink crafters” who do a little bit of everything. Organizers creating craft fairs specifically featuring sustainable goods serve as a technique of power to guide crafters towards alternative values of environmental sustainability. For example, Etsy Team Columbus hosts an annual event called the Eco Chic Craftacular, an eco-conscious art fair and fundraiser, which in the spring of 2014 featured more than 65 vendors and workshops and demonstrations.

Etsy’s rating system for transactions is another important technique of disciplinary power used to govern individual crafter sellers’ behaviors and differentiate sellers from one another. Etsy gives buyers a means to discipline sellers through a star rating system (1-5 stars) and the ability to leave comments on individual transactions. A seller’s average rating for the last 12 months is displayed prominently in the details for every item in their shop. Sellers strive to keep high ratings that allow their shops to remain competitive, engender customer trust, and maintain their reputation. As this crafter explained:

. . . if you have high feedback you sell more than if you have low feedback . . . I need feedback.

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

In practice, most of the crafters in this study agonize over their ratings and will make tremendous accommodations to buyers to ensure positive feedback (e.g. giving refunds even though the customer was in the wrong). Crafters regulate themselves to try to maintain high ratings by writing detailed terms of sale (to prevent misunderstandings with buyers); providing fast shipping; and giving customer-is-always-right service. Sellers encourage the rating process to establish credibility and use strategies such as
stickers and notes in packages to remind buyers to leave positive feedback. A few sellers have had bad experiences with the feedback process and sought other venues for sales, as illustrated in the following quote:

I found that like the feedback process on Etsy is really really terrible . . . you can’t dispute that stuff and you can’t, you know, you can’t get them to take it away . . . you’re up at the buyer’s whim. They could – you know they could demand whatever they want from you and leave you negative feedback regardless. So it’s a really flawed process so that’s why I don’t really put much effort into the Etsy page anymore.

- Austi Welsh, fulltime business as a soap maker

**Individualization / totalization**

Techniques of individualization include “giving individual character to, specifying an individual” and techniques of totalization include “giving collective character to, specifying a collectivity / total, and will to conform” (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995, 178). Loacker (2013) notes how competition between artists can promote individualization and Catungal, Leslie, and Hii (2009) claim that “the creative class worker thrives on competition and long hours” (pg. 117). Etsy uses personalization tools as a tactic to connect both mentalities of competition and hybrid economies with crafters’ everyday practices. Etsy’s blogs and the tools available to personalize their shops encourage sellers to provide a story to help customers connect with them. They can use their real names, provide a photo and bio, supply an “about” description of their shop, etc. The Etsy marketplace promotes the mentality of hybrid economies via congeniality through the discourse of their Seller Policy and the technique of power of forum editing. Etsy differentiates its products from mass produced ones by highlighting a human
connection through handmaking as a person-centered process, which gives Etsy a competitive advantage that capitalizes on alternative values. Many crafters describe how what they are really selling is not an object; it is a story. For example, this bio by a successful craft seller tells a lot of her personal story:

hello! i'm a stay-at-home mom of twins. i began my Etsy shop because i had trouble finding fun twin clothes. i made my first twin set . . . from my husband’s old t-shirts. time flies when you're having fun, cause now i have over 75 designs!

- Kelly Z, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of children

The personal story of this crafter becomes commodified as part of the crafts she sells. Most of the crafters with whom I spoke personalized their selling pages to help differentiate their shops.

The biopolitics of Etsy include multiple techniques of totalization to regulate crafters at the scale of the population. Etsy uses tracking technologies (such as cookies, web beacons, and web bugs) to collect aggregate data and store information on how people use the web site for site functionality and selling advertising relative to user interests. Etsy collects multiple business statistics that it shares weekly with the community on sales, number of new items listed, number of new members joining the community, and page views. The overall functioning of the craft retail market, understood here as the aggregate results of people’s buying decisions, regulates crafters when they make decisions based on large scale trends revealed through reporting techniques, such as top craft seller reports and measures of the industry by craft associations. Crafters often stay abreast of these trends and act accordingly.
**Regulation**

Techniques of regulation include control by rule, restrictions, and requirements and include sanctions, rewards, and punishments (Foucault 1977; Gore 1995). Etsy’s seller policies outline the rules of the selling space through its Seller Guide and Do’s and Don’ts and threaten removal from the marketplace if these rules are broken. Craft fairs often have rules that require goods to be handmade and exclude non-handmade items, as illustrated in the following quotes from fair guidelines:

> What kind of items do you accept? If it's hand crafted with fine detail and lots of love we want to see your work! We accept artists, crafters and designers. We do not accept food vendors or at home party business’s such as Avon, Tupperware or 31 Gifts.  
> - FAQs, *Craftin’ Outlaws Alternative Craft Fair website (Craftin’ Outlaws, 2014)*

> Only those crafters who make and sell THEIR OWN HANDMADE CRAFTS MAY APPLY AND BE ACCEPTED. It is a JURIED SHOW – displays will be inspected at the Fair and rules will be enforced. [Emphasis in original]  
> - *Stonemills Museum Craft Fair Rules and Regulations*  
>  (Stonemills Museum Craft Fair Committee 2013)

Craft fairs differentate themselves by using their rules and the jury selection process to exclude items that are not handmade or are corporate in nature. Also, craft market regulation, through the decisions of buyers individually and in the aggregate, guides crafters’ abilities to price and produce their work in particular ways. Crafters accept low wages through the technique of regulation by the craft market – what consumers will buy and the prices they will pay. Crafters in this study often referred to a tension between what they wanted to produce and what was the most economically rational to produce. Most crafters were concerned that a fair wage for their labor would make their products prohibitively expensive. For example, in a focus group participants discussed pricing by the costs of materials plus labor, but a quilter said “That just doesn’t work for quilting. It
would just be thousands of dollars,” the implication being that her work could not compete if it was priced with the full cost of labor. Crafters who sell at fairs often see customers react negatively to crafters’ prices in comparison to mass produced items at big box retailers as typified in this quote:

So I had $55 on the pillow and this guy picks up my pillow and he’s like “uhh, did you see this,” like yelled it at his wife, “she has $55 for this, oh my god” and just threw it back down on the table and walked away.

- Renee Ballah, part-time business as crafter, caregiver of her children

When a crafter asks a price for their work that includes their wage and their work is rejected or ridiculed due to the asking price it encourages them to reduce their prices in ways that undervalue their labor. The following quote illustrates this struggle and the internalization of such rejection:

. . . when I do my pricing for things I have two little voices in my head that say “you hand painted this plate intricately for like five hours, you have to charge $75 to $100 for this plate” and then the other half of me is “are you kidding me? It’s just a fricking plate and people are gonna say that it’s just a fricking plate. Why would I pay $100 for a plate?” So and then I try to compromise between, you know, what I think it should be worth like as an artist versus what I think it should be worth as a consumer that would potentially buy it. So there’s a lot of kind of give or take. And pricing is my most challenging thing that I have to do. I hate it.

- Karen Buoncristiano, part-time business as a soap maker and ceramicist, with other fulltime job

Karen’s comment begins to show the complexity of how the mentalities, discourses, and techniques of power discussed above help to form discordant subjectivities of entrepreneurial crafters.

Conclusions: An untidy web of governance and why it matters

The various key mentalities of crafters that I identify create a shifting web of governmentalities that reinforce and conflict with one another. Crafters, like other
creative workers (Lazzarato 2009), experience multiple and inconsistent governmentalities that have the potential to produce conflicting subjectivities. For example, individualized and precarious work emphasized within the mentality of entrepreneurial precarity and potential reinforces the notion of market logics such as competition. However, most crafters within a community shun the direct competition of copying another person’s work because of the hybrid economies mentality which emphasizes more personally connected economic interactions. Also some discourses and techniques of power can guide people to enact multiple and shifting mentalities. For example, how crafters engage with competition might be direct competition in an online context such as Etsy selling (more aligned with market logics) or rejecting competition in the local craft community (more aligned with the norm of congeniality). Crafters may take up or reject these mentalities on an act-by-act basis depending on their changing situations, contexts, and understandings of themselves.

Why does it matter that crafters’ behaviors and practices are guided in these ways? In societies dominated by neoliberal mentalities that stress competition as the mantra and the market as the most efficient way to allocate resources, corporate actors increasingly regulate people’s everyday lives, but do not have to guarantee rights, access to resources, and due process. The growth of Etsy repackages the promise of entrepreneurship through microbusinesses to fulfill the desire of people to balance income generation with autonomy and meaningful work. However, for most sellers income generation is very limited. Also, sellers’ autonomy is constrained by corporate and market-oriented governance through Etsy’s policies and practices. Yet, Etsy is growing rapidly with about a million shops on the site as of this year and pilot endeavors
for poverty alleviation through crafting microbusinesses in economically depressed areas in New York City and Rockford, Illinois (Mauriello 2013). By explaining the governance of crafters with reference to their regimes of practices (starting a business, taking up multiple roles, achieving visibility, conforming to norms, earning incomes, and working in diffuse spaces), the mentalities to which they subscribe, the discourses that communicate the mentalities, and the techniques of power that ground the mentalities, I lay a foundation for understanding crafters’ subjectivities (and others impacted by neoliberal governance) and how some might critique the existing system.
Chapter 4: Crafting subjectivities

It can be a little bit overwhelming, but *I choose to do it*, so I must like it on some level. Maybe I like the adrenaline rush. Who knows? I think ultimately though I’m built more like an entrepreneur. I don’t wanna work for anybody else . . . I like to be able to work at 5 o’clock in the morning or whenever on something that I know will make me money eventually, but I’m not doing it according to anybody else’s schedule and specifications . . . I’m willing to trade a little bit of craziness and you know feelings of overwhelmed for the freedom that I have.

- Adrienne Raimos, part-time business as a knitter, craft fair organizer, fulltime non-craft business

How do people *craft themselves* as craft entrepreneurs? As illustrated in the quote above, most crafters understand themselves as autonomous and free to choose their conditions and possibilities of work and do not consider themselves governed by Etsy or other gatekeepers. Subjectivity is how people understand themselves and who they are (Gregory et al. 2009). In this chapter, I use a Foucauldian framework to understand subjectivity as constrained agency, guided by the norms of prevalent discourses, practices and techniques of power, but with possibilities for critical critique in fashioning the self (Foucault 1997; 2000c; 2007). How people understand themselves is not necessarily coherent and static, but a dynamic field of multiple logics, emotions, thoughts, and identifications (Ettlinger 2003, 2004) that may conflict, as suggested at the end of the previous chapter. Subjects are not only the effects of power (in that they are produced through discourses), but power is diffuse and located in subjects who are both active and
passive in their own subjectification (McLaren 2002). Crafters’ subjectivities (or understandings of themselves) reinforce, and resist the mentalities indicated in the previous chapter. How do the people doing craftwork understand themselves and who they are in relation to their efforts?

This chapter analyzes the formation and characteristics of subjectivities related to entrepreneurial crafting by examining the crafter/artist/maker, entrepreneur, and caregiver as unique but intersecting subjectivities. Many crafters make a distinction between crafter/artist/maker and entrepreneur identities as having different motivations and abilities. I give particular attention to how these subjectivities are imbued with neoliberal tendencies. I examine the non-monetary values aspiring crafters generate through their practices and to whom and where these values accumulate. I then examine specific instances of resistances that critique social norms and counter-conducts that attempt to resist governing mentalities.

**Psychic income and agency in subjectivity**

Crafters overwhelming reported thinking of themselves as free to choose if and how to take up craft entrepreneurship despite the numerous mechanisms of governance described in the preceding chapter. Foucault’s approach to understanding subjectivity is useful in interpreting indie crafters’ comments because they are constrained and guided by societal norms (via Foucault’s early work on governance) and also have agency in how they constitute themselves (via Foucault’s later work on subjectivity).
Foucault’s later (early 1980s) engagement with the notion of subjectivity focused on how the subject might constitute oneself through reflexivity, agency and the care of self, rather than on external techniques of governance. For Foucault (2000c, 331), to be a subject means “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [one’s] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge.” This includes an interaction between external techniques of domination or coercion and internal techniques of self (Foucault 2007b) in contexts where people have some freedom to make decisions. People have agency through elements of choice in the formation of their identities and can develop multiple identities. For Foucault, thought is an essential element of human life and relations, existing before discourses, and driving everyday behaviors (Foucault 2000b). The self-formation of the subject can be understood as “an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being” (Foucault 1997, 282). People are understood as having constrained agency in constructing themselves rather than being completely dominated by structural constraints such as the capitalist economy (e.g. Marxism) or the unconscious mind (e.g. psychoanalysis).

Techniques of the self allow individuals to form their identities by shaping their bodies and thoughts (Danaher, Schirato, and Webb 2000). For example, people may decide to take up craftwork in order to foster creative practices and to identify themselves as having cultural capital. Subjects are always in a process of formation or becoming through the influence of multiple discourses that materialize into daily practices as people make unconscious and conscious decisions to conform with or question norms (Gibson 2001; Ettlinger 2011). Subjects have the ability to transform themselves through
continuously developing savior, or knowledge of systems based on critical reflection and understanding of norms and techniques of governance and how these are grounded in their daily practices. One constitutes oneself as an ethical subject not by subscribing to a prescribed moral code, but by negotiating a relationship between context and the self through defining one’s own moral practice, goals, and deciding on forms of moral being that serve these (Foucault 1990).

Emotion is another critical factor in forming crafters’ subjectivities. Feminist scholars have given consideration to emotional subjectivities, which emphasize how subjects are produced and reproduced relationally and within specific contexts with awareness to ever-present power relations and conditions of difference (Thien 2005; Ettlinger 2009a). Emotions are understood as permeating subjective experiences of individuals and environments (Valentine 1989; Bondi 2005). Such work has sought through explorations of situated knowledges to dissolve binaries (such as male / female, emotion / rationality) and conceive of emotion as “generated by and expressive of wider social relations” while emphasizing the importance of giving voice to subjects to articulate their experiences (Bondi 2005, 436). The economy as disconnected from emotion is one such binary this work seeks to dissolve (Tronto 1993; Ettlinger 2004, 2009a,). Ettlinger (2004) offers a conceptual framework that analyzes the spatiality of emotions in production and consumption in everyday life through geographies of multiple logics, overlapping contexts of spaces and times, and disarticulation from communities as highlighting agency. This framework is helpful in interpreting crafters’ practices and understandings of themselves that embody and at times resist neoliberal subjectivities.
Characteristics of neoliberal subjectivity permeate many aspects of the research participants’ self-understanding. At the core of the neoliberal subject are competition and economic self-interest as the guiding factors through a field of free choice (Foucault 2008; Feher 2009; Read 2009; Dawkins 2010). The governance of neoliberal mentalities does not operate as direct coercion, but works by presenting a field of access, choice, and possibilities (Read 2009). The new nature of work is thought “to bring into play emotions, sentiments, the whole of one’s life outside work as well as territorial and social networks means, in fact, to make the whole person productive” as part of an active life (Morini 2007, 46). Crafters invest their human capital to engage in multiple enterprises and earn psychic and monetary values. Workers perform their identities as “creative, flexible, and entrepreneurial subjects” by intensifying and exploiting available labor often to the detriment of their non-work responsibilities (Prichard 2002, 274). In crafters’ relationship to work, there is a corrosion of the worker / capitalist distinction in that crafters do not make a wage, but take what is left from the process or subsidize their process through other livelihood streams. Although economic self-interest is important to understanding crafters’ motivation, other factors matter in how people understand themselves or social interactions. Most people would not take up this work if their sole purpose was to maximize monetary value. By considering the thoughts and emotions of craft workers, multiple types of value related to their practices become apparent and invested in identities as crafters/artists/makers, entrepreneurs, and caregivers. Butler (1990) describes how people perform their identities and these performances in turn help produce social subjects. Amy D describes how she performs her craft business identity:
Whenever I have a thing and I have to be Amy D it’s a persona. Like if you see me at a craft fair I’ll be like HEY and I’ll be wearing like pink pleather pants or something, you know.

- *Amy D, business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children*

Figure 4.1 and 4.2 below illustrates how one crafter embodies and performs her maker/business persona as the “Soap Diva” through her vehicle license plate and image on her business card. How crafters take up and perform their subjectivities impacts the everyday decisions they make, their quality of life, and their livelihoods.

Crafters’ work efforts produce multiple types of value that circulate throughout economies and accumulate to multiple actors at various scales. Monetary value is important to understanding crafters’ labor and how their efforts can fit into livelihood strategies and regional economic development, but other values often are overlooked. Lee (2006) sees economic practices as constructing value in multiple and variable ways including the value of life-sustaining material success, such as money and things, and values as the practices, relations and forms of life we hold dear, such as egalitarianism and individualism. By taking into consideration psychic values, we can develop a greater understanding of how aspirants sustain their work despite negligible monetary returns and often menial supplementary jobs. Yet it is important to critically examine the value of this monetary income from crafting to crafters’ livelihoods rather than taking for granted money’s value. In other words – what does the money from crafting mean to people’s lives? For most crafters these monetary income streams supplement their households but are nonetheless crucial because the money allows the continuation of their craft practice or pays for family extras like vacations and celebrations. Such uses are integral to the care of the self or others as discussed below.
Figure 4.1: Linda Chute is the Soap Diva and she performs her identity through her vehicle’s license plate.

Figure 4.2: Most crafters offer business cards at their booths to communicate their brand and show their professionalism. Crafter Linda Chute's business card features her posed in a bathtub covered in soap.
Craftwork can be work on the self. Crafters reported gaining non-monetary values from their experiences as aspiring entrepreneurial crafters. By utilizing Foucault’s (2008, 244) concept of ‘psychic income’ as personal satisfaction I mean to encompass multiple values deemed important within individuals’ lives. In Alvarez’s (2005) study of participatory informal arts in Silicon Valley three key themes emerged related to how participants interpreted the value of their arts practice: a quest to recognize oneself as creative and artistic, personally and socially; opportunities for visibility and leadership; and the desire of aspirants for respect. Scholarship regarding work in the culture industries often highlights alternative types of values that may attract and maintain workers despite precarious labor conditions (Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin 2005; Banks 2007; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Bain and McLean 2012; Luckman 2012; Waitt and Gibson 2013), and they are also apparent in aspirational economies of crafting. Some of these purported values include: job satisfaction based on the “variety of the work, a high level of personal autonomy in using one’s own initiative, the opportunities to use a wide range of abilities and to feel self-actualized at work, an idiosyncratic way of life . . . [and] a low level of routine” (Menger 1999, 555). Ross (2008) has critiqued some of the perceived benefits of arts work as illusionary. For example, the autonomy of being one’s own boss often is tempered by the constraints discussed in the previous chapter such as the imperative to be directly responsive to consumer preferences.

Psychic income such as enjoyment may also emerge from aspiring artists’ practices. For example, for many practitioners the crafting process creates personal value for the maker in terms of pleasure and the “transformative value of making things
yourself” (Dawkins 2010, 263). Often these personal pleasures are a precursor to decisions to try to earn income. Arts aspirants may draw on numerous benefits thought to arise from the arts experience: intrinsic benefits such as captivation, spiritual awakening, and aesthetic growth, and personal development benefits such as critical thinking and creative-problem solving (Mccarthy et al. 2005; Brown 2006; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Gordon 2012; Luckman 2012). There may also be values related to people’s quality of life such as undertaking craft work to fulfill a desire to work from home to facilitate care of dependents (e.g. children, elderly parents) or retirement.

At the personal scale, about half of the crafters described their work as therapeutic in terms of stress relief, relaxation, and meditation as illustrated in the quotes below:

“Crafting calms me down. Knitting can easily slip into a trance or meditation and helps relieve the burden of my thoughts.”
“Sewing is a meditative practice for me.”
“It’s calming and clears my head.”
“Enjoyment and stress relieving.”
“My craftwork is a therapeutic creative outlet and hobby.”

- benefits of craftwork described by anonymous crafters in an online survey

I feel like knitting is kind of that space of like nothingness, where you get into that flow and that’s where the ideas come . . . It’s a healing art in a sense, you know, if you allow it to be, and if you look at it that way, not just a creativity thing.

- Adrienne Raimo, part-time business as a knitter, craft fair organizer, non-craft fulltime business

For Foucault (2005), meditation, or thought on thought, is a technique of self that can lead to critical thinking by examining the truth of what one thinks and how one acts as someone who knows the truth (an ethical subject). As a technique it gives individuals a chance to be reflexive and critical “keeping watch on representations as they appear,
seeing in what they consist, to what they are related, whether the judgments we pass on them, and consequently the impulses, passions, emotions and affects they may arouse are true or not” (Foucault 2005, 462-463).

Crafters’ experiences align with the notion of art as a sublime and transcendental experience (Alvarez 2005). Ram Daas, a pioneer of the 1960s psychedelic drug movement and spirituality, tells a story of one of his lectures that compares experiences of the transcendental qualities of craftwork with those of psychedelic drugs:

So I would tell a story about what happened to me [on a psychedelic trip] and everybody would nod and I would look over and [an old woman in the crowd] was nodding. And I thought how does she know? So, I told a further out story, like the last time I was stoned on the beach in Mexico and standing by the ocean and I lost my body and the thread broke and she’s going like this [nodding] you know? And I figure maybe she’s got a neck problem. And I got absolutely obsessed with what was happening and her consciousness, so I’d tell far out things and look to see what she was doing. And at the end of the lecture I kind of looked at her and smiled and finally she came up to me and she said “Oh I just want you to know what you said was just fine. I agreed with everything you said.” How did you know? What is it you’ve done that you can know these things? And she leaned forward very conspiratorially and she said “I crochet.”

- Ram Daas, from video An Evening with Ram Daas 1985 (Ram Daas Channel, 2008)

However, people also experience burdens to their practice, such as wear on the body through repetitive stress of some craft making (e.g. sore hands from repetitive movements and strain on the eyes from knitting).

For aspirants, logics of maximizing personal value may trump monetary values, which may explain why aspirants maintain prolonged efforts to “make it” without receiving monetary rewards. For example, the following quote shows how one crafter puts her personal pleasure in relation to making above the economic imperative to make a profit:
If a client wants me to make a quilt that I’ve made a bunch and I’m bored of I will just quote them super-high. I’m like I’ll do that for $600. And sometimes they pay it and I’d be dumb not to but I’m like and now I’m gonna spoil this business. I’m just a terrible business woman. [Laughs.] I just wanna sew.

- anonymous

This crafter’s quote reveals how the neoliberal imperative to make money manifests as common sense, in that it is ‘dumb’ to value your personal pleasure above money. But for the majority of crafters psychic income is valued as greater than monetary income to an extent. The importance of these aspects show how values beyond monetary logics create conflicted subjectivities and could be understood as resistance to unacceptable working situations of global neoliberal capitalism. However, crafters motivated by other values or selling their work as a hobby causes tensions for those dependent on craft income as illustrated in the following quote:

That’s a problem with Etsy . . .[professionals and amateurs], so there’s a lot of people who’re like you know I don’t need to make money “I just like it so I’m gonna charge $5 for this.” And you’re like that’s cool, but I have to keep doing it and I can’t keep doing it unless I’m making money. Like I’ll do it for myself, I’ll keep doing it for myself, but I can’t keep doing it as a business, that would be stupid.

- Amy D, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

For the most part, personal values accrue to the aspirants themselves, but it is easy to imagine how some of the values could spill over into other aspects of aspirants’ lives. Research by Aageson et al. (2010) revealed that cultural entrepreneurship within households correlates with improvements in children’s health and well-being. It would be instructive to see if aspiring cultural entrepreneurs engender the same benefits or perhaps generate burdens for their families through the stresses of attempting to establish themselves.

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These values are important to indie crafters and inform their subjectivities as crafter/artist/makers, entrepreneurs, and caregivers. I categorized these identities based on crafters’ comments to me and my questions to them about their understandings of themselves. Crafters navigate their lives drawing on multiple logics and values, identifying more or less with different subjectivities in different contexts.

**Multiple subjectivities, conflict, and the incoherent self**

Crafters identify with and take up characteristics of entrepreneurs and artists and caregivers. For individuals particular moments of identification may be conceptualized as points of intersections between these three identities in which characteristics may overlap, be held in tension, or have one side dominate. These relationships can be conceptualized as a Venn diagram as pictured below in Figure 4.3. Crafters’ everyday decisions may be ‘located’ at different intersections of these subjectivities, change throughout their career trajectories, intersect with other facets of their identities, and alter their use of space. For example, a crafter may decide to produce an item that does not stimulate their artistic identity, but fulfills an entrepreneurial imperative to satisfy consumer demand, and fulfills a caregiver imperative to earn some extra money for an upcoming family vacation. These subjectivities are highly relational, in that they are dependent on interactions with others such as customers and those receiving care from crafters and may intersect with other income sources and responsibilities in a dynamic manner.
When I began this research I had conceptualized these categories as a relational continuum with major goals or accomplishments including: the hobby-artist seeking personal satisfaction with no interest in earning monetary value; the aspiring artist-entrepreneur attempting to earn discursive and material value through the sale and dissemination of their work; the sustaining artist-entrepreneur earning some acclaim and/or income in combination with their other livelihood strategies; and professional artists earning the majority of their income from their arts work. However, crafters described the artist and entrepreneur identities as distinctive, and their trajectories often were non-linear and divergent. For example, a person could produce professional craftwork in terms of artistry but not earn a profit from it, or she might make something

![Venn Diagram]

**Figure 4.3**: Relations between identities of entrepreneurialcrafters can be conceptualized as a Venn diagram in which points of separation and/or overlap are possible as crafters make decisions related to their everyday lives.
with little artistry and have a professional level of commercial success. The following quote from a survey respondent suggests the blurring of such relationships:

I’d suggest that the line between professional and amateur is much blurrier these days than this survey seems to reflect. A lot of people I know are stay at home moms who earn a bit extra on the side by selling what they make; others just publish patterns as an additional way to bring in income; it’s “professional” because they've sold things, and because they are very talented, but I doubt they think of it as a traditional job or as a professional kind of...thing.

- anonymous survey respondent

Instead of intersecting continuums, the overlapping and non-linear Venn diagram seems more representative of crafters’ experiences of subjectivity. Also, the notion of caregiving emerged through crafters’ descriptions of their experiences as an identity that was not separated from, but intertwined with craft entrepreneurship.

Crafter/artist/maker

We have to create or we go crazy.

- Linda Chute, part-time soap making business

Over and over again in my interviews, surveys, focus groups and reading of blogs crafters talk about the process of making as a need, a compulsion, a desire. Deleuze and Guattari (2000) understand desire as productive – a vital force rather than a lack or a wanting. A desire to make is intricately bound up with crafters’ conceptions of themselves and the notion of loving what they do reoccurs in crafters’ talk about their making. The crisis of creation leads to problems of consumption and production, in that the crafter needs to get supplies to continue creating and needs an outlet to rid themselves of the objects they have created. Craft entrepreneurship potentially offers relief for both
of these problems, in that if artists can at least break even, they make money for more supplies and get rid of the objects they have created. The following quote illustrates the happiness that comes through being able to perpetuate the artist identity and differentiates it from the business-minded entrepreneur:

"You’re talking to someone that’s so much like the artist. Like I have “artist brain,” quote unquote. I think like an artist all the time. Oh, I’m just gonna make this and whatever. Money just floats in and out of my life like whatever. Like what is money? What is my hourly wage? What do I care? You know? And I’m just enjoying myself. If I make some of my costs back then I’m happy or all of my costs back then I’m really happy. Sometimes I think that I break even when it comes down to it. And I’m like – I can’t stop making things, so if people are enjoying them and I’m breaking even I’m totally happy. If I make a little more than breaking even then I’m obviously gonna be more happy."

- Karen, part-time business as ceramist and soap maker, fulltime waged employment

Artist-centered subjectivities often rely on specific modes of conduct and concepts of the self. Loacker (2013) identifies how artists’ expectation to be on their own and struggling reinforces and relates to governmental strategies of individualization in neoliberalism.

Crafters’ conceptions of themselves are bound up in the objects they create. Many crafters reported feeling a deep sense of personal rejection when their work is rejected. For example, one crafter described a customer rejecting one of her pieces as feeling like breaking up with your boyfriend. This rejection can be particularly hard to deal with when dealing with people face to face at craft shows as illustrated in the following quote by a soap maker:

"With the craft shows . . . people make a lot of the same comments over and over again, and sometimes it wears on you. And it’s one thing if people are being light hearted about it, but sometimes they can be like quite mean spirited. The number of times that I’ve heard things like “Oh, it actually smells good” or people asking if you can actually use it, like they think it’s just like a joke because of the concept . . . That can get pretty tedious. Especially when, I’ve done some events this summer where it’s just been people who didn’t get it, you know? And again
they can be very vocal about it and I’m sure any craft person will have stories for you about that, about how . . . I’m trying to think of a word other than rude people can be, but it’s very very honest.

- anonymous

At fairs the makers are present in the booth during most of the event and must put in the complex emotional labor of being friendly, selling their items, and dealing with rejection of objects that often embody their makers. Many of the crafters I spoke with understand their work as blurring leisure and labor (McRobbie 2002c; Gill and Pratt 2008; Bain and McLean 2012) and as such are often willing to receive low (or no) compensation for it. However, when crafters begin to take up entrepreneurship, this notion quickly becomes problematic. Many crafters specifically make a distinction between different identities as the artistic side and the business side as illustrated in the following quote:

[A burden of crafting is] compromising what I (as an “artist”) want to make because I (as a ‘business owner’) have to consider if I can realistically sell it and make a profit after all my expenses and time are factored in. It's a lot simpler when you are making things purely for yourself, and do not depend on others liking (and purchasing!) your work so that you can make a living.

- anonymous

Entrepreneur

Although most of the research participants tried to make money from their crafts, only 36 percent self-identified as entrepreneurs. Those who did identify as entrepreneurs found it to be a very important identity. For example, Adrienne quoted at the beginning of this chapter says:

I think I’m just an entrepreneur through and through . . . I’m built more like an entrepreneur. I don’t wanna work for anybody else.

- Adrienne Raimos, business as a knitter, craft fair organizer, with other non-craft business
Adrienne and many of the other self-identified entrepreneurs understand characteristics associated with entrepreneurship, such as independence and autonomy, as foundational to their concepts of self. Confidence is thought to be another important characteristic of entrepreneurs (Kelley et al. 2012).

. . . basically the entrepreneur has to have essentially an overconfident personality, because if they don’t they’re probably not going to make it. They have to think more of their stuff than somebody else does.

- Beth Dekker, entrepreneurial manager for craft businesses, art space founder, hobby crafter

Although overconfidence is a feeling necessary to motivating a crafter to begin her business, it might become problematic if her overconfidence causes her to continue even though the business is unsustainable. The desire to earn an income also is foundational for many crafters. For example, this quote illustrates one crafters’ desire to continue making money value even when becoming a fulltime caregiver for her children:

You know how they people say men’s identity is tied up in earning money and they feel like the need to earn money? I feel that way. Do you know? Like I wanna earn money and I wanna be able to care for myself and I wanna know that if something were to go wrong I could take over. [My husband] makes most of the money, but so I wanted a job but it’s hard when you have kids.

- Amy D, business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

Seventy-four percent of Etsy sellers consider their shops businesses (Etsy 2013b). Many do understand themselves as entrepreneurs and want to make money to contribute to their household livelihoods, but their versions of success often point to a different end goal than traditional understandings of entrepreneurship.

Rather than being focused on maximizing profit, most crafters want to earn some manner of sustainable livelihood from their work while balancing their entrepreneurship with the other aspects of their lives. A survey of Etsy sellers found that most wanted their
shop to grow, but 61 percent wanted it to remain a size they could manage themselves (Etsy 2013b). Most of the research participants understand themselves as artists first, or artists>entrepreneurs, so the rationality of artist often usurps that of entrepreneur. Crafters seem eager to be entrepreneurs of themselves and tend to value the investment in human capital they foster in themselves by working to build the multiple skill sets required (e.g. accounting, legal, marketing) to run their microbusinesses. There is often tension though between the initial goals for themselves in doing art/craft work and the time and labor required to do these other more business-oriented aspects of the work.

. . . as a business owner you check your e-mails first thing in the morning, sometimes you check your e-mail begrudgingly at the end of the night and you’re up for three hours because the last e-mail was awful and then you’re trying to fix that problem. So you’re kind of always on when you’re an entrepreneur. And you’re always assessing fires.

- Megan Green, business as a soap maker, craft fair organizer, caregiver of her children

Caregiver

Caregiver is another subject position that indie crafters embody, whether as care for others, the self, or the planet. Foucault’s notion of subjectivity (Foucault 1997; 2000c; 2007) and Gilligan’s (1982) feminist care ethics understand subjects as created and maintained through relations with others – an ethics of care – emphasizing connections and responsibilities to each other. Morini (2007) examines the feminization of labor in neoliberal societies and notes how women tend to transfer the modalities of care to their work. For example, caring for a child is not bound by time or space limits and women tend to treat work or their craft business this way too. The personal values discussed above are interwoven with the notion of care. For example, crafters who gain therapeutic
value from their work are performing care of the self through their practice. The following quote illustrates how practicing crafting is care of the self that engenders happiness:

I love it. I could never NOT do it. Even if I never made a dime and no one ever saw what I made, I would be making things because that is what makes me the happiest. [Emphasis in original.]

- anonymous survey participant

Crafting is often practiced as caring for others by creating and valuing a personal connection through the commodity and the story that is sold with it. A relational understanding of economies emphasizes how connections between many different types of work are paramount in “creating and repairing our world” (Tronto 1993, 103). This sense of relationality can be expanded to understand our selves not as autonomous actors, but as connected to other people through our practices. The place of art and creativity within Tronto’s framework of caring is ambiguous, but such things are important to a caring economy. Although crafting is not necessary for existence, it brings pleasure to many people who create it and/or consume it, so it should also be valued. The experiences of the crafters in this project illustrate how craft making can be important to people’s creation and repair of their worlds and their selves.

Crafters’ subjectivities are situated in social relations in that their social networks can help them to be more successful. Bourdieu (1993) understands social capital as the ability of social networks and relationships to help people earn monetary and non-monetary values. Values from craft working may flow to other people within crafters’ social networks and these social networks also enable craftwork to be taken up. Support within the household was an essential factor for many crafters to pursue their micro-
businesses. For about 65 percent of the crafters their entrepreneurship was made possible by the earning of a wage and health insurance by the crafter’s partner through work outside the home as illustrated in the following quote:

. . . I would like to add that my husband’s success has fostered the opportunity for me to run a successful craft business . . . He doesn’t fund me, but he is supportive and my business funds contribute only a small percentage to our household income. It has allowed me to grow my business significantly.

- anonymous

Many of the respondents were mothers who took up craftwork as a way to negotiate the desire to give care by contributing monetary value to their families while being home to care for their children. About 35 percent of my survey respondents listed caring for children as part of their life responsibilities. Crafters reported that their identity as mothers, who are able to stay home and take care of their kids, was highly important for their concepts of self, although it often resulted in tensions between the needs of the craft business and work as a care provider. In most cases the care of children prevailed and the work of the craft business was marginalized to times and spaces free from childcare labor (e.g. when the kids had gone to bed or when their partner arrived home from waged work to take over childcare duties). For example, Olivia Bratich, the owner of Wholly Craft!, described struggling to check business e-mails with her new baby in her lap eventually taking the advice of another crafting mother who told her to put the work off until later. Crafter Amy D described herself as “waiting on kindergarten” when her childcare responsibilities would be reduced while the children were in school so she could expand her business.

Many craft producers are motivated through care of the environment and community to use green production strategies and buy/sell locally produced products.
About 40 percent of survey participants self-identified as “green.” Interviewees were not asked specifically if they identified as “green,” but numerous crafters practiced upcycling as discussed in the previous chapter. Many crafters are dismayed by what they perceive as a wasting of materials in regular throw-away consumer culture and have honed their practice to utilize these excess materials. Being thrifty is also important for many crafters, due to material constraints in terms of what they can afford to spend on inputs and expect to get for returns. Many of the crafters believed Columbus had a strong buy-local movement and capitalized on this interest by creating crafts with Ohio-related motifs (see Figure 4.4). However, some crafters felt unable to authentically access the local as a strategy for marketing, such as a crafter who had recently moved to the area from another country.

Crafters constitute their subjectivities by negotiating their values and desires as guided by discourses of neoliberal governmentalities. However, some people resist and reconstitute these subjectivities by questioning the viability of craft entrepreneurship:

Well, the people at Etsy as you know are like relentlessly cheerful, that’s the unwritten rule . . . [Local craft organizations] really try to have a supportive atmosphere, but they really get angry if you say anything like negative, they say we’re here to support each other, but sometimes you wanna talk about reality. You know, why am I not getting sales? . . I don’t even bother saying anything

-anonymous

Even this crafters’ silent critique opens up spaces of questioning and potentially changing the norms of crafters’ subjectivities.
Figure 4.4: Crafters capitalize on representations of the local with these children’s clothes featuring a stylized image of the state of Ohio.

Resistances and counter-conducts

Some of the research participants resisted aspects of the mentalities described above by critiquing and questioning the norms and governance of crafters. A few had developed counter-conducts or tactics and strategies to resist regulatory techniques of power (Foucault 2007b; Cadman 2010). The research participants who had voiced such concerns were predominately those who had been working in the industry for some time and experienced the upsurge in the popularity of craft entrepreneurship since the mid-2000s and the formation and popularization of Etsy.

Foucault understood the relation between governmentality and resistance as mutually constituted through people’s ethics or relationships to themselves. Governmentality relies on the managing of people through individuals normalizing their
own behaviors. These norms are created by the everyday practices of people who are free to make choices about how to deal with themselves and each other. For Foucault (Foucault 1991, 352), freedom is the choice to critique or question prevailing norms or rationalities and ethics is “the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself” through the conscious practice of freedom. The governance of the self can be a conscious creation of the self, which sometimes includes critiques of the status quo and resistance to dominant norms through countering techniques of power. Transformations in society occur when cracks develop in standard ways of thinking and practice, when people are no longer able to think of things in the same way. “Criticism consists in uncovering that thought and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as people believe, making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted” (Foucault 2000b, 456). Critical thinking is needed to determine not the truth, but the moral and ethical choices that will “allow us to play these games of truth with as little domination as possible” (Foucault 1997, 298).

Resistance occurs when people at the individual level question the rationality of prevailing norms. Individuals can achieve the “de-subjugation of the subject” through this questioning, changing their subject identities by refusing the identity given by dominate discourses and taking on new identities through new sets of values (Foucault 2002, 193). The option of resistance does not guarantee it will happen. For Foucault, this questioning is itself enough to constitute resistance, although it is perhaps more effective when these thoughts change everyday practices or are scaled up from the individual to connect with others (Cooper 2006). So, governmentality can be an expression of power relations through which people can resist and possibly affect the norms by which they are
governed. Critiques of existing norms and/or engagement in alternative practices can be taken up by an individual or scaled-up to multiple people and counter-conducts can be developed towards changing existing techniques of governance. A technique of governance of the self in indie crafting communities may be critique via blogs like EtsyBitch.blogspot.com (Communal 2008), which offers a forum for voicing dissent and calling for changes to Etsy seller policies. Another technique of governance of the self is resistance through creating and participating in seller spaces with different norms and values.

Most people abide by the norms, few critique or resist, and even fewer develop counter-conducts to change norms. However, because the norms of crafting are in themselves contradictory, taking up one mentality can be resistance to another. For example, to describe themselves and their production processes to personalize production is a counter-conduct that attempts to change the standard capitalist practice of ignoring the production processes behind mass-produced goods. Another example is the majority of crafters working for alternative values beyond money as a counter-conduct to resist the mentality of market logics to the point of constituting a new mentality of hybrid economies. Economic and social incentives help ensure most crafter conform to norms. For example, access to the millions of potential consumers on Etsy is an economic incentive that ensures most crafters abide by the norms of the marketplace. Crafters also conform to the norms because they internalize many of the problems they encounter, so crafters blame themselves rather than critique the processes in which they are involved. Some of the problems they were concerned about (e.g. mass produced objects and copy cats) were attributed to individuals who were breaking the rules, rather than seen as part
of more systematic problems. The promises of the discourse often do not deliver in these imperfect governmentalities (e.g. monetary income and freedom of time and space). As noted above crafters tend to individualize these failures, but when crafters talk to each other about these issues in their social networks – a questioning of these norms and problems as systematic may emerge. Cracks that may develop in the system that might create spaces of rupture and allow spaces of critique and counter-conduct might include honest of accounting of the potential for earnings on Etsy (Etsy tightly controls this information) and employing the social networks that enable their selling to scale up resistances from the individual to multiple crafters.

A few crafters resist many aspects of the mentalities outlined in the previous chapter. The move to craftwork for many people is a resistance to inflexible time / space and lack of pleasure experienced in much waged work. Practicing craftwork can also invoke alternative capitalist practices with different notions of value, such as making decisions based on personal pleasure rather then profitability. Alternative notions of value can be understood as a resistance to purely market logics as illustrated in the following quote:

I feel overall it is more worthwhile for me to be making less money but doing what I love than making more money and not doing what I love.

- Yao Cheng, full-time business as a textile designer and painter

This love is often tempered with concerns over the precarity of work as a crafter. Affect and the “vocabulary of love” figure prominently in tethering people to precarious work in the creative industries (Gill and Pratt 2008, 15; Arvidsson, Malossi, and Naro 2010). Very few crafters unconditionally buy the dream of crafting for a living, or suggest that it is an easy path as illustrated in the following quote:
I think it is being sold as that it’s easy. So, that’s the part that is the bullshit, that it’s easy. You know, because it’s really hard and you have to really want it. And then that’s also a lie too, because it’s like well you didn’t want it bad enough. That’s bullshit too . . . it’s luck and just because you make something and it’s really nice doesn’t mean people want to buy it.

- Amy D, fulltime business as a seamstress, caregiver of her children

A few crafters problematize how crafting for money is sold as an escape for people and feel a tension between self-subsidization of the work and business price points (e.g. annoyance with hobby crafters bringing down market prices). Numerous blogs have emerged that critique Etsy seller policies and practices and some sites offer alternative craft market places (e.g. Artfire, Big Cartel, or Storenvy). One of the people I had talked with had stopped doing her craft as a business and now only does it as a hobby in order to resist what she saw as the destruction of the fine craft market by the mass availability of products on Etsy.

Some of the crafters I spoke with have changed how they use Etsy after experiencing low sales. They resist, or challenge the norm of being a competitive seller on the site. Rather than thinking of it as a competitive platform to try to sell their goods, these crafters have developed a counter-conduct of using the site as a portfolio to display their work and put more of their sales efforts into local brick-and-mortar sites such as craft fairs and gift shops. For example:

Etsy is so big and it’s international. It’s everywhere. So people being able to find you is like crazy. I think in the three years that I’ve been on that I think I’ve sold like 20 things . . . I just leave stuff on there when people for shows say do you have a website? Yep, here it is, Etsy, go there.

- Sharon Butcher, part-time business as a jewelry maker, retired teacher
Most of the crafters personalized their selling pages to help differentiate their shops. However, some sellers resist selling themselves along with the product, as illustrated in this quote from a focus group participant:

I’m not really that comfortable sitting down and telling you, saying hi this is my life story, I was amazed at how many people really wanted to hear my life story from me, you know from wherever they were buying you know how did you get involved with this and I’d end up having these long conversations and I’m saying I don’t want to tell you this much about me. Why do you care?

- Etsy Team Columbus focus group participant

When this particular seller feels uncomfortable with the boundaries customers cross in asking about personal information she changes the subject to talk about her dogs. Other crafters resist the imperative to personalize through the counter-conduct of keeping their bio and shop information focused on their craft process.

A few of the crafters I spoke with questioned the homogeneity of the indie craft scene in terms of race and gender, that it is mostly white women. They had talked amongst themselves about the patterns they saw and tried to come up with ideas as to why this was the case, as illustrated in the following quote:

We talk about that a lot privately . . . I’m like why aren’t there more black women? Cuz I feel like that is a problem. But then I worry, cuz . . . I’m having a feeling I need to articulate it in a way that is not offensive . . . Like why aren’t there more black people at craft fairs? . . . I think it’s an important conversation . . . I’m like can we get more black people? Is that racist to want more black people?

- anonymous

These crafters critiqued the norm of whiteness in the indie craft community. Some asked black people in their social networks why few black people attended craft events and were told that the indie craft cultural aesthetic was unappealing to black people who preferred new and expensive items. Yet the crafters who had critiqued the norms had not
made specific efforts to develop counter-conducts that might change these practices, such as engaging young people with crafting in under-represented communities.

Florida (2002) argues advancement in the new economy of the creative class is based on merit rather than race or gender, but others (Parker 2008; Leslie and Catungal 2012) have noted that racial minorities often experience marginalization due to racialized perceptions of merit. Leslie and Catungal’s (2012) research on the Toronto art scene found immigrant and First Nations artists often were segregated into ethnic-based events. There is some evidence of craft enclaves in Columbus as illustrated by craft fairs at ethnic events as discussed in the previous chapter. Although some crafters noticed the lack of diversity and found it problematic, crafters tend to understand the scene as functioning in an egalitarian way based on merit as illustrated in the following quote:

Like I think the important thing for me is that everybody always be invited, everybody always be encouraged. It’s sort of like the affirmative action sort of thing – I wouldn’t want to see like here’s the black section or here’s the male section. I would rather go to a craft show with a hundred well-to-do white females all making really nice stuff than to a show that is forced diverse, but everything is kind of not quality.

- anonymous

Although this crafter sees the value of diversity to the art community, he opposes a race- or gender-based quota because it disrupts the supposed egalitarianism of a merit based system.

Few of the crafters I spoke with developed specific counter-conducts to try and change mentalities and practices within the craft scene. One example of a counter-conduct was effort by Olivia Bratich of Wholly Craft to create an up-cycle site within her store. Her efforts are a technique of power used to help guide crafters towards an alternative economic mentality (see Figure 4.5 below). Olivia asked crafters to donate
their excess supplies and offered the recycled supplies for other crafters to buy. At first she tried to operate the supply closet as a pay-as-you-wish space with no price guidance in order to make people reconsider how they understand value. This tactic had limited success because it caused an uncomfortable social interaction when buyers came to the cash register not knowing the price and being uncomfortable negotiating the terms of exchange. Now there is a sign saying the suggested donation is $10 per basket. Although the turnover is slower than Olivia had hoped, the project does meet her goals of getting more supplies in the hands of crafters, reusing materials, and making some attempts to reconsider value.

Figure 4.5: Olivia attempts to get people to reconceptualize value through naming their own price for purchasing upcycled craft supplies in the Supply Closet at Wholly Craft! Image source: http://static.squarespace.com/static/512ac329e4b0997773774944/v/51a67a21e4b0213bc2c47f6d/1369864738928/2013-0151-CT-Wholly%20Craft-05-09-2013%20(25%20of%2038).jpg?format=1000w
Injustices emerge from crafters taking up a new production of subjectivity as described by Read (2009), a neoliberal mode of subjection in which market logic and individualization permeate one’s understanding of themselves and all spheres of life. Crafters’ sense of individualization leaves sellers with no one to blame but themselves when their businesses are unsuccessful and they are alienated from their fellow sellers who are the competition rather than potential allies in collective action. Corporate and market-oriented governance on Etsy can foist numerous injustices on craft sellers. Etsy is far and away the largest marketplace for handmade goods with substantial daily buyer traffic. Crafters establish their online stores and try to build a customer base on Etsy because of its market dominance and ease of access. The Etsy marketplace is a private space where rights of access and speech are tenuous and can be stripped from sellers at any time. Also, the rules of the selling space may shift at the discretion of the company, as they did last autumn when Etsy changed its policy to allow manufactured items designed by sellers to be offered in the handmade marketplace. Although this policy change allows sellers to scale up their businesses by outsourcing aspects of production, it also makes it difficult for sellers who exclusively handmake their products to compete with the price points of manufactured goods and for many it undermines the handmade ethic on which Etsy has been built. In practice, when crafters sell on Etsy they often conform to the rules of the site to maintain their right to access this space. Crafters often highlight the notion of their own autonomy, that they have choices about whether or not to sell and how to go about it, but even those who prefer to sell through another site found no viable alternatives available. Besides the potential traffic from selling on Etsy, many crafters reported that the Etsy marketplace is easier to use than managing portfolios
and orders through one’s own website. Crafters enact hidden injustices on themselves through self-exploitation as they work unpaid and underpaid hours trying to realize unrequited dreams of starting and sustaining their own microbusinesses. Some crafters work in sweatshops of their own construction by embodying these neoliberal subjectivities. Such tendencies are particularly insidious and problematic in that there is no governing body that will rescue a woman from knitting 12 hours a day on her couch for $2 an hour.

**Conclusions**

Crafters’ subjectivities are complex, dynamic, and often conflicting. Their norms both reinforce and resist neoliberal subjectivities. The crafter/artist/maker, entrepreneur, and caregiver identities examined above also overlap with other facets of identity such as gender and responsibilities such as caregiving and waged work. However, more work is needed to consider other facets of identity such as race and sexual orientation. Crafters often are driven by desire and compulsion to create selves and businesses that capitalize on psychic income. But with limited monetary returns is this psychic income enough to sustain the surging interest in the craft industry in the aggregate and craft entrepreneurship for individuals? Are these experiences of aspiration-based work applicable to other workers in the culture industries and beyond?
Chapter 5: Conclusions – Aspiring to remake capitalism

The comedy sketch show Portlandia, which pokes fun at alternative culture, illustrates the potential and precarity of craft entrepreneurship in a 2012 sketch called “Jewelry by Meghan” (Krisel 2012) In the sketch (which follows) the dialogue between two characters played by Carrie Brownstein and Fred Armisen is punctuated with a song (in italics) (http://www.imdb.com/video/hulu/vi1863164185/). They begin by discussing Carrie’s sister’s changing work biography:

Fred: She was working at like an event-planning place or something?
Carrie: Yeah, like three years ago and then she was delivering groceries to the elderly, and then like landscaping, but she finally figured out what she wanted to do.
Fred: Oh, yeah, what’s that?

She’s making jewelry now,
She’s got her own website,
She crafts each piece by hand on her dining room table at night,
She’s making jewelry now.

Fred: Wasn’t your sister like going to massage school for awhile?
Carrie: I don’t know, she was always just like, I thought she’d do something in politics. She was always really into Kucinich, remember?
Fred: Yeah.
Carrie: Yeah, she was so into it but –

She’s making jewelry now.

Carrie: You know, after she had her kids she kind of didn’t wanna go back to having a job and it’s just like we’re so happy because she’s not like floundering around anymore.
Fred: Yeah. What’s she doing again?
She’s making jewelry now,
She’s got her life on track,
We don’t have to worry now,
She got that arty spirit back,
And she’s making jewelry now.

Fred: So, how much does something like a necklace cost?
Carrie: I mean anywhere from $80 to $200.
Fred: Really?
Carrie: I mean, yeah.
Fred: You know, I’ve been trying to figure out what to do next. I’ve got a little workspace. You know what I should do?
Carrie: What?

Fred: [Reading his e-mail at a kitchen table strewn with jewelry and packing supplies.] “I’m sorry to inform you I’ve been waiting six weeks for a couple of necklaces. Where are they?” I have no idea. What time does the post office close? [Sighs] I should just apply to grad school.

Comedy is based on social norms (Hokenson 2006). This sketch resonates with social norms and the experiences of many of the crafters in my research – feeling unfulfilled by available employment opportunities and wanting to work in ways that allow them to be creative and care for their children. It ends with a critique as Fred’s character is overwhelmed by the work and signals turning to graduate school as the next hope to look for purpose and income. I do not want to present these crafters’ experiences as stories of misguided people (mostly women) doing business wrong, in that it is not making them substantial incomes. Rather, I mean to highlight why doing business this way feels right for them and what other values they are gaining from their work. Craft entrepreneurship is an aspirational economy based on multiple conceptualizations of
value – it is mostly sustained through rich psychic incomes, hope for monetary incomes, and subsidization from other sources. However, Leyshon, Lee, and Williams (2003) note that spaces of hope can be diminished by material inadequacies or incorporation into the mainstream.

In most contexts, aspirational economies can persist even if artists exit frequently due to constraints on their livelihoods, because there tends to be an oversupply of aspirants entering the field (Menger, 1999), but there may be detrimental effects to individuals and communities in relation to these exits. Aspiring artists often earn insufficient monetary values to maintain a livelihood from their work and artists may exit when they are no longer able or willing to use other sources of income to sustain their work. In the process, these aspirants may amass large financial debt, tax their social capital, experience intense emotional stress and a sense of grief with the loss of their entrepreneurial pursuit (Cardon et al. 2012). According to a 2012 report on U.S. entrepreneurs, 82 percent of startup funding came from personal, family, and friend sources and two-thirds of businesses failures were the result of difficulties obtaining financing (Kelley et al. 2012). Such negative experiences may deter further entrepreneurship and lead to exit from the area if locational choices were made based on their aspirational pursuits. Few scholars have examined how exit may occur though the notion of precarious work related to the culture industries has a large place in the literature (Ellmeier 2003; Gill and Pratt 2008; Ross 2008). One example is McRobbie (2002b), whose study of work in the fashion industry considered the life cycle and tendencies for reduced acceptance of struggle as one reaches middle age. Understanding the widespread pursuit of entrepreneurship as a process, whether it is sustainable for
individuals or not, can offer a greater sense of the values that are produced and consumed by artists’ work. Becker (2009) discusses how the process itself and failures that may be associated with it have value in the art field:

In the larger society, value is generally not ascribed to one’s progress on a creative path, the courage demonstrated on the journey, the level of knowledge gained along the way, or the innovations expressed. Rather, value is primarily attributed to the outcome, the product, about which the world asks questions such as: Is it useful? What is its monetary value? Who will respond to it? It is therefore often difficult to explain to those outside creative circles how something that has not as yet accrued value in the global economy, and that may never receive a notable reception (i.e., has not yet been deemed “use-ful”) could ever be understood as “success-ful.” It is also not easy to explain how embracing failure is actually essential to all unique achievements and should not be feared any more than the accidental or the unexpected, all of which might turn everything around and open up possibilities not recognized or understood at the outset of the project. [Emphasis in original.]

- Carol Becker, Thinking in Place: Art, Action, and Cultural Production, pgs. 59-60

Many craft entrepreneurs build their human capital through the process of aspiring to create a sustainable business and retain these gains whether or not the business is a conventional success. If most artists are not earning and sustaining significant monetary values from their work there must be other values that encourage their persistence.

However, in terms of monetary value, craft entrepreneurship’s potential as an economic development tool is fairly limited. In 2013 Etsy developed pilot endeavors for poverty alleviation through crafting microbusinesses in economically depressed areas in the Bronx, New York and Rockford, Illinois (Mauriello 2013). The Craft Entrepreneurship Program used in-person classes to teach low-income people how to utilize their craft skills to earn income selling their work. About 70 people participated in the program, 22 of the participants opened shops, and the shops had a combined total of 41 sales. An Etsy blog post (Mauriello 2013) reported some of the results of the project.
by highlighting the “success” of two sellers who were likely the high achievers of the group. I examined the items sold from one of the seller’s shops, INGMade. In the three months the shop had been open (October through December 2013) she had sold 13 items for a gross of about $350 (which does not account for the cost of supplies and approximately $30 in Etsy fees). Although it is quite early in the program, based on the results thus far the potential for poverty alleviation through craft entrepreneurship seems to be very limited for most participants.

For the majority of crafters, craft entrepreneurship is a strategy that allows many mostly lower middle-class women to perpetuate their craft hobby as care of themselves by providing some income to sustain the craft practice and justify the carving out of time and space for themselves. Craft entrepreneurship helps crafters to justify using their human capital towards a desire and compulsion for creative arts-based work – their craftwork. Prevalent neoliberal tendencies in society make market logics common sense, so even if the promise of a lucrative craft business is a chimera, chasing that dream of trying to earn monetary value seems more logical than doing something simply because you love it. I predict the number of craft entrepreneurs will continue to grow, because so many of these crafters love their work and earn psychic incomes such as therapeutic value and a sense of autonomy. Crafters also take up entrepreneurship in a context of precarious work where the demands of a flexible labor market create an absence of steady jobs – meaningful and not (Standing 2011). Although the individual monetary gains will be limited for most, there will continue to be a few success stories and huge growth opportunities for craft related business services. Also, even the small income streams reported by most crafters contribute to overall household livelihoods in important ways.
and illustrate the utility for utilizing a livelihoods approach to studying economies in
developed country contexts (Tamboukou and Ball 2003). Since crafters’ work is situated
in household livelihoods it impacts where craftworking takes place.

Where craftwork happens in Columbus largely defies the mainstream scholarship
on arts-based economies built around face-to-face interaction in agglomerate clusters or
districts within large cities. The location of crafters’ work in regions is diffuse insofar as
it is spread through multiple sites rather than concentrated in urban arts districts. Craft-
community space is able to function as diffuse across the region because online
communications networks help to mediate it. Much of the networking (between sellers
and between sellers and buyers) in the craft community takes place online through social
media websites such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram. However, face-to-face
interaction in the fleeting times and spaces of craft events can help to engender stronger
connections and gain attention from consumers in a less crowded field. Crafters’
experiences in this regard are similar to insights by Klein (2011) regarding the creation of
knowledge communities in the music industry via temporary events. The workspace of
crafters is also rendered diffuse by the blurring of the alleged division between private
home and public work sites. Morini (2007) notes a feminization of labor through the
reorganization of work space as a work/home hybrid and of time as work/social time
blend along the lines of how women’s work has always functioned – that women transfer
the modalities of care (boundless) to work. The diffuse spatiality of craftwork is part of
the informalization of independent work, which conventional work on the formal arts
economy ignores (Shorthose 2004; Morini 2007). Planners hoping to encourage craft-
based entrepreneurship as a mechanism for development should create spaces for
temporary events such as craft fairs and spaces with low-cost shared access to some of the more expensive means of production (e.g. kilns, 3-D printers). One such place that is showing promise for crafters in Columbus is 400 West Rich Street in the Franklinton District in Columbus. This area was targeted by the City of Columbus for arts-based redevelopment and the building is a former warehouse turned studio and event space. A few crafters have studios here, most of the tenants are fine artists. However, the space is useful to many in the craft community as a temporary selling space during a bi-weekly farmers market featuring local produce, handmade goods, art, and music. Art-district developments for crafters should focus on offering access to such temporary event spaces rather than non-home studios.

Figure 5.1: A well-attended indoor farmer's market at 400 West Rich in February 2014 offers an opportunity to for crafters to sell their handmade goods.
Many of the veteran crafters in this study are turning their interest to capitalizing on craft-related services as additional income streams (e.g. teach classes, blog, write books, become craft business consultants). Beth Dekker offers her services as an “entrepreneurial manager,” where she takes on the roles associated with business management and leaves the crafter to focus on their art. She also wants to write a book about the process she’s experienced working with a few different crafters. Amy D teaches crafting classes and also wants to write a book called “Waiting on Kindergarten” about balancing starting a business with caregiving of children. Megan Green wants to offer business services to connect craft workers with distributors. Olivia Bratich is moving the Wholly Craft! gift shop to a larger location. However, hobby crafters selling their goods can be a burden on professionals because of market saturation and deflating the price of goods as hobbyists supplement their production costs with other incomes.

The neoliberal tendency to emphasize competition individualizes the outcomes from people’s shops and associates them with personal efforts rather than larger scale trends that might be addressed collectively. Read (2009) understands neoliberalism as:

. . . encouraging workers to see themselves not as “workers” in a political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as “companies of one.” They become individuals for whom every action, from taking courses on a new computer software application to having their teeth whitened, can be considered an investment in human capital. (Read, 2009)

The social proximity many crafters experience through interactions in the local community reduces direct competition and could in turn create more opportunities for collaboration and collect action. Geographic proximity does not guarantee such relationships because trust is often required to form social proximity (Ettlinger 2003;
Watson 2008)) and social proximity can occur at a distance via online interactions (Jones, Spigel, and Malecki 2010). There have been few collective actions to try to influence Etsy’s policies. Some crafters staged a strike in 2012 in which 3,500 shops closed for a day to protest the lack of policing that allows the presence of manufactured goods in the purportedly handmade marketplace (Orsini 2012). The strike participants represented about 0.004 percent of the active shops on Etsy at the time. When the crafters in my study voiced concern over Etsy policies, they all talked about finding alternative venues online in which to sell rather than even considering ways to try to make change to Etsy policies. However, these venues have so much less traffic than Etsy that sellers do not see them as viable alternatives. It seems that most sellers feel little agency in terms of being able to make change on the site and feel individualized to the point that there is little impetus for collective action.

But there may be some resistance to neoliberal tendencies at the individual level. One crafter says, “I’m a terrible business woman. I just wanna sew” when describing her strategy of putting high prices on work that feels monotonous. U.S. society is rife with examples of business people touted as “great” who lead organizations whose practices arguably are horrific. For example, the Walton family who own Wal-mart are often touted as great business people due to their monetary success, but the conditions for workers in factories that supply some of their products could be deemed “terrible”, such as a factory that collapsed killing more than 1,000 Bangladeshi garment workers (McCarthy 2013). Some entrepreneurial crafters are remaking capitalism to be more humane and less terrible through crafters’ practices that might be deemed “terrible
business” by market logics (e.g. refusing to take part in unpleasant production to earn money). A few of the strategic crafters have found ways to be shrewd business people in the conventional sense of finding a market niche, building a customer base, and paying themselves a sustainable wage, while still maintaining a commitment to alternative values of a handmade ethic and care of others.

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Although I use art and craft economies as a lens through which to understand aspirational phenomena, arts economies and aspirational economies are not interchangeable. I suggest arts economies exemplify aspirational economies, although much research regarding arts economies focuses on formal rather than informal economies and artists who have become established and can perhaps no longer be considered ‘aspiring.’ Established artists can offer valuable sources of information regarding their aspirational practices during their career trajectories. Throsby and Hollister’s (2003) economic study of professional artists in Australia examined some aspects of professional artists’ beginnings including the artists’ perceived moment of establishment, age of establishment, and first income. Although insightful, it illustrates researchers’ tendencies to study people who are successful enough to become established, rather than the struggles and failures of all those who do not – a considerably larger population. I argue that these struggles also are important to how economies operate in the arts and beyond.

My conceptualization of aspirational economies is an attempt to contribute to alternative understandings of the economy by highlighting multiple logics and types of
values in contrast to the dominant logic of the market and emphasis on monetary value in discourses of neo-classical economics (Leyshon, Lee, and Williams 2003). Aspirational economies do not stand apart as separate from capitalism, but can be conceived as an alternative way of enacting capitalist relations that includes a more expansive understanding of values and a more transient notion of success and failure. Understanding the nature of aspirational economies can shed new light on the livelihood strategies of individuals and the contributions of dreamers to regional economies.

Although much scholarship has focused on professional artists, researchers might turn their attention fruitfully to how the efforts of aspirants and the process of becoming (or not) influences practitioners' lives and regional economies. How aspirational economies are experienced and sustained by practitioners is a particularly salient issue in understanding the landscape of employment in post-industrial economies. The arts labor market exemplifies neoliberal employment trends regarding tendencies of risk, flexible specialization, project work, low or no-pay, and self-employment (Banks et al. 2000; Ellmeier 2003; Gibson and Kong 2005) and workers in the culture industries face labor inequalities along lines of race and gender identities (Leslie and Catungal 2012). Self-employed arts workers often are engaged in informal work largely outside the purview of formal mechanisms for measurement, social policies for worker welfare and taxation, and cultural development initiatives that focus on larger firms (Williams, 2006).

For power brokers concerned with regional economic development such as government officials and planners, encouraging smart aspiration and fostering the establishment of aspirants as professionals can lead to monetary gains in the economy as well as the generation of many other types of value. I am not discounting the value of
‘artistic dividends;’ rather, I am developing inclusive knowledges by extending the conceptualization to encompass the well-being of the neoliberal subjects producing the ‘dividends’ as well as the variety of values produced by their practices. Aspiring artists’ attempts to connect with audiences often are unrequited, but when external investments are made that are not returned that money leaves the local community. Smart aspiration might include encouraging local spending on aspiration-based consumption by brokering local networks among aspirants (e.g. connecting artists with local web designers).

Secondary incomes from aspiring arts work may help to stabilize economically depressed communities (Oberhauser 1995; Aageson et al. 2010), and if aspirants are able to quit their day jobs by taking up their arts work full-time, they have created an employment opportunity for someone to replace them and their business may eventually grow to the point they hire employees. One of the most important factors for successful entrepreneurship is experience (Rotefoss and Kolvereid 2005), so it makes sense to encourage aspirants to build on their experiences. Local production and consumption taken up by aspirants may help foster local consumption-driven and export-oriented regional economies (Markusen and Schrock 2009) and help build local tax bases. Also, for Leadbeater and Miller (2004), people who fit the pro-amateur distinction can serve as ‘disruptive innovators’ whose innovations may be taken up by entrepreneurs to create new economic opportunities.

Although this dissertation positions craftwork as aspirational economies there are still numerous questions to consider regarding how such economies function across multiple contexts and fields of aspiration. Are aspirants wasting resources or creating alternative types of value that help them in their lives and improve their communities?
Are aspirants pulling down prices for artists, making it difficult for professionals to survive or are they providing a market for professionals to serve as teachers and suppliers? Are there more aspirants fueling the ‘creative’ economy than artists and does their presence provide dividends to the places they inhabit? How do aspirants’ identities (such as race and gender) and spatial contexts (such as rural and suburb) affect their abilities to professionalize? If we are all encouraged to be entrepreneurs now, researchers need to focus on how peoples’ desires, passions, and drives are mutually constructed with their ‘Economic’ behaviors. A focus on aspirants and how they attempt to enact their dreams can enrich scholarship on economies and cultures by showing the messy and contested nature of becoming established, the failures hidden by examining only professionals, and the multiple types of values that are generated along the way.

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What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?

- Michel Foucault, On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of work in progress, (Foucault 1991, 350)

I would say success has to do with your personal satisfaction. Are you happy? Are you reaching people, finding an audience who appreciates your work? It isn’t necessarily the money you make or the profits you earn which contributes to feeling successful in my opinion. Just knowing that I met people who like my creations and validated my expression goes a very long way toward my perception of being successful.

- anonymous survey participant

Many crafters who try to earn money from their work often implicitly are attempting to answer Foucault’s calls for making their working lives a work of art. They are trying to turn away from unsatisfying waged work for other people and are drawing
on alternative values to care for themselves and others. Their efforts conform to, resist, and help create neoliberal social tendencies, but maybe these contradictions offer a space of possibility. Feher (2009) calls for embracing the neoliberal condition utilizing it to express aspirations and demands unanticipated by neoliberal promoters – working towards change through existing norms by crafting new meanings and uses. Craft entrepreneurship could utilize these bonds as the very cracks needed to foster change. For example, Etsy uses a strategy of creating localized teams that network crafters together to hone more competitive selling strategies. However, once these networks are established the teams might give a place for crafters to scale up resistances and share their critiques and counter-conducts with others.

In conclusion, we can see in practice that most crafters struggle to make substantial incomes from their entrepreneurship. Yet their efforts are sustained by their abilities to subsidize their work through other channels such as their own waged work or the work of other household members and the alternative values gained from their participation. Although few crafters make substantial incomes from their work, major gatekeeping corporations like Etsy are able to capitalize on these aspirations, both through the percentages they take from success sales and the “long tail” of minimal listing fees from hundreds of thousands of sellers (Anderson 2006). With the seeming renaissance of handmade goods through online sales, perhaps the growth in consumption of craft entrepreneurship is the major growth market. Crafters themselves gain so many other types of value from their work that their efforts will likely continue long into the future. Crafters’ experiences exemplify neoliberal social tendencies, which often purport to offer deregulation but regulate in different ways. Crafters regulate themselves, often
according to the rules and norms that come from Etsy’s corporate governance and oversight from online technologies reporting taxable incomes. As working lives become more precarious aspirational tendencies permeate more people’s experiences, through mechanisms such as unpaid internships. Studying how aspirants draw on multiple types of value in pursuit of their hopes and dreams will be increasingly important to understanding the functioning and perhaps remaking of economies and spaces.
References


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Appendix A: Crafting survey questions

Crafting Survey questions:

If you work as a crafter please complete the following survey on crafter values, practices, and strategies for earning a livelihood. The survey consists of 25 questions and should take about 10 minutes to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you can refuse to answer or stop the survey at anytime. Your answers will be anonymous. My contact information is at the end of the survey if you have any questions or concerns about the research.

1. What type of craft(s) do you practice?

________________________________________________________________________

2. What are some benefits of doing your craftwork?

3. What are some burdens of doing your craftwork?

4. How much time a month do you spend doing your craft?

5. How much money do you spend on practicing your craft in a year?

6. Where do you do your craftwork? (circle all that apply)

   home
   studio
   craft center
   friend's home
collective art space

church

other _________________________

1. What is the approximate location of the place you do most of your work:
   1. city ________________________ (e.g. Columbus)
   2. state _______________________ (e.g. Ohio)
   3. nearby intersection ________________ (e.g. High St & Tibet St)

7. Do you try to make money doing your craftwork?
   yes
   no

If NO:
7a. Why not? (then skip to question 8)

If YES:
7a. Why do you want to make money from doing your craftwork?

7b. What percentage of your income comes from crafting?
   _________________________

7c. How much money do you make from your craftwork in a year?
   _________________________

7d. How do you decide what crafts to produce and sell?

7e. How is the price determined for the crafts you sell?

7f. How do you distribute / sell your craftwork? (circle all that apply)

to your social network (friends & family)

online distributor web sites such as Etsy
craft fairs
local craft stores

your own store (brick & mortar)
your own online store
flea markets
other: _________________________
7g. Where are your crafts distributed / sold to? (circle all that apply)

- urban Columbus
- suburban Columbus
- surrounding cities and town
- surrounding rural areas
- online to local people
- online to non-local people
- other urban areas
- other rural areas
- other ________________________________

7h. Do you report your craft making income on your taxes? Why or why not?

8. How do you fund your craftwork?

9. What is your gender?

- female
- male
- other

10. What is your age?

- 18 – 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 – 45
- 46 – 55
- 56 – 65
- 66 – 75
- 80+

11. What ways do you earn income? Approximately how much is your total household yearly income?

12. Is your main job arts related?

- yes
- no

13. Do people in your household pool their resources to earn a livelihood?

- yes
- no

13b. If yes, what ways do other people in your household earn income?
14. **How do people in your household receive health care benefits?**

From my waged / salaried employment
From another member of the household's waged / salaried employment
Self-employed insurance
government benefits
no insurance
other: ________________

15. **What would help you be able to keep practicing your craft and earn money at it?**

16. **Is there any other information you want to offer that you think is important for understanding crafters practices?**

17. **What are some other responsibilities you manage in your life?**

**Thank you for your time and efforts!** If you would be interested in participating further in this research project through being interviewed, taking part in a focus group, providing participant feedback, or hearing research outcomes please contact Jessica Barnes at:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jessica Barnes</th>
<th>For questions about your rights as a participant this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Geography, Ohio State University</td>
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<td>1070 Derby Hall, 154 N Oval Mall</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:barnes.418@osu.edu">barnes.418@osu.edu</a></td>
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Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions

Semi-structured interview questions:

A. For crafters:

1. What type of crafts do you practice?
2. What are some benefits of doing your craftwork?
3. What are some burdens of doing your craftwork?
4. Why do you do craft work?
5. How have you learned your craft?
6. How much time a month do you spend doing your craft?
7. How much money do you spend on practicing your craft in a year?
8. Where and when do you do your craftwork?
9. What are your working conditions like? Associated benefits & burdens?
10. What is your typical work routine like?
11. Do you feel like part of an artists' community?
   - Do you try to make money doing your craftwork?

If NO:
7a. Why not? (then skip to question 8)

If YES:
7a. Why did you decide to try (& continue trying) to make money from your work?

7b. How have you learned the craft business?

What percentage of your income comes from crafting?

7c. How much money do you make from your craftwork in a year?

7d. How do you decide what crafts to produce and sell?

7e. How is the price determined for the crafts you sell?

7f. How do you distribute / sell your craftwork?

If you sell on Etsy what has your experience been like?

7g. Where are your crafts distributed / sold to?

7h. Are there tensions between your artistic vision & the craft market? How do you reconcile these?

7i. Do you integrate your social network into marketing? Associated benefits & burdens?

- How do you fund your craftwork?

- How does your crafts work fit with other responsibilities?

- What is your age?

- What ways do you earn income?

- Is your main job arts related?

- Do people in your household pool their resources to earn a livelihood?
18b. If yes, what ways do other people in your household earn income?

- How do people in your household receive health care benefits?

- What burdens, restrictions, limitations, & problems do you encounter trying to do your work? How might these problems be overcome?

- What methods would be effective for sharing helpful practices and information?

- Is there any other information you want to offer that you think is important for understanding crafters practices?

B. For craft retailers:

1. How do crafters get their items in your store?

2. What percentage of applicants are successful at getting their items in your store? What percentage of crafters sustain their sales over an extended period of time?

3. How much do you charge in terms of commission for sales?

4. Do you also sell supplies and training? If so, what portion of your business is sales to other crafters?

5. What value do indie crafts have (in terms of money and other values)?

6. Where do the crafts in your store come from and where are most of your customers from? Is local production an important aspect of your sales?

7. Do you feel there is a crafting community in Columbus? If so, how does your venue fit into that community?

8. Are you also a crafter? What made you decide to go into retail business selling crafts?

9. How does selling crafts fit into your livelihood?

10. Is there any other information you want to offer that you think is important for understanding crafting retailers practices?
C. For craft consumers:

1. Why do you buy indie crafts?

2. What do you value about indie crafts?

3. How much money do you spend on indie crafts a year?

4. How do you choose which items to buy and how much to pay for them?

5. Where do you buy your crafts?

6. Is there any other information you want to offer that you think is important for understanding craft buyers?