



# Paradoxes of openness and distinction in the sharing economy



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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies four sites from the sharing economy to analyze how class and other forms of inequality operate within this type of economic arrangement. On the basis of interviews and participant observation at a time bank, a food swap, a makerspace and an open-access education site we find considerable evidence of distinguishing practices and the deployment of cultural capital, as understood by Bourdieusian theory. We augment Bourdieu with concepts from relational economic sociology, particularly Zelizer's "circuits of commerce" and "good matches," to show how inequality is reproduced within micro-level interactions. We find that the prevalence of distinguishing practices can undermine the relations of exchange and create difficulty completing trades. This results in an inconsistency, which we call the "paradox of openness and distinction," between actual practice and the sharing economy's widely articulated goals of openness and equity.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, Pierre Bourdieu's influence in sociology has increased markedly, including on the study of consumption and economic life (Sallaz & Zavisca, 2007). Bourdieu's formulation of multiple types of capital (economic, cultural and social) and their role in producing and reproducing durable inequality has been highly productive in a variety of contexts. However, while scholars have examined practices of distinction, the structure of particular fields, and the role of specific capitals in social reproduction, there has been less attention to economic exchanges at a micro, interactional level (King, 2000). In this paper, we use a Bourdieusian approach to study new kinds of exchanges in the "sharing economy" and the ways in which distinction and inequality operate within them. To do this, we extend Bourdieu by bringing in conceptual tools from relational economic sociology. This literature, pioneered by Viviana Zelizer (2005b, 2010, 2012), emphasizes the importance of meaning, the role of culture in structuring economic activity, and the idea that economic exchanges require ongoing interpersonal negotiations. We use relational analysis to study how people deploy, convert, and use their capital. In particular, we show how cultural capital is used to establish superior position in the context of various types of exchanges. Thus, our contribution is an investigation into how Bourdieusian inequality is reproduced via interpersonal relations in the context of exchange.

Our approach involves the introduction of two concepts from relational economic sociology – circuits of commerce and good matches. Zelizer defines the former as "a structure combining its own economic activities, media, accounting systems,

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interpersonal relations, boundaries, and meanings,” that appear “in a wide variety of social circumstances and cannot simply be reduced to firms, markets, or networks.” While circuits can exist in all contexts, the concept has mostly been used outside of formal economies, such as the new organizations studied in this paper. To date, the circuits literature has had little to say about class inequality, however, it seems likely that classed systems of power shape circuit formation, functioning, and viability. A second contribution of this paper is to explicitly consider how structural inequality, as represented by distributions of multiple forms of capital, affects the operation of circuits. More specifically, we ask: what is the relationship between cultural power—as exercised through distinguishing practices—and the robust development and functioning of circuits?

To answer that question, we focus on a rapidly growing class of circuits that goes by the name of the sharing economy.<sup>1</sup> Sharing initiatives include peer-to-peer lodging and transportation services, time banks, goods exchanges and other forms of collaboration (Schor & Fitzmaurice, 2015). We examine four cases from the sharing economy: a time bank, a food swap, a makerspace and an open-access educational initiative. We believe the sharing economy is ideal for exploring the operation of inequality in circuits, in part because many of these exchange sites explicitly seek to break down traditional relationships of power. In addition, because they are relatively new, our research sites lack taken-for-granted understandings of the exchanges they facilitate. Participants offer competing ideas and visions of what is valuable and worthy of exchange, and who is worthy of being included in exchanges. These interactions allow us to see how distinction, a key mechanism for the reproduction of inequality, is relationally produced and reproduced. To do so we use Zelizer’s concept of relational matching (Zelizer, 2010, 2012) to analyze participants’ ability to make exchanges in the face of these competing understandings. Successful sharing economy initiatives depend on creating the conditions for large numbers of matches to occur, thereby achieving robust transactional networks.

Our findings suggest a phenomenon that we call the paradox of openness and distinction. Virtually all exchange sites and digital platforms within the sharing economy explicitly advocate for open access and equality of opportunity, if not fairness and even economic egalitarianism. We find this discourse among our respondents as well as the sites’ own mission statements and self-descriptions. However, at the same time, we find considerable evidence of distinguishing practices. These displays of class power in turn undermine the successful formation and reproduction of circuits. For certain types of circuits—particularly those with less market-driven principles of exchange—high levels of inequality and displays of distinction make it hard to establish robust circuits by inhibiting the formation of matches. In the circuits that are characterized by more distinguishing practices we observe a lower volume of trading. In fact, the two most “relational” sites (the time bank and the food swap) fail to produce the types of matches that generate robust trading economies. To understand why this might be the case, we turn now to a discussion of the relational and structural (Bourdieuian) perspectives.

## 2. Complicating the good match: matching with distinction

For Bourdieu, relationships of inequality are produced and reproduced within specific fields. The concept of the field provides an analytic framework for understanding relationships between producers and consumers, competitions for various types of capital, and the possibilities available to actors in a bounded context (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993). Fields are governed by sets of rules, values, and forms of capital (dominant vs. subordinate), and are populated by actors with varied amounts and compositions of capital who are attempting to improve their positions within these fields. For Bourdieu, the class hierarchy, in which certain practices and ways of living are valued above others, results in fields becoming arenas for attaining distinction.

Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the field has faced resistance from scholars for being overly structural, and as a result, static (Gartman, 1991). In some ways, a Bourdieusian field resembles a war of position, with a well-defined structure, but a lack of movement. While Bourdieu believes fields can be de-stabilized, the literature contains few studies of transformations in the underlying binaries of taste (for an exception, see Carfagna et al., 2014). By contrast, we have chosen sites in which people are trying to either transform existing fields or create new ones that are not characterized by logics of domination. They are hoping to build more egalitarian, non-exploitative, and personal relationships. Participants in these sites frequently understand their actions as attempts to construct new forms of economy and exchange, which embody values that are different from the dominant values in mainstream fields, such as food, education, manufacturing or service provision. At the same time, we should not underestimate the power of logics of domination that participants encounter in daily life. Transcending them requires more than just good intentions and novel economic arrangements—it also requires new interpersonal relations that are grounded in alternative sets of cultural relations.

These types of novel economic connections are addressed in the work of Viviana Zelizer, who has introduced the idea of circuits of commerce. Circuits are economic organizations that are not markets, networks or hierarchies (Zelizer, 2007, 2010). Zelizer identifies five criteria a pattern of interactions must possess to constitute a circuit of commerce, rather than a market or a social network: social relationships among a group of individuals, economic exchanges stemming from those

<sup>1</sup> We follow the practice of occasionally using quotes around this term to indicate that by its use we do not necessarily subscribe to the view that all activity in this sector is rightly called sharing. There is considerable controversy about the nature of the exchanges on for-profit platforms such as Airbnb and Uber.

relationships, a common system of evaluation and accounting, shared meanings of exchanges, and boundary-defining membership in the circuit (Zelizer, 2010). Our sites are not typically fully constituted circuits in that they do not always satisfy these five criteria. Participants may be working out the shared systems of evaluation and accounting, as well as criteria for exchanges, boundaries, and membership practices. We find that these characteristics remain unsettled and in flux. For this reason, we consider our sites “circuits in construction” (Dubois, Schor, & Carfagna, 2014) to emphasize their emergent nature. While relational theorists may argue that most circuits are like this, our sites are particularly unsettled due to their short histories. Whether or not they evolve into durable circuits of commerce or are absorbed into existing market logics and structures remains an open question. We argue that one factor that will determine their evolution is negotiation around the unequal statuses that members bring to the circuit.

Zelizer's work on circuits is part of a growing literature in economic sociology that studies economic relationships that arise and persist outside the purview of traditional markets. Zelizer emphasizes the “dynamic, incessantly negotiated interactions” that characterize circuits (Zelizer, 2010:307). Within circuits of commerce, interpersonal relations are frequently contingent and emergent, in contrast to the more regularized, taken-for-granted, and sub-conscious behavior in a Bourdieusian field. The literature on circuits is small but expanding. Prominent examples are Parreñas' (2000) work on migrant domestics whose remittances create networks of financial relations in their home countries, and Velthuis' study of the role of emotion and relationships in valuation in art markets (2005). Other circuits analyzed by Zelizer (2010) are time banks and alternative currencies, which match our cases more closely.

For Bourdieu, inequality is an enduring and structural dimension of any field. For Zelizer, the relationship between circuits and inequality is a largely unexplored empirical question.<sup>2</sup> In our work, we find that dynamics of inequality are central to the operation of the circuits under construction. In sites with heterogeneous participants, it can be difficult to bridge class and other types of inequality. We have questioned elsewhere whether high levels of distinguishing practice undermine trading volume in sharing economy sites (Fitzmaurice & Schor, 2015; Dubois et al., 2014). On the other hand, in our more socially homogeneous spaces, we find more homophily, which facilitates more robust trading patterns, but also leads less culturally-advantaged participants to experience difficulties breaking into trading networks.

Zelizer's concept of matches (Zelizer, 2010, 2012) is useful here. In her account, “good matches” mediate tensions at the intersection of economic exchanges and types of relationships typically thought of as existing outside the purview of the market and its logic. A match is good when it “gets the economic work of the relationship done and sustains the relationship” (Zelizer, 2010:153). Zelizer's examples include economic transactions between marital partners, doctors and patients, sex workers and clients. The sites we study also require such matches, for without them, the openness, social connection, intimacy, and equality they promise would be at odds with the robust economic exchanges they seek to foster. It is important to note that Zelizer's concept of a “good” match, despite its terminology, is not normative. Good matches are those that happen, are viable over time, and sustain relationships. By contrast, failed matches, which we also call mismatches, are transactions that do not occur because the parties cannot come to agreement—about price, quality, or other terms, including the meanings of the exchange. The prevalence of good and failed matches is one criterion by which we can judge the success or failure of a circuit. (For an in-depth discussion of a failed circuit of commerce, see Fitzmaurice & Schor, 2015.) Successful circuits are those that are able to create enough good matches to ensure a volume of transactions that is proportionate to the number of people in the circuit and the desired level of exchange. Of course, every circuit will have mismatches, i.e., potential trades that do not occur. When those become large relative to good matches, success is undermined. Well-functioning circuits in construction should also be attracting new members and keeping them. Circuits that are plagued by high numbers of mismatches are more likely to have low or stagnant trading volume and a high number of dropouts. In our research sites, we can also identify a second type of success, namely adherence to organizational mission, a topic we return to below.

In the sharing economy, good matches happen between people who want to trade food with each other, provide or receive services, or share skills, information, and social contacts. However, individuals—through their socialization and education—also have class positions. We find that they often succumb to opportunities for distinction-making that are normative in the larger fields related to the circuits. Within the food swap, members transport practices from the gastronomic field that are snobbish and off-putting. In the time bank, some members are wary of receiving services from people with low educational levels. What remains less clear is how processes of distinction within a circuit enable certain kinds of matches while precluding others, thereby enabling or undermining the formation of a robust circuit of exchange.

The literature contains accounts of how inequality operates within the context of circuits. These include Kimberly Hoang's ethnography of sex workers in Vietnam (2011, 2015), Ashley Mears' study of modeling circuits (2011), and Olav Velthuis' (2005) research on fine art circuits. However in these examples, circuits tend to be segmented into different (unequal) levels, and exchanges tend to occur within, rather than across these levels. What about cases where there is only one site of exchange (and circuit) and where openness and egalitarian exchanges are either the norm or an important aspiration? Can people bridge inequality to make good matches? Can trading dyads form when their education levels, cultural capital, and economic capital are too unequal? We turn now to our cases, where we explore these and other questions.

<sup>2</sup> For example, at the end of the Introduction to the section on circuits in *Economic Lives*, Zelizer asks “How much inequality is consistent with circuits?... Do circuits serve to legitimate or challenge categorical forms of inequality?” (Zelizer, 2010:308).

### 3. Methods and data

We have chosen four research sites that meet the criteria for circuits discussed by Zelizer. They are also all part of an emergent sector that is called the sharing economy. The time bank, which is a form of local money, is a type of circuit frequently discussed by Zelizer. It has clear membership, a set of well-articulated practice and participation norms, a fixed exchange ratio and transparent accounting systems. The food swap is also a circuit of commerce, as it attempts to define the requirements for acceptable exchanges and sets out requirements for participation, boundary conditions, and social interactions. The third site is CraftWorks, a makerspace. This particular makerspace is a membership organization housed in a large building that offers rental space, access to tools, and classes. Here, the circuit consists of people exchanging time, skills, and two specific currencies with each other according to definite logics of value and worth. The final case, an open education initiative we call Winterpreneur, facilitates trades in knowledge, services, and social capital, which are predicated on conforming to a set of shared understandings and practice.

All four sites are located in an urban area in the Northeastern United States. To collect data, we conducted semi-structured interviews of 1–2 hours with participants and engaged in participant observation. Our interview sample consisted largely of young adults aged 25–34, because sharing economy sites are disproportionately used by people within this age group (Bloomberg, 2015). We conducted 80 in-depth interviews with active users and roughly 250 hours of participant observation across the four sites. Respondents answered a call for interviews or were asked to participate after interacting with researchers during participant observation. The criterion for inclusion in the time bank study was the completion of at least five trades, in order to ensure that respondents would be able to talk from experience. In the other three cases, respondents were recruited directly from participant observation. There was no screen for length of participation; however, most of the people interviewed had considerable experience at their site. Interview scripts across the cases contained similar questions, and transcripts were analyzed using project-wide codes. These were generated by a combination of line-by-line coding and prior analytic concepts.

### 4. The cases

We turn now to discuss the four cases with an emphasis on the distinguishing practices we observed in all of them. While all four sites display some level of class distinction, there are also major differences among them in both how much distinction we observed and the forms it took. Furthermore, cultural capital and class distinction are not the only processes of exclusion that we found: the sites are also stratified by race and gender. All four of the sharing platforms are spaces where whiteness is performed and white privilege is reproduced, albeit under a discursive frame of inclusion and “colorblindness.” Gender dynamics also differ across the cases. Winterpreneur and CraftWorks are mainly male spaces, while the food swap and time bank are overwhelmingly female. These findings challenge the claims the organizations make about openness and raise questions about how practices of work, consumption, and leisure differ by race and gender. Finally, our research suggests that the extent and nature of practices of distinction in these sites have effects on economic matching. When practices of distinction are rampant, they can prevent matching. This is most prevalent in the time bank and the food swap. In the makerspace, a structured method of managing inequality allows robust matching and inequality to co-exist. At the open learning site, exclusionary behavior was less common, given high levels of conformity to group norms, allowing sharing to proceed more easily.

#### 4.1. Deploying cultural capital in a highly egalitarian space: the contradictions of time banking

Time banks are multilateral barter service economies that aim to be an alternative to conventional market procurement. In a time bank, all types of services exchange at equal value per unit of time expended, irrespective of their market value. A lawyer who earns \$200 an hour in the market trades equally for her services with baby-sitters, drivers, and dog walkers, who may earn a small fraction of that rate. Most time banks are general purpose in the sense that members offer a wide array of services. (Illegal or socially deviant practices are excluded). Examples at our site include car rides, legal services, energy healing, mandolin and Spanish lessons, vegan baking, pet sitting, closet organizing, gardening, and home repair.

In their interviews, participants highlighted the alterity of the time bank economy in relation to buying services on the market. Many members are weary of the impersonality of market exchanges, and cast their participation as a way of helping others or building community. Mandy, a coordinator at a non-profit mentoring organization, explained that the time bank “seems to be a much more balanced and healthy relationship where both parties feel important and valued,” and where there is “a lot of mutual respect for everyone and it’s not as hierarchical as the economy system. . . of regular financial markets.” Victoria, a recent college graduate who wanted to be engaged in community-building exchanges, lamented that the market model of providing services disconnects people. Reflecting on a recent exchange with a mechanic working on her car, she complained:

I didn’t even have to talk to him after he fixed my car. So there was so little interaction there, and there was something very important that happened. I put a lot of money into him fixing my car, and there was nothing really there afterwards. That’s a lot of trust, like I had no real relationship. It’s crazy but it’s actually really normal.

Such sentiments were common. Another member, Alex, explained that even if the mode of exchange was inefficient, time bank members were found “high-fiving and smiling” after trades.

The idea that every person’s skills and expertise are valuable is part of the inclusive ideology of the organization. Anyone can join the time bank and there is a strong message that everyone has something to contribute. In addition, all contributions are considered equally worthwhile. In our research, we found that this egalitarian commitment is part of what attracts members. The bank represents an almost utopian space of fairness, dignity accorded to all forms of labor, and deep community founded on equal status. “People normally think of money, the economy. . . you get a service and you pay for it. . . people don’t even think another world is possible,” one member remarked. Aaron, a business developer working in the tech field, suggested that the time bank was “about knowing where your goods are produced, that they’re not produced in some black box and you pay money for it and you get it, and you have no idea what happens in between.” Likewise, Micah, a 25-year-old developer, explained:

I think that the mainstream conception is that time is money, and so you invest your time in certain places in order to get enough money to spend your free time other places. So it is a very money-driven thing. But I guess it’d be really cool if the alternative was a person-based thing.

Elaina described her participation in terms of her desire to support “people [who] are putting an effort into making something, and I’m paying them for that effort, versus, like, paying for some evil corporation far away who’s never even cared about this product.” Yet while members professed a strong commitment to this egalitarian and open ethos, in many cases, their practice belied their beliefs. Indeed, while all members voiced agreement with the basic values of the time bank, about half also articulated contradictory sentiments. To see these contradictions, we shift now from participants’ rhetoric to their actual practices.

The most salient characteristic of this time bank is members’ high levels of education. All of our respondents hold at least a bachelor’s degree, just over half also have a masters’ degree, and two have doctorates. Many are in high-status occupations such as software programming, law or management. They also have very high cultural capital as measured not just by their own educations and occupations, but also by their parents’. More than half have at least one parent with a graduate degree.

In part on account of the high cultural capital of these members, the practice of time banking diverges from its egalitarian and inclusive ideology. Sam, a white, 33-year-old woman with a masters’ degree, laughingly confided, “I’m going to be totally blunt here, there’s a lot of educated white lady skills on there, and not so many, you know, like I said, carpentry, and plumbing, and electricity, and hair stylist, and all those things that don’t tend to be your stereotypical educated white, [City x] lady skills.” Many of our participants articulated similar sentiments. Sam implicitly recognized the divergence between time banking as an abstract concept and actual trading practices, explaining that “what I love about it is that we could all be helping each other out with all the things we know how to do, and getting to know each other in the process.” At the same time, she feared that—in practice—the bank “replicates this weird segregation which we already have all the time.”

Often, the divergence took the form of members not offering their valuable, marketable skills in the time bank, leading to the abundance of the “white lady skills” bemoaned by Sam. Jill, for example, told us about how she refrained from offering skills she uses for her day job. She remarked, “Actually, no. I’m realizing the reason I don’t offer that is because I think it’s worth more, that I could get more money.” Similarly, members who were professionally qualified in one area preferred to try their hand at skills they weren’t qualified to offer. Corie, a lawyer and social worker, explained how the time bank “reminds you about all the areas of your life that you’ve actually learned things in, like gardening or home repair stuff. Things you never think of as skills because they’re not on your resume.” While these high cultural capital consumers may be revalorizing manual skills (Carfagna et al., 2014), their reluctance to offer services they are professionally qualified for reveals a lack of commitment to the egalitarian ethos that draws many participants to the time bank. They withhold services that are valued highly in the market rather than offer them as equivalent to an hour of canning lessons or dog-sitting. This withholding means that certain skills that are in high demand, such as programming and legal services, are under-supplied. Furthermore, demand for the amateur skills these “withholders” offer is not always forthcoming, because people want more guarantees of quality. These dynamics reduce the volume of trades and represent a failure to achieve good matches.

Another form of privileged practice is that many of the high cultural capital members treated trading as a form of volunteering. They earned many hours for providing services, but chose not to cash them in. One member explained his involvement saying he doesn’t “feel a strong desire to earn every single penny I can get for doing my work, so that’s why I already do spend a lot of time doing volunteer [work].” Rather than transforming market relations, for these high cultural capital members, the time bank becomes a form of charity. This also represents a mismatch, mixing the categories of gift and transactional exchange.

Moreover, when deciding with whom to trade, participants often paid careful attention to markers of status. Citing a background in marketing, Jen remarked that in the postings, “the way people express themselves and sell their offers” guided her selection of trading partners, thereby privileging a particular high cultural capital style of written communication. When pressed for additional detail, Jen explained that the “detail, professional presentation, and attractive wording” of the offer helped her decide on trades. Jen also described her aversion to offers with “typos and sentence fragments.” Likewise, Anna, a member who jokingly referred to herself as a “crunchy granola wholly devoted to the concept of the time bank,” described having reservations about not using credentialed professionals for certain services. As a result, she refrained from trading for certain skills in the time bank: “things like electrical work, plumbing work, home repair, car repair . . . that could really be disastrous.”

Not all types of offers are scrutinized in this way, however. Participants are less demanding in terms of the cultural capital they expect from trading partners when it comes to experiential learning opportunities. However, in these cases, the function of the time bank may be less to equalize access to goods and services than it is to afford opportunities for high-status members to acquire more cultural capital through affordable access to new skills and competences. In a world in which not only omnivorous consumption, but also omnivorous competences and learning are highly valued, the time bank may unwittingly exacerbate differences in cultural capital.

#### 4.2. CraftWorks: creativity, passion and status at the makerspace

In a former factory, members of “CraftWorks,” a non-profit makerspace, are busy designing art installations and jewelry, building custom bicycles and circuit-bending electronics. They are members of what has come to be known since 2005 as the maker movement. The combination of peer-to-peer networks and new production technologies such as 3-D printing has led some to predict a coming third industrial revolution based on small-scale local production that could revitalize communities while being environmentally, politically, and socially sustainable. With a strong discourse of openness and egalitarianism, the maker movement embraces ideals of social mobility, economic development, and democratic, collaborative production. However, we find that CraftWorks’ social dynamics are far more exclusionary than the discourse of this fledgling movement suggests.

At CraftWorks, people range in ability from hobbyists and tinkerers to professional engineers and craftspeople, with experienced members acting as instructors and advisors for novice makers. Nearly all of the research participants were white. Most were male and from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds, with professional parents. It is therefore not surprising that many of the projects at CraftWorks are technologically sophisticated, ranging from giant robots to complex circuitry. However, even low-tech making at CraftWorks creates distinction for those who engage in it when it displays distance from necessity, exoticism and individuality. Bike makers at CraftWorks don’t just fix bikes, they construct bikes that are often used for a single ride or have custom welded frames, to reflect the idiosyncrasies of their riders.

As a creative space, CraftWorks is positioned against the conventional. It’s a place where new ideas and technologies are realized and innovation takes place. Members rarely engage in mundane practices like repairing a broken washing machine or a DVD player, though surely one could do both with the tools available. Much of the actual practice at the space adheres to an ideal of creative work (i.e., work that is not done out of necessity, but rather for the intrinsic value of creating). In a woodworking course our researcher took, a fellow student was building a combined bike rack/drawer that she planned to mount on a living room wall. The rack was made from a gorgeous piece of wood and everyone in the shop space was duly impressed. Without prompting, the maker sheepishly acknowledged that it was not the most practical of home furnishings and that she was not quite sure why she was making it.

Many of the projects at CraftWorks are impractical and reflect a Bourdieusian distance from necessity. A good project in this context is one that is a reflection of the maker’s creativity, of his or her unique perspective and voice. These projects frequently involve customization and, as the woodworking instructor told us, many of the individuals who sign up for her introductory course do so in order to refurbish furniture. The ethic of customization, which is promoted on websites such as Apartment Therapy, Design Sponge, and Ikea Hackers, is ultimately one of differentiation. Customizers take a commonly produced and consumed object and make it distinct, but also imbue it with authenticity, or what many nostalgically refer to as craft.

Discourses of equality and egalitarianism in the space reference the fact that CraftWorks is a formally open environment with people who are willing to listen and help each other. Two men in their mid-30s, when they overheard a question our researcher posed to a participant about cooperation in the space, inserted themselves into the interview to attest to CraftWorks’ meritocratic ethic:

Male 1: One of the things that I’ve noticed is a lot of us come from environments where we’re used to being the cleverest kid in the room. Some of us get over that very quickly; some of us don’t, and like to argue... But, yes, there’s definitely a strong meritocracy based on, you know, “put up or shut up; what can you actually make?”

Male 2: Yes. And, I mean, I’ve been involved so long in the community that I don’t notice the status difference; because, I don’t know, I came from the point where everybody was pretty level. So, I don’t know, I guess I still have that idea.

At the same time, this participant acknowledged that new members had to establish themselves if they were to collaborate with high-status members:

Male 2: But at the same time, new people coming in don’t know how to do anything, but they want to just make stuff—sometimes they have no direction—they don’t know where to go, they don’t know who to, like, work with. And if they’re, like, “Hey, can somebody help me out with this?” it’s, like, “Who is that person? I don’t know who that is.” Versus if somebody’s here who I’ve seen in the community, working in the shop, like, I’m just going to do it for them for beer.

Having a vision or an idea is important in order to establish oneself in the space. Vision adheres closely to the ideal of the creative worker, one who does not produce out of necessity, but rather out of a disinterested desire to execute an internally-derived vision. Thus the creative ethic refuses the realm of necessity, or objective need. The maker, with his or her disinterested orientation toward work, provides the *illusio* required to sustain the game of distinction, masking (or

misrecognizing) the reproduction of hierarchies with a seemingly impartial orientation toward creative work. While in theory anyone can participate in making and thus the social life of the community, in practice, making tended to privilege those with a disinterested orientation toward their activities. High-status makers preferred to make matches with other high-status equivalents.

At CraftWorks, the game of distinction limits the number of possible exchanges an actor can make. For high status actors, exchanges with others who do not approach making in a disinterested manner leads to a risk of contamination, via involvement in worldly, non-creative endeavors. One high-status maker explained his interactions with new members, and whom he tended to associate with:

I always ask what kind of background they have and what they want to do with their newfound powers once they get them. Some people already know how to build things. They have a situation where they say, “If I could just make these two pieces of metal one piece of metal, and have it done permanently, that would solve a lot of my problems.” And some people are just, like, “I want to try a lot of different things and see where it takes me.” I actually relate to that person more than someone with an agenda, because my stuff is just kind of a product of my imagination.

In this example, our participant describes how he relates less to a person with an “agenda,” or to put it in Bourdieusian terms, an interest, or instrumental orientation. Thus the drive toward distinction does not simply find its outlet in the act of creation, but also by signifying who is inside and outside the sphere of the sacred. Indeed, most members who cannot afford to approach their time at CraftWorks in a disinterested manner are weeded out by the costs and risks associated with inattention to practicality. Perhaps as a result, CraftWorks was extremely homogeneous in terms of race and gender. Indeed, while there are robust circuits of exchange at Craftworks, these circuits are predicated upon raced, classed, and gendered assumptions of worth.

The gender composition of CraftWorks is more balanced than one might expect given that the organization is closely affiliated with several tech companies and computer science and engineering programs—both traditionally male-dominated fields (England, 2010). While there are no hard numbers, several members ventured that women comprise roughly one-third of members, if not more. However, this relatively high figure obscures a strong gender differentiation in the pattern of activities that people engage in. One strategy for expanding CraftWorks has been to attract as many disparate groups of hobbyists and enthusiasts as possible, bringing them under the larger maker umbrella. However, inside the space, many members and activities remain segregated. This is true for practical reasons, such as the need to group woodworking equipment together, and because members tend to cluster around areas of affinity. Some activities, such as welding and robotics, are highly male, while jewelry making is overwhelmingly female. However, several efforts were made to make these sub-environments more inclusive, such as with a Metalworking for Women course offered by one senior, female member. We found that women were far more likely to cross over into masculine areas than men were to cross into feminine areas, revealing the stigma associated with performing activities traditionally associated with femininity. Distinguishing oneself from feminine practices is important for establishing oneself in the space.

There is also a clear gendering of discourses and practices. Our participants frequently referenced the difference between consuming and making, reflecting the historic association of the former with women and the latter with men (Rappaport, 2001). To be a mere consumer is to be passive, a feminine trait, and to be masculine is to actively engage with tools and materials rather than to simply purchase them on the market. Maker movement guru Dale Dougherty also endorsed this categorization: “The maker movement has come about in part because of people’s need to engage passionately with objects in ways that make them more than just consumers” (Dougherty, 2012). In addition, men often assumed that women lacked basic competency in traditionally male-dominated activities. One woodworking instructor was acutely aware of this perception on the part of men. Indeed, she related the need to constantly demonstrate her competence to the mostly white and male geek audience:

And you do have some of those people that have that, like, one-upmanship kind of mentality, a gender bias comes up more. And it’s pretty frustrating to have grown ups doing all these things, to want to be in an environment that’s really inclusive to people, and still—amongst a group of people who self-identify as liberal, and aware of gender issues, and things like that—to still have to sort of—to fight with it, and, like, try to point out to people sometimes that what they are doing is gender bias.

Here, to perform masculinity is to engage in one-upmanship, demonstrating one’s knowledge even when one doesn’t have any. There is a competitive quality to this performance that not only distinguishes the performer as masculine, but also distinct from those who do not know, the maker laity.

CraftWorks is also overwhelmingly a space of whiteness. We only once observed African-Americans or Latino/as working in the space. Discourses around race at CraftWorks are similar to those we also found at Wintrepreneur in that an ideology of colorblindness is pervasive. The racial composition of CraftWorks is all the more striking considering its location in a mixed-race neighborhood. It was not uncommon to see a group of Latino children playing across the narrow street outside of CraftWorks. Despite its racial homogeneity, members of Craftworks see the space as functionally open and egalitarian even as it emphasizes to the public that it is a place for creative individuals to realize their vision. That this mission ignores instrumental consideration may be one mechanism by which disadvantaged groups opt out of membership.

We also found that those with conventional class and race privilege were able to translate that privilege even within the informal institutional environment of making. For example, Nate was able to integrate easily into the space simply by virtue of his constant presence and willingness to work for free (perhaps the most obvious indicator of disinterestedness):

I feel like I kind of snuck into the community [by hanging out at CraftWorks all day], because I volunteered to help people with their work so they'd teach me how to, like, do these skills that I always wanted to know. And that's invaluable to me. But my situation allowed it. It's, like, I came here with no job in mind. . . I moved here because I wanted to do something new. [City x] was a cool city. . . and I felt like I couldn't really go wrong.

The sense that things “couldn't really go wrong” is understandable only in the context of the comforts afforded by relative security and privilege.

Because a disinterested orientation is so common at this site, we find that it undermines the goal of constructing robust circuits of exchange and the kind of knowledge sharing and innovation that members of the maker movement hope for. Not all actors at Craftworks participate in distinguishing practices, but the ideal of creative work holds a great deal of legitimacy in the space and is, by and large, the dominant ethic. This can be seen in the media, or currencies, that are used for the exchange of skills and time. Both our interview and participant observation data revealed two distinct circuits—one consisting of high-status individuals, the other of an undifferentiated group of ordinary makers. In between are middle-status aspirants. High-status individuals have exceptional skills, connections to early hacking activities, or highly original creativity. They can be brilliant computer geeks, extreme Burners, or versatile makers. We found that the high-status individuals are frequently mentioned in interviews, and trades and connections with them are brought up in conversations.

At Craftworks, these status inequalities are compatible with robust trading volume as a result of the emergence of dual circuits. As noted above, the emergence of multiple circuits is also found in the accounts of Hoang (2011, 2015), Mears (2011) and Velthuis (2005). At the makerspace, those who sit atop the status pyramid trade among themselves using beer, a frequently referenced medium, and reciprocal gifts of time. Money rarely passes hands inside this group. However, these same individuals are willing to trade down, with low-status members, but these trades involve cash. Middle-status actors, who aspire to the beer economy, are less willing to trade down, lest they risk contamination. One middle-status actor described her frustration at trying to fit in an environment that, in her view, was often snobbish and unforgiving toward those who purchased things rather than made or bartered to have something made:

DIY is definitely valued here in a way that is interesting. A lot of the time, you feel guilty for not making something yourself. But it's, like, we're still in a culture where it's significantly easier and a lot of times cheaper to just buy it. . . You get kind of looked down on for doing the easy thing sometimes, because everyone assumes that because they have found the time and spare income to do X, Y, or Z thing that is, you know, better for the environment, or better for politics, or whatever.

On the other hand, we did find some examples of actors rejecting the dominant game. Guthrie, an active and energetic member of CraftWorks, approached his activities there with equal parts curiosity and practicality. At the same time, his language was no less romantic than the other makers, as he explained that he “longed to build stuff.” After his family's home flooded, Guthrie described how every time he went home, he would bring back a piece of furniture that he would repair at CraftWorks. He compared his interest in fixing and building to his grandfather's work around the woodshop.

I do mostly woodworking, yes. I have an interest in the other stuff, but when you start to do a little bit of woodworking you find projects like crazy. Now my girlfriend's assembled a list of furniture that I need to build, and I've got friends who are, like, “Well, if you have any spare time I could use a table”; that kind of stuff.

Guthrie's approach to making is earnest both in its desire for pleasurable making and in his genuine to be useful to those around him. No doubt the work in which Guthrie engages is just as creative as many of the other projects in the space. However, Guthrie is not making an effort to distinguish his practices from those around him. If anything, his making activities are inclusive, and would draw in new constituents who solicit his skills. Creating is not used to distinguish him but rather to produce what others may or may not be able to make. The former is hierarchical in its logic, while the latter sees no reason to draw such lines.

#### 4.3. “Taking Back the Pantry” or claiming foodie distinction

Food swapping represents a radical re-imagining of markets for food. It seeks to provide participants with access to a variety of homemade, homegrown, or foraged foods without having to pay cash, while simultaneously creating community. Trades are bilateral and, as in the time bank, everyone's offerings are considered to be roughly equivalent in value. For a trade to occur, participants must agree that their jar of jam is equivalent in value to another member's loaf of banana bread. Logistics include a period of browsing followed by written offers to engage in trades. To complete a trade, there must be mutual agreement.

Foodies are generally known for their snobbish tastes and practices (Johnston & Baumann, 2010) but swaps are a part of the cultural foodscape that purport to be more open and down-to-earth. Certainly, we find that food swappers reveal the same desires for novelty that foodies are known for. However, food swaps aim to be about honest provisioning and “taking back the pantry,” in the words of one of the swap's organizers. The organizers also see the swap as an opportunity for anyone

to gain access to fresh, homemade, “real” foods that might not otherwise be available. Shauna, a swap founder and 34-year-old lawyer who works for the state government, expressed hesitancy to charge for membership, even when the founders were paying out of their own pockets to rent space. She and the other organizers did not want anyone to be discouraged from coming, even by a nominal fee. The only requirement is that participants bring their own homemade food to trade.

In our conversations with Shauna, she described the food swap as giving individuals the freedom to learn to make new things and then exchange the surplus for a diverse array of fresh, healthy, homemade items. All the organizers discussed the difficulties of being young, single urban professionals who were concerned about the foods they were eating. Shauna wanted to be able to support local farmers by purchasing Community Supported Agriculture shares, but found herself unable to consume the quantity of food provided. Anne, another founding member, explained that recipes often yield more than she can use without becoming bored by eating the same thing every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Rather than give up on these cooking, eating, and purchasing opportunities, the organizers of the swap believed that sharing with others would allow them to avoid waste and boredom. Participants echoed similar concerns. One noted that while any food you wanted could be gained through the market, it was nice to be able to get new and exciting foods from members of the community.

Despite the ideological orientation toward openness, access, and empowerment, we found that the individuals involved in the food swap were a fairly homogeneous group. At nearly every swap we observed, the participants were almost entirely women, predominantly young professionals ranging from their late twenties to early middle age. Overwhelmingly a women’s space, the food swap’s only male attendants were often from our research team. One organizer estimated that the swap averaged fifteen percent men. Most often, these men accompanied spouses or partners to the swaps. Lone men typically had trouble integrating, although it was not impossible. When we began our fieldwork, an Asian man in his thirties was the darling of the swap. Preparing dishes from his native Japan, he was often surrounded by a crowd while he explained his offerings.

Moreover, despite being formally open to all types of people, very few racial minorities are regularly represented at the swap: swappers are overwhelmingly white. Among non-whites, Asians are most frequently represented; Blacks are least. When discussing the swap’s goal of increasing access to healthy, real food with one of the organizers—the only African-American person in regular attendance—issues of racial inclusion surfaced, albeit in coded language. After describing how the swap had diversity along lines of age and place of residence, and even some gender diversity, Shauna explained:

The problem is that we’re really, like, this close to running out of space. So the question is, how much effort do we put into really targeting *certain* people and targeting *a certain community* that we want to build when we’re already are, kind of, we’re not terribly convinced that we want to grow out of the space that we’re in already. So if we were to make the conscious decision to grow out of the space that we’re in already, I think that we might start to look at, for instance, trying to find a way to communicate that real food and cooking is easy to people who have been—for whatever reason—that’s led them to believing that it’s a hard thing that people don’t actually do, but that would take a lot of work in order to do that in the right way (emphasis added).

The organizers certainly expressed a desire for openness and inclusion, and they hoped the food swap would expand access to “real” food. However, there was also a certain reticence surrounding the inclusion of “a certain community” because of logistics, and the effort it would take to educate certain individuals about their own ability to cook real food. This was effort the swap organizers were unconvinced they were willing to undertake. While they were less explicit, other organizers expressed liking things the way they were because they knew all of the individuals in attendance and could relate to them.

At the same time, even these relatively similar participants were not always able to successfully trade their homemade foods to access a more diverse pantry. One reason is that not everyone felt welcome at the food swap. Despite its hospitable language, the food swap is also an arena for foodie distinguishing practices, through which some individuals are accorded status and inclusion and others are made to see that their homemade food is not appropriate or desired.

The distinguishing practices we observed were often subtle. The swap is a friendly environment, although conversations typically remain surface level. Casual questions about the food, where participants are from, and what they do for a living dominate the chatter. However, participants express clear preferences when engaging in exchanges, offering their items based on perceptions of worth. Since the objects of exchange are cultural goods and charged with high semiotic content, such propositions for exchanges are reflections of judgments of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Given that such judgments occur within relationships of exchange, it is appropriate to consider how divergent definitions of what counts as real homemade food delineate boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

In evaluating trading decisions, swappers frequently invoke the local. Noticing an abundance of similar ingredients in the items available at one swap, Shauna exclaimed, “Whoa, there’s a lot of corn here. I guess we know what everyone’s getting in their farm shares.” Implicit in statements such as this is the assumption that participants belong to CSA programs. Lidia, a 31-year-old Ph.D. student from France who is a regular swap attendee, described how she often felt jealous of the food swap participants who came in from the suburbs and had their own farms or gardens, and how she wished she could afford to shop at farmers markets since the quality and taste of the food there is “so much better.” Anne described how getting to know a farmer was an exciting and novel experience for a “city girl” who is “not cut out” for farming. With clear satisfaction in her voice, she explained, “I know someone who is a farmer—which fascinates me ‘cause I’m a city girl, so we don’t meet many people who are actually, literally farmers.” Eating local food is cast as a way of gaining access to the valorized experiences of others.

Bound up in conceptualizations of the local was the idea of real food, a concept that repeatedly surfaced in conversation. Shauna believes that one of the most important aspects of the swap is “creating a culture where people understand that it’s kind of manageable to create real food.” Likewise, the “realness” of food was central to Anne’s framing of food consumption.

And I also think it’s sort of not just nurturing the body but the soul. I mean, it’s nice to have food that has that, like, sort of, real, authentic, you know, prepared-from-scratch taste to it as opposed to, you know, the Lean Cuisines that I used to eat when I was, like, fresh out of college. I mean, it’s really different to have food that’s, like, it’s real food and tastes like real food, and comes from, you know, comes from a farm as opposed to a box or a can.

For these food swappers, real food has a material integrity, which they conceptualize as connection to the soil, more palpable taste, and distance from mass production. For them, real food is “honest.”

Rachel, a 32-year-old librarian working as a university administrative assistant, had similar views. Describing why buying strawberries in January was “the most ridiculous thing on earth,” Rachel explained, “Because you’re shipping not-very-tasty strawberries a very long way. And then I get them and, yes, it’s technically a strawberry, but it doesn’t taste like one, so what’s the point?” Lidia expressed similar incredulity about the majority of food available in the United States and refused to buy products that were not honest. “Why would anyone ever even think to put animal bones [in the form of gelatin] in yogurt?” she said in an utterly bewildered tone.

Despite the frequent assertions that the food swap was a good way to use up leftovers, even a hint that someone’s homemade food was an ordinary leftover was greeted with clear efforts to reinforce the boundaries of the circuit of exchange. At one November swap, a couple in their late twenties brought homemade vegan stuffing. They presented the stuffing in a large bowl, as one might at a Thanksgiving table, and packaged it in a manner that reflected the handling of leftovers after the Thanksgiving meal, spooning servings into large Ziploc bags. As our researcher circulated through the swap during the sampling period, a regular participant leaned over and whispered, “It generally takes people a few tries to figure out what works here.” The couple made one trade during the swap, and left with a full bowl of stuffing. As they left, the woman said to her partner, loud enough to be heard, “at least we know what not to do next time.” They haven’t returned.

In a similar case of boundary policing, one regular swapper routinely advised newcomers that they should avoid making items that “anyone could make.” “I wouldn’t recommend bringing brownies,” she would say, “I mean, unless they are like the best brownies ever. But everyone here can make brownies if they want them.” Far from efficiently using excess “homemade” food, homemade is reimagined as something made in the home especially for the swap that other participants might not think to make themselves. One participant, after bringing a large batch of homemade scones and only making three trades, blogged about how disappointed she was that people did not value her food. She never returned to the swap.

The policing of the circuit’s boundaries was particularly clear at one December swap, a charity cookie exchange that drew more than 90 participants—nearly all of them first timers. One regular pointed out that someone had made Betty Crocker cookies and admitted it on their information sheet. “I know it’s for charity,” one swapper remarked, “but they clearly don’t understand what a swap means for us.”

One week, a regular participant, noticing Oreo truffles on offer asked, “Now, are the truffles actually made of Oreo cookies?” “Yeah,” the new would-be swapper enthusiastically answered, pleased with his re-articulation of a store-bought product into an innovative form. “Oh, well then I won’t be able to trade with you, because I can only trade for, like, really homemade things. Like made from scratch, with no preservatives or chemicals or anything, because my friend doesn’t eat any processed foods. She only eats *homemade* things, that she makes completely herself.” These examples show the ways specific evaluative criteria are mobilized to circumscribe the extent to which new participants can enter the circuits of exchange within the swap.

One regular participant said that she would trade with first timers who did not understand what counted as homemade. However, she would always give them tips after trading with them. If they came back and still did not get it, she would not trade with them again and was not afraid to reject face-to-face offers. Often, new participants who lacked the cultural capital to navigate the food swap environment would leave having made only one trade or a few trades, going home with the vast majority of the food they brought. Such negotiations maintained the values of the swap by drawing on seemingly contradictory notions of “homemade” and “using up leftovers” to delimit participation within the swapping circuit.

#### 4.4. Open learning at Wintrepreneur: learning to win, sharing to survive

Open learning is a practice that uses free or low cost educational resources that are typically open-access, peer-led, shareable, and digitally mediated. Based in a large northeastern metropolitan area, Wintrepreneur emerged in the open learning sector as a low-cost hybrid offline/online learning resource designed to teach entrepreneurs the skills necessary to succeed in the local startup economy. Wintrepreneur offers classes on skills relevant to topics such as digital marketing, business development, investor relations, and web development. Classes cost between \$0 and 25 to take and are taught without compensation by successful local entrepreneurs. They run 90 min and usually include both lecture and project-based learning over complimentary snacks and beer. Wintrepreneur also offers networking events and hosts an informative blog with curated content about entrepreneurship. Their website promises to teach the secrets to success in the startup world and boasts that it has helped several thousand people “step up their game.” Wintrepreneur promotes a mentality of winning through learning, but also envisions itself as a community that brings “novices and experts together to share their expertise.” Winning at entrepreneurship requires learners’ focus and discipline to increase skills, but also expects a

collaborative ethos of openness and sharing in order to learn with and from the community. As a result, learners must negotiate “winning,” alongside a denunciation of the zero-sum logic of winners and losers.

The ideology and structure of Wintrepreneur create a paradox for learners that became apparent in a conversation with Dania, one of the founders. She expressed a sincere desire to “open up” the city’s vast network of seasoned entrepreneurs to allow inexperienced but talented young people to break into what seems from the outside like a closed community of startups. But because the startup world is viewed as an expanding sector, home to vast opportunities, there is a cooperative ethos among its constituents. To Dania, Wintrepreneur provides an on-ramp via affordable classes that connects people to professionals who are willing to share their time and expertise. The company does not look to make a profit from the classes, and the founders had jobs at existing startups which allowed them to use a portion of their paid time to launch and maintain Wintrepreneur as a service to the larger community. In a volatile market, Wintrepreneur provides access to high-quality teaching and mentorship.

Learners at Wintrepreneur became winners and therefore valued members of the community via two strategies: denouncing traditional higher education and employment and conforming to the culture of risk taking. For Bourdieu, people with higher cultural capital display more confidence than their lower cultural capital peers; confidence is therefore a marker of status and distinction. In this context, confidence translates into risk-taking (Bourdieu, 1984). Employing these two strategies afforded learners distinction and status, which allowed for inclusion in post-class networking activities—a conversion of cultural to social capital (Bourdieu 1986). These strategies allowed learners to acknowledge the structure of institutions in crisis (e.g., education, the economy) as problematic, and to subsequently ground their personal responses in discourses of choice and control (Neff, 2012). Wintrepreneur boasts access to high-quality content and instructors, but does not connect its concern with access to a structural critique of higher education or a concern for equity. As Dania casually stated, “not everyone cares about equity, you know.” Like the co-founder, learners also distanced themselves from structural critiques of inequality within higher education and the economy, and promoted Wintrepreneur and the startup world as something that fit their personal style of learning and working better.

By denouncing traditional higher education and employment, learners situated learning at Wintrepreneur within a schema that also encompassed these institutions, rather than understanding it as an extracurricular or purely social experience. For Taylor, “school feels like school”; at Wintrepreneur, he did not feel like he was doing work. He wanted to learn to be his own boss and came very close to dropping out of college after asking, “Am I getting a degree because I need a degree?” Taylor felt like he could be challenged to do good work without higher education. Mei talked about favoring Wintrepreneur’s teachers like she favored adjunct teachers, the least economically stable academics:

Well, in these informally learning environments, like the speakers at Wintrepreneur, they don’t get paid. . . I think for the most part, the majority of people I’ve gone to see, I believe generally care about sharing with others. . . In college, my favorite teachers were the adjunct professors because they worked full-time and taught part-time. I really valued their hands on, real-world experience, and I like that about Wintrepreneur.

Mike struggled to find engaging peers in his corporate job and enjoyed Wintrepreneur because it put him in contact with other young people who wanted to be in a stimulating environment: “But like, I am interested in, like people who are out, like, doing cool stuff job-wise, and, you know, whatever.” For him, the startup world was more exciting and better for his personal growth because it challenged him to constantly keep learning to stay relevant, unlike the dead-end corporate job that became available to him through networks from college.

Over half of the Wintrepreneur learners we interviewed talked about dropping out of college or understanding why someone might want to drop out of college. The others had strong critiques of higher education, making it easy for all of them to position Wintrepreneur as something better than what they experienced or were currently experiencing at their undergraduate institutions. Though they all denounced higher education, especially for its inability to teach them relevant skills for the market, they did not all feel like their startup dreams were secure either. Nita understood her choice to start a company and its relative success as a chance to just “learn things”:

I mean, I don’t see myself as an entrepreneur still; I’m just doing something. And I never thought I would have my own business, co-found anything. . . But again, it just happened, and I just want to learn things.

Jerry, who had spent years finding his way back to education after being kicked out of graduate school, talked about his learning at Wintrepreneur as a chance to succeed because at this point, the stakes were too high to fail. Though he struggled in traditional education and held jobs that he said paid him too little to sustain a career, he described himself as constantly learning now that his startup job depended on him learning new things. Mei also talked about how her startup job required her to “get the hell out there” and learn things that she did not yet know, but needed to know in order to do her job well.

The risks of high-stakes learning became a virtue for participants. They buffered the intensity and pace of constant learning with the collaborative, networked atmosphere of places like Wintrepreneur. These sites offer no real credentials for the learning that takes place, unlike traditional higher education or accredited learning spaces. Resources invested into learning are not institutionally linked to pathways to employment and mobility, yet learners did not feel like they were taking unnecessary or illegitimate risks. Risk was desirable but also downplayed, partly because the resources invested included time that was not already allotted to something else (e.g., “I learn at night when I’m sitting around at home doing nothing”), effort and productivity that they narrated as a result of the style of open learning (e.g., “I’m so productive and motivated now that I can learn how I want”), and feelings that they felt alienated from prior to their learning (e.g., “I’m so

confident now and it feels amazing to think I could just learn anything”). These resources, when compared to the substantial costs of traditional higher education, felt like a less risky investment. Risk was also downplayed because the deinstitutionalized pathways to employment and mobility depended upon social connection and collaboration—another effective and cultural project. Becoming part of the in-group at Wintrepreneur felt good and was worn as a badge of both personal accomplishment and community involvement.

Bradley, a college student who could take advantage of free classes, noted that he did not always show up to class for the content:

We’re looking at marketing this summer and what we can do better. Sure, it was helpful, but we were more there to talk with the people afterwards. . . That’s the best part of Wintrepreneur, is the network afterwards.

Mike, who was told by a coworker, “you have to do it yourself” when asked for advice on how to best learn coding, reflected on how nice it was to be someone that people wanted to hang out with and talk to after class. Almost all of the learners told a story of meeting someone that they later went out for drinks with after class or met up with at another event later in the week. They described these interactions as engaging and exciting, where they shared their insights on learning and getting ahead. Some even began to network and find “gigs” or employment opportunities through these interactions. However, not everyone had this experience of “inclusive winning.” When asked if he noticed everyone having a great time at Wintrepreneur, Mark recalled a student who “just didn’t get it” and was “an old-fashioned guy.” Mark’s class was learning about how to apply life-hacking strategies to their lives in order to be more productive, and this man resisted the approach of the energetic instructor. According to Mark, no one socialized with this man after class.

During participant observation, the researcher also witnessed a class disengage from a woman who asked too many critical questions, as well as an instance where a man was left behind in a group project. He had successfully employed the first strategy when he denounced his corporate job as he expressed being a cog in the wheel, but then took his denunciation of corporate America and expressed it as part of himself. While working during class with a group to design a game for a fictitious client, he kept saying things like, “I don’t do stuff like this, I’m in boring corporate America” while disengaging from the project. After encouragement did not work, his group left him behind for the rest of the project, unable to waste time interacting with his insecurity. He, too, left immediately after class and did not network with his classmates.

As with our other sites, Wintrepreneur is stratified by race, class and gender. In the classes we observed, the male-female breakdown was generally 65–35. By race, the split was 80% white, 20% Asian, with other races not represented. Three of the nine interviewees identify as women and three are Asian-Americans. One Asian-American self-identified on our survey as “human.” This choice is symbolic of the larger ethos of Wintrepreneur and the startup world, a predominantly white space that employs a discourse of colorblindness. Only one respondent directly discussed race during her interview, though a few did offer stereotypical narratives of working class people who would not succeed at open learning. One white male respondent said he would not have time for open learning if he, for example, had a kid and worked at Burger King or 7-Eleven. He went on to say that “culture can get in the way,” and, when probed, gave an example of a young person who wanted to grow up and be a coal miner like his father instead of valuing education and self-betterment.

Open learners were successful if they demonstrated the right values and culture, a finding that corresponds with Rivera’s evidence on professional hiring patterns (Rivera, 2012). However, culture was not typically translated to include race. One woman said her status in the startup world as a woman and racial minority was motivation to mentor other young women of color. She described feeling tokenized at times and wanted to make sure she was visible enough in the community to show others that they would have support if they also ventured into this world. Her tone changed from community-minded to individual-minded when the conversation shifted from race to gender. She recalled a bad experience with a potential investor who patronized her after treating one of her male peers like he was an old friend:

It was like, just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean you can just treat me that way. And I think that has definitely made me feel a lot more confident. And my mom says, “Don’t be arrogant.” And I’m, like, “I’m not being arrogant. Or you know what? Let me be arrogant, because that is what everybody else is doing.”

Arrogance is a cultural norm associated with masculinity, but she was ready to adopt that norm if it meant that being a woman would not sabotage her success. On the other hand, another female respondent said startup learning spaces like Wintrepreneur felt free of gendered dynamics, describing open learning as a risk-free environment for her to unlearn internalized ideas of herself as not smart enough for STEM learning. Ultimately, spaces like Wintrepreneur represent themselves as gender-neutral and color-blind, but in practice, they demand assimilation to a dominant norm rather than a form of radical inclusion.

## 5. Discussion: distinction, matching and the functioning of circuits

Our cases provide considerable evidence of what we have called the paradox of openness and distinction. All four sites embrace and prominently articulate an ethic of accessibility, openness, and equal opportunity for all. Craftworks and Wintrepreneur both aim to be communities of equals in which people learn from and support each other. The food swap and the time bank go further, and have structured their exchanges according to a logic of equality. In none of the four is there formally organized hierarchy, awarding of status markers or entitlements, or an ethic of internal competition. And yet, in

High Cultural Capital Dispositions	Associated Distinguishing Practices By Case			
	<i>Craft Works</i>	<i>Wintrepreneur</i>	<i>Food Swap</i>	<i>Time Bank</i>
Distance From Necessity	Single-use bicycles, elephant-sized robot, and the non-functional bike rack/shelf	Learning for learning's sake	No actual leftovers, small portions	Trading to learn new skills/hobbies
Effect on Matching	Projects associated with instrumental motivations devalued.	Matches failed among those who begrudged time spent learning	Individuals trying to make use of surplus food could not secure trades	Skills that were in high demand were often unavailable
Natural Ease and Confidence	Confidence to "tinker" in areas in which one may lack expertise	Requirement for group acceptance, confidence to create on one's own education required	Food Swapper Eve always "threw it together," even when her food was very complex	Members feel they can offer skills for which they lack training (but often reject other amateurs)
Effect on Matching	Matches predicated on shared vision of making.	Failure to appear confident reduced access to group resources	Mismatch between what people said was involved in participation and what was expected	Mismatch between what people wanted to provide and acquire
Distance From Mass Production	100% artisanal/craft production	Critique of higher education as mass produced learning	No processed ingredients/by definition homemade; preference for local	Popularity of canning and preference for local
Effect on Matching	High-status makers refused or switched currencies for instrumental matches	Shared understandings of the circuit led to robust matching	Certain items became "taboo" because they contained processed foods, even when very creative	Oversupply of "white lady skills"
Esoteric Knowledge	Knowledge of Burner/Maker subculture, depth and breadth of technical knowledge		Knowledge of techniques and ingredients	Learning skills like whittling, mandolin
Effect on Matching	Robust high-status circuit, sub-culturally homophilous, excluded low-status members		Mismatch between many first time members' ideas about homemade food and the valorization of creative, exotic takes on familiar items	Skills that were in high demand were often unavailable
Professionalism	Connections to famed hackers and market successes highly valued	Participants report high levels of "productivity"	Professional presentation in packaging	Grammar, website presentation
Effect on Matching	High-status aspirants sought out high-status actors whom they would also emulate	Individuals who resisted changes to improve their personal productivity faced marginal positions in circuit	Failed matches occurred when people reused jars from store-bought products or used disposable food storage containers	Individuals lacking these skills had difficulty securing trading partners

Fig. 1. HCC dispositions and associated distinguishing practices.

each case, we found evidence of distinguishing practices. We have summarized these practices in Fig. 1. We found that participants segregated themselves by cultural capital. They engaged in snobbish judgments. They used subtle and not-so-subtle cues to exclude low-status members. An informal hierarchy emerged in some cases: at the makerspace, there is a clear high-status group. At the food swap, the founders and their friends formed an in-group that outsiders found hard to break into. At the timebank, exclusion was practiced on a one-to-one basis and at Wintrepreneur, it occurred when participants failed to adhere to a set of group norms.

One might ask why these sites are so plagued with practices of distinction given that participants are consciously attempting to create social relations that reject dominant logics of hierarchy and power. One possible answer is that the pervasiveness of inequality in the larger macro-economy is difficult to escape in new economic spaces. The sites and practices framework of Bowles and Gintis (1987) may be useful here. In their view, sites have distinct, dominant practices,

and at times, people transport these practices from one site to another. Once transported, a practice may or may not be compatible with the reproduction of the site as a functioning institution. In our cases, practices of inequality that are valorized in market settings and particular fields are brought into sharing sites. The food swap case certainly supports this view, as the snobbishness of the gastronomic field was an important part of why swappers engaged in such high levels of distinguishing practice. Similarly, in the makerspace, the high prestige of certain kinds of making, such as robotics, contributed to the dynamics of status acquisition we observed.

Another possible explanation relates to the social locations and network ties of the participants themselves. We found that the vast majority of individuals involved in these sites possess high levels of cultural capital, and that these sites are fairly homogeneous in their racial and gender compositions. If participants are embedded in homogeneous networks, and were recruited into these sites through their network ties, this might account for the lack of diversity as well as the failure of the circuits to achieve the kind of openness they are formally committed to. We did not systematically collect data on how participants were recruited, and therefore do not know how many came via social networks. Nor do we know how homogeneous their networks are. However, our understanding is that people were attracted to the sites both through social connections and without them, and that a fair number of people learned about the initiatives through the Internet or other publically available information. The site we have the most recruitment information about is the food swap, where recruitment occurred not only through social networks but also through favorable press coverage and a very successful annual holiday swap. Nevertheless, even with this very open and public recruitment, the swap routinely failed to generate good matches, or even the types of robust parallel circuits observed in other cases (Hoang, 2011, 2015; Mears, 2011; Velthuis, 2005). While recruitment networks are a possible explanation of these circuits' exclusionary character, the difficulty participants experienced making matches in the face of relative homogeneity is all the more notable.

Performances of distinction not only created a paradox that contradicted the ethos of these sites, but in some cases, they also impeded the ability of participants to make trades, i.e., good matches. In that way, inequality undermined the construction and reproduction of these circuits of commerce. In the time bank case, people rejected trades with others who had bad grammar or lacked professional looking websites. They refused to offer coding, digital skills, lawyering or similarly high-valued expertise, preferring to exercise a class privilege of confidence and entitlement by trying their hand at manual or creative services. Some used the time bank as a place to give charity, which allows one-sided trades but does not operate according to the underlying values of the institution. This represents a kind of mismatching, and ultimately can reduce trading because it creates lopsided accounts.

In the food swap, failed matches were rampant. Participants policed choice of ingredients, packaging, volume of offerings, what swappers made, and how they dressed. To make a good match, participants had to intuit multiple criteria which were highly opaque, often arbitrary, and shifting. We found a fine line between leftovers that were transformed into something exotic, versus food that was just "left over." Another matching failure occurred when people re-used ordinary jars rather than the currently faddish, branded canning jars that served as instruments of symbolic class decontamination. The most successful matches happened among purveyors of authentic homemade foods that exhibited no class contamination. In this site, charity trades also occurred: people would give their foods to others and take nothing in return, or take foods that they then did not use. On one occasion, a swapper was observed giving items she had accumulated to a homeless person as she left the swap.

In contrast to these two cases, the evidence from CraftWorks shows that inequality can be compatible with success, but only under certain conditions. This site has a high level of activity and numerous active participants. Good matches were common. Members were willing to share skills and lend a hand when someone displayed a shared vision of creativity, passion for the process, and internal drive for the work. The occasions when matching does not occur are when people lack an idea of what they want to do. However, matches follow a hierarchical ordering along the lines of sub-cultural and cultural capital that structure the community. They also require two distinct circuits, with different currencies, which is similar to previous findings (Hoang, 2011, 2015; Mears, 2011; Velthuis, 2005). One circuit is for high-status players, the other for ordinary makers. In the former, high-status members give their time and expertise freely to other high-status members, in exchange for beer or reciprocal help. These members will trade down to assist newcomers or members who lack making skills, but only via a transactional arrangement. These matches often happen in the context of an organized class and the currency is cash. In this way, matches demarcate clear inequalities within the space. However, the presence of multiple media of exchange (e.g., trading for beer versus trading for cash) allows matches to occur across a wide chasm of cultural capital as well as between people with similar levels. These findings accord with those of Katherine Chen, who in her study of Burning Man, another creative community, also found the presence of multiple payment practices, as participants were both compensated and not compensated for their contributions (Chen, 2009:110).

From our cases, we conclude that flexible media can foster trades where participants have unequal market earning potential, skills or class position. For example, the absence of multiple media and the fixed exchange ratio in the time bank and food swap cases help to explain their low levels of trading activity, as we have discussed elsewhere (Dubois et al., 2014; Fitzmaurice & Schor, 2015). In the Wintrepreneur case, participants match up with each other readily, both in group situations in and outside of classes, as they come together to share and exchange knowledge, contacts, and skills. The cases where good matches failed to occur were when individuals did not share the common disposition toward the learning process, lifestyles, and social interaction. In these cases, they tended to be excluded from access to the resources of the group and the organization.

Good matches are central to the formation of circuits. How does the prevalence of distinguishing practices affect the ability to make good matches and by extension, create robust trading economies? In our cases, we find two patterns. In the

time bank and food swap, the high level of distinguishing practices makes matches difficult to achieve. These sites suffered from low trading levels, as noted above. Both sites are easily accessible in the sense that they advertise to a general public, are free, and have relatively low barriers to participation. Once people join, however, failure to display sufficient distinction undermines the willingness of others to trade with them, and matches across that cultural divide are not frequent enough to create a high volume of trades. In both cases, new participants often failed to carry through with trades, while others saw a fall in their trading activity after promising starts. In the time bank, we had difficulty finding members who had completed the five trades necessary for inclusion in the study. Lack of trading was even more pronounced at the food swap. It barely functioned for a time on account of an inability to retain sufficient numbers of new members. At one point, attendance fell to five or six people and as a result, swaps were occasionally canceled for lack of participation. In these cases, we believe trading is made more difficult by the enforcement of a uniform metric of exchange—in the time bank, everyone's time is equal, and in the food swap, members' offerings are roughly equal on a per item basis. Inequalities cannot be ameliorated by adjusting the trading ratio. Social inequality in the form of cultural capital creates mismatches in how people understand these transactions or what they hope to gain from them. In these cases, the structure of Bourdieusian cultural capital undermines good matching.

However, in the other two cases, we find much more robust activity and participation. People are able to find good matches. In the Wintrepreneur case, only a few people are excluded from the classroom and extra-curricular activities of the group. At CraftWorks, high levels of not only making, but also informal and formal teaching, helping and interacting are observed. However, in these cases, most matches are culturally homophilous. Social exclusion is occurring but it does not prevent good matches. At Wintrepreneur, the mostly homogeneous crowd bonds easily. At CraftWorks, there is a status hierarchy, ordered by skill and creativity and cultural and sub-cultural capital. People largely trade with others at a similar level. When they do trade down, they convert to ordinary money, which is facilitated by the structure of the site. The space exhibits high levels of race and gender exclusivity, but is able to maintain vibrant activity.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest the difficulty of constructing egalitarian circuits. At the beginning of this paper, we identified two criteria for success: robust trading activity and adherence to organizational mission. We find that each of the sites succeeds at one or the other, but all four have difficulty achieving both. The time bank and the food swap are characterized by a low volume of trades and have had the most difficulty reproducing themselves. On the other hand, both remained true to their missions, and did not compromise their structural commitments to equality and access. We believe that more flexibility in the types of exchanges, or multiple categories of exchange, might generate a higher volume of transactions. For example, the time bank might be more successful if it were segmented into two trading categories (one for widely held skills, e.g., dog walking and errand running, and another for more specialized skills, e.g., programming and plumbing), with either no fungibility or a fixed ratio across the two spheres. However, a change of this sort would constitute a movement away from the ideological commitment to strong equality.

By contrast, Craftworks and Wintrepreneur both sustained a good deal of trading activity and robust participation. However, they were less impressive by the second criterion of success—adherence to the sharing ethos. Wintrepreneur is an accessible site, but one which demanded a degree of adherence to a common philosophy, orientation and set of behaviors. It reinforced a white, high cultural capital, largely male ethos and participants who deviated were excluded from participation. Craftworks is also characterized by exclusion. While robust trading volume is made possible by its dual circuits, the high-status group was difficult to break into, especially for women. In the interviews, a number of participants complained about the prevalence of status positioning, one-upmanship, and exclusionary practices. This type of behavior is both contrary to the frequently discussed community ethic of the space as well as the mission of the maker movement.

Our findings that egalitarian circuits are hard to reproduce and that sharing organizations may face a tradeoff between inequality and market volume have a parallel within social movement organizations. Recent ethnographies, such as Katherine Chen's study of Burning Man (2009) and Erika Summers Effler's account of a Catholic Worker group and an anti-death penalty organization (Effler, 2010) explore this dilemma. In the four cases we have examined, we have also found that it is difficult to construct circuits that are both egalitarian and robust. Our research suggests that augmenting the Bourdieusian framework with relational analysis at the micro-level of exchange may be a productive way to better understand why and how that goal is so challenging.

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