Coaching the Self: Identity Work(Ing) and the Self-Employed Professional

COACHING THE SELF:
IDENTITY WORK(ING) AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED PROFESSIONAL

A Dissertation Presented

by

SINÉAD G. RUANE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 2013

Isenberg School of Management

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DEDICATION

For my Mum, Winnie/Úna:

Your constant love, support, and sacrifice

afforded me many of the opportunities you never had—

thank you!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

> "I was working on the proof of one of my poems all morning and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again."
>
> ~ Oscar Wilde

Well put, Oscar! And such is the writing process! There are countless commas within this document, and behind each one, there are countless individuals to thank for its inclusion. While writing this dissertation proved to be an extremely difficult exercise—impossible at times—I have left the most challenging task till the very end: writing the Acknowledgements. There are so many people I must recognize for making this project possible, and I run the risk of unintentionally excluding someone. Please know that even if I have neglected you on paper, I hold you dearly in my thoughts and in my heart.

First of all, my sincere thanks go out to the many coaches and informants who so generously shared your time, thoughts, laughter, fears and hopes, and your lives with me. Without your stories, there simply would be nothing for me to share. I would also like to acknowledge the Institute of Coaching, whose generous Harnisch Grant allowed me to carry out much of the fieldwork for this project.

A huge thanks to my committee, who were so helpful and accommodating throughout this process. Ron, I credit you with pointing out that my attention was really focused on coaching, and encouraging me to put my apprehensions aside and pursue this research path. Tom, my fieldwork mentor, I am so grateful that I enrolled in your Labor Studies course in the fall of 2008. Thank you for guiding me to identify and articulate my research interests, and from your own example, persuading me to analyze my data in a way that really worked for me. Tony, you have played multiple roles in my career as a

doctoral student—professor, PhD director, Dean, committee member—but the most meaningful has been as a constant supporter. I still remember our phone conversation in April 2004, when I accepted the offer to study at UMass, you had said: "Oh boy! I'm going to run upstairs to the Graduate Office, and jump up and down!" Now, after many years and with a doctorate in hand, I'm glad to see that I'm leaving you the way I found you: jumping up and down!

Linda, my words seem insufficient as I attempt to convey my deep gratitude for the last several years. I have always been inspired by your genuine love of learning, and profound engagement in your scholarship. Early on in the program, as I struggled to find my place as a scholar, you said: "Hang in there; it will get better." And you were right, it did. You introduced me to ways of looking at the world that I hadn't considered. You pushed me to ask questions of myself and of others that I hadn't dared before. You interrogated me persistently about my ideas, challenging me to clarify my thoughts and present them in a way that others would find compelling. And, through your own brilliant writing, you helped me find my voice as a writer. So yes, it did get better; but only because of you.

I would like to express my appreciation to other faculty and staff during my time at UMass: Marta Calás, Chuck Manz, Bob Marx, Jane Miller, Melissa Woodard, Larry Zacharias, Bruce Skaggs, Bill Wooldridge, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Lisa Keller, Betsy Krause, Jill McCorkel, Oriol Pi-Sunyer, Jackie Urla, and especially Dina Friedman. An extra tip of the hat to Tiffany Green—aka the "fifth committee member"—without whose generosity and input this project would never have gotten off the ground. As well, Diane, Lynda, Sarah, Audrey, Gabriel, Mary, the TSS crew, and Joan, all helped make the

"business" of being a grad student much easier, so that I could focus instead on the "actual work."

To the many inhabitants of SOM 231, past and present: you made my experience as a doctoral student not only intellectually enlightening, but also fun, wacky, and unforgettable—highlights include: the consumption of an embarrassing number of pounds of birthday cake (and other random leftovers), AD seminars, hilarious email threads, quarterly potlucks, and crazy conference hijinks! The guilty include: Jeff, Han, Sudhir & Radhika, Kim, David, Chris, Daphne, Grace, Al, José, Dymtro, Kristina, Banu, Paul, Michael, Scott, Elizabeth, Sarbjeet, Arturo, Kevin, Rory, Kirk, Jeff G., Chetan, Kirk, Farbod, Anthony, Xueting, Hector, Alia, Jess, Jeff M., Anthony A., Ben, Tracey, and the "newbies" who I haven't had the chance to really get to know…yet! Warmest hugs go to Rafael, Aline, and PJ, who have each opened their homes to me at various times and were genuinely excited to hear my thoughts as I prepared my work to share with the world.

Heartfelt thanks to my cohort, aka "Tony's Angels": Alexandra Galli-Debicella and Emily Porschitz. Alex, your kindness, outrageous stories, and unique sense of humor always put a smile on my face, even during the toughest times. Emily, you have become an amazing friend and a pillar of strength to me during this process. I am so grateful for the many times you picked me up, dusted me off, and told me: "You can do this!" — without every doubting that I could. Thank you for helping me believe in myself.

There are also many others to acknowledge beyond the walls of Isenberg. I want to thank the Graduate Employee Organization (GEO) for all their hard work to protect our rights as graduate workers and to secure fantastic benefits, allowing us to focus on

our scholarly goals. As well, I am grateful for having had the chance to work with and befriend some awesome people during my time there: Robin, Tim, Nina, and Sharice.

A big "WOO-HOO!" to the "Jazza Ladies": Andrea, Maria, Karyl, Sharon, Sam, Patti, Kim, Laura, Chelsey, Roseanne, Michelle, and those I know only by smiling face. With your help, I managed to keep my stress in check, my body in shape, and my spirits lifted—especially as I struggled with the isolation of writing. It was always a joy to dance with you!

Deedee, Jules, Tom, Al, Felix, and Fred: you created a safe and loving home for me, which was truly a wonderful place to retreat at the end of a long, tiring day. I can't imagine my time in Amherst without you guys and the happy memories we shared on Pomeroy Lane. Pete, your unconditional friendship has meant so much to me throughout the years; thank you for sharing this time with me, with all its ups and downs, listening to my endless rants and "thinking out loud," and always being my biggest cheerleader!

My family has been an incredible source of strength, love, and encouragement, not only for this endeavor, but for any of the crazy challenges that I have been compelled to take on. Kudos to all my extended "family" overseas, but especially to Pat and Angela, Susan and Tony, John and Ag, and to Maria, Michael, Flossie and Will: thank you for always welcoming me into your homes and offering anything that would make this long journey more comfortable.

Mom, Winnie, I will forever be indebted to you for all your hard work, your sacrifice, your love, and your unconditional belief in me, now and always. I could not have accomplished all that I have without you as an amazing role model. Dad, Martin, I really appreciate the many pieces of sage advice from your own doctoral experience—

even if offered humorously in hindsight! But of all your wise words, these ones stay with me most: "The best dissertation is a DONE dissertation!" And so in response, I say: "Go raibh maith agat!" Fionnuala, you somehow managed to achieve that difficult balance of caring about *how* I'm doing, but not so much about *what* I'm doing. It was reassuring to know that you would never ask about my writing progress or what my research questions were, so…thanks a million! You're the best, sis! Déirdre, although you were not always here in person, you have been and always will be with me in spirit and memory. Thank you for being my angel, guiding me each step of the way.

And last but not least, I want to express my gratitude to my exceptional writing and life coach, Mr. Lawi La Moto. Many thanks for getting me through the most testing moments, with your love and strength (or was it indifference?), only leaving me when you knew I would be fine without you. That is, you understood that with all these wonderful people surrounding me, I would never be alone.

THANK YOU!!!

ABSTRACT

COACHING THE SELF:
IDENTITY WORK(ING) AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED PROFESSIONAL

FEBRUARY 2013

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Identity has long been a prolific research interest for organizational scholars. Its popularity can be attributed to the development of post-bureaucratic organizations, where control is no longer achieved through external forms (i.e. rules and procedures), but rather, "softer" mechanisms, such as organizational culture and values. Examining identity therefore becomes crucial for understanding how employees internalize organizational goals to exhibit desired behaviors. While the predominant approach has been to analyze how organizations help shape, control, and regulate member identity, this project calls into question the assumption of organizational employment to explore the micro-processes of identity construction among a growing class of worker in the U.S.: the self-employed professional.

This investigation is grounded in the world of personal coaching, an emerging profession organized largely by self-employment. Between 2007–2011, I immersed myself in the "field" of coaching, generating data via ethnographic methods—i.e. participant observation, in-depth interviews, informal interactions—and secondary archival sources.

Applying a critical interpretive lens to conceptualize identity not as a "thing" but as an ongoing social accomplishment, the analysis reveals three main insights. First, intense identity working was provoked by tensions and anxiety arising from conflicts, contradictions, and challenges, as informants tried to construct a positive identity as a self-employed professional, while simultaneously performing vital (and mostly unrecognized) identity work for the wider coaching profession. Second, since "doing" identity and material conditions are mutually constitutive, identity efforts can be categorized as having a profitable, proficient, or pragmatic orientation; I contend that this typology is applicable to other self-employed professionals. Third, as a socially negotiated process, identity working is one which recruits many participants—both within and outside of the coaching community. Furthermore, geographically-dispersed members actively regulate and control each other's identities to maintain professional standards, via new organizing forms, like social media.

This investigation contributes to knowledge about the nuances of identity working, and linkages between such micro-processes and the wider historical, socio-economic conditions. Extending beyond the coaching profession, the data produced serve as a contextual exemplar for exploring how individuals navigate the restructuring of labor and changing employment relations, which increasingly characterize the "new world of work."

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE "NEW WORLD OF WORK"

> Throw away the briefcase: you're not going to the **office**. You can kiss your **benefits** goodbye too. And your **new boss** won't look like your old one. There's no longer a ladder, and you may **never get to retire**, but there's a world of **opportunity** if you figure out a new path. **Ten lessons** for succeeding in the **new American workplace.**
>
> *Time Magazine*, 2009, emphasis in original

These are the words gracing the cover of the May 25, 2009 issue of *Time Magazine*. With them, an image is shown of a young man, his body divided at the waist by a dotted red line. In the bottom half, he dons a grey pinstriped suit, highly polished black leather shoes, and one of his gloved hands clutches a briefcase. From the waist up, the man is dressed more casually in a light blue v-neck sweater. A mop of curly brown hair frames his unshaven face, and there is a look of self-assuredness in his ever-so-slight smile. The bottom half of this man is intended to represent the "workplace past"; the top symbolizes the way things are heading. Beside the young man, "The Future of Work" is written in large letters to reinforce this point.

This cover image introduces *Time's* special report entitled "The Way We'll Work." It informs readers to expect a "more flexible, more freelance, more collaborative and far less secure work world" (Time, 2009c: 39) and that these changes are, in fact, already taking place. The report consists of ten short articles, each one addressing a different aspect of the new American workplace. Among them are: "Women Will Rule Business"; "We're Getting Off the Ladder"; "When Gen X Runs the Show"; and "Why Boomers Can't Quit."

These articles are written as "lessons" for the audience (assumed to be predominantly white collar professionals) to help cope with and adjust to the "new work order." For instance, in "The Last Days of Cubicle Life," the reader is advised to wave goodbye to the old workplace, described as an "office that consists of an anonymous hallway and a farm of cubicles or closed doors" (Godin, 2009: 51). This is not necessarily a novel idea since, in the same article, it claims that an estimated 28% of the workforce are already telecommuting on either a full or part-time basis, which is up from 12% a mere decade ago (Godin, 2009: 51).

While more than a few of the statistics provided in the report warrant further investigation, the fact remains that *Time* is published weekly, reaching an audience of over 20 million in the US alone (Time, 2009a) and also boasts a heavily trafficked website, with 7.6 million users each month (Time, 2009b). It's probably safe to assume that its content reaches a much larger audience than that printed in an academic journal or Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report. The message to this segment of the American population is loud and clear: this is the new workplace, and like it or not, you had better be prepared for it. But this message is far from passively received; indeed, it actively shapes our expectations, influences our perceptions, and in turn, makes the "reality" it conveys possible.

Given that these changes are upon us, they will affect not only the individual worker, but also those of us who *study* workers. As scholars, we must keep abreast of the trends in the work organizations we wish to research. For example, according to the report, by 2019, 40% of the US workforce will be independent contractors—defined as those who rent their skills and services out to various individual and organizational

clients—up from 26% today (Fisher, 2009: 48). Organization Studies scholars should therefore reconsider the long-held assumption that "the organization" is the default context or most appropriate setting for studying working life (Ashcraft, 2007). The question of *how work is organized* cannot be taken for granted.

The changes discussed in the *Time* report have direct implications for what kind of work will be available in the US and when, where, and how that work will be performed in the not-so-distant future. We are informed that women and "Gen-Xers" will be filling more senior positions, many "Baby Boomers" will be forced to put off retirement, and the demand for "green jobs" will reshape the labor market. Clearly, the articles cover important "macro" trends, broadly defined, but skirt around the "micro" concerns – that is, how exactly individuals can effectively adjust to, cope with, and anticipate the changes ahead. Readers are left to wonder, what are the issues that have *not* been discussed, perhaps because they are not immediately visible or do not directly contribute to the "profit motive"? For instance, how will the changing expectations of the "new workplace" impact our relationships? Our health? Our emotions? What will happen to individuals who have difficulty adjusting to the anticipated changes?

Missing from the report is any discussion of such issues, ones of a more "personal" nature. For most of us, work is central to our daily existence, accounting for the lion's share of our time and energy. Therefore, any substantial changes in this domain are sure to create ripple effects in other areas of our lives. One such realm that will certainly be affected by the "new work order" is identity.

* * * * * * *

The preceding paragraphs were the original introduction for this project's proposal, which I defended in December 2009. Since that time (and even as I prepared the final draft of the proposal), developments spurred by the economic downturn have altered the world of work and, as a result, shifted the public's focus from issues like how to prepare for new kinds of work and ways of working, to concerns regarding the availability of work—any kind of work, old or new. A more recent sampling of the cover stories from *Time Magazine,* shown in Table 1 below, bears witness to these changes.

Table 1: Sample of *Time Magazine* Cover Stories (2009-2011)

***Time Magazine* Cover Story**	**Issue Date**
Out of Work in America: Why Double-Digit Unemployment May Be Here to Stay—And How to Live with It.	Sept. 21st, 2009
Jobs—Where They Are.	March 29th, 2010
The Economy is Back. The Economy Stinks.	July 26th, 2010
How to Restore the American Dream.	Nov. 1st, 2010
Where the Jobs Are.	Jan. 17th, 2011
What Recovery? The Five Myths about the Economy.	June 20th, 2011

As the wider conversation surrounding the world of work began to change, so too did the nature of this project. The ongoing economic crisis and record unemployment levels for the duration of my fieldwork undoubtedly colored the public's priorities, and were therefore reflected in the data—articles, interviews, observations, and informal conversations. So while I set out to investigate my originally proposed topic—identity and self-employment—I was soon reminded that the research process is an interactive one, influenced by the timely concerns and interests of the informants. I would now like

to share some insights that emerged from my time in the field to illustrate the evolution of this project's direction.

A Tale from the Field

When I commenced fieldwork for this project in October 2007, I joined a local coaching organization, hoping to meet and observe some active coaches, in an attempt to learn more about this profession. I had expected their monthly meetings to be filled with discussions about the coaching process, the various models and techniques used, and perhaps even some coaching case studies. I soon discovered, however, that the organization was undergoing a sort of transformation, and the members were on a journey of defining its mission, purpose, and values. Consequently, most of the meeting time was spent debating these issues. There was also some discussion about business and marketing concerns related to coaching, such as creating a user-friendly website, establishing pricing structures, and finding the best places to advertise. Little conversation, however, was devoted to *actual* coaching work—or, at least, what I then believed "counted" as coaching work.

The meetings continued in this fashion for a few months, with the primary focus fixed on determining the organization's future direction. But this effort began to lose steam as members became openly frustrated with the lack of progress and consensus over their collective identity and purpose. Eventually the organizational redefinition was all but abandoned for the time being. The meetings were reconfigured so that the first half was dedicated to discussing "business issues"—and to this day, I am still unclear as to whether this was meant to be the coaching organization's business, or the individual coaches' businesses, which it inevitably included. During the meeting's second half, one

(or two) of the coaches would give a presentation or demonstration, or lead the other members in an activity.

And then, in the autumn of 2008, just as I had grown accustomed to the format of these meetings, the economic crisis unfolded, its full impact looming. I began to see changes in the atmosphere of these monthly gatherings; there seemed to be a new sense of urgency to the business discussion. The once-relaxed exchange of ideas about effective marketing and tips on how to build clientele, was now replaced with coaches sharing their anxieties about "just making a living." The desperation I heard in some of the voices was undeniable. I remember one coach in particular brought up real concerns about losing existing clients, let alone finding new ones. But then, in the next breath, she began to perform "positive self talk":

> I know I have to believe clients will come to me; I just have to do the work and put my faith out there that it will happen. I need to practice abundant thinking when it comes to my coaching. But still…I worry.
> (Fieldnotes, October 22, 2008)

Through this incident, I caught a brief exchange between the competing voices in her head; the anxious voice of the self-employed worker, and the soothing voice of the coach. In my mind, this event indicated that some informants were slowly realizing that positive thinking and believing in abundance just might not be enough to weather the bad economy. But since they employed "positive self talk" in their work with clients, the coaches themselves were now relying on such cognitive tools to get through the difficult times ahead.

A few months later, one of the coaches who regularly attended the organization's monthly meetings invited me to a free public presentation on a new workshop she was offering. Excited, I took my seat in the hotel conference room, among the six or seven

other women in the audience, who appeared to be in their late 40s or older. I remember feeling quite surprised when my informant got up to introduce herself. Gone were the fears about marketing and getting new business she had shared in the coaching meetings. Her tone was animated and confident; her script, expertly crafted. She talked about how her decision to become a coach was "answering her true calling" and this new career opportunity materialized from a tragic, yet "life-changing experience." To hear her speak in such a way was like watching a great theatrical performance, and so very different from the collective problem sharing I had listened to during the coaches' meetings. What I found even more intriguing was the fact she had admitted privately to me, on a previous occasion, she had been laid off from her "permanent" full time job as a career counselor. But this (certainly what I consider) important and relevant detail never came up during her presentation that March afternoon, in the room full of prospective clients.

With time in the field, I began to see a pattern emerging which mirrored the disconnect between this coach's presentation brimming with of rosy narratives, and the angst-filled banter I had been hearing during the monthly coaching meetings. Time and time again, the fretful discussion about marketing and pricing and profit margins, which occurred "off stage," never seemed to come up when the coaches were "on stage," performing their carefully-rehearsed scripts to the public. For me, this discrepancy generated a number of questions: Why had these other, more stressful issues been omitted from the coaches' narratives about their work? What purposes were being served by their omission? Who was benefitting from their exclusion? And who, in turn, might be suffering?

Through these observations, I was prompted to eventually shift my investigation from the *content* of coaching to the *context* of coaching, and this new focus would shape the in-depth interviews to come. As a researcher, my intention has always been to examine the issues and events most significant to the informants. In this case, their voices guided me to look deeper into the challenges of self-employment and how this experience impacted one's identity. I truly began to appreciate the importance of *context* with respect to the kind of narrative produced and presented. Being context-dependent, narratives change temporally (when), spatially (where), and relationally by audience (who). I now was motivated to examine the specific conditions under which it was appropriate to emphasize particular issues, and downplay others. For example, the coaches' monthly meetings had become a "safe space" to talk about the anxieties surrounding the practice of coaching, but it seemed as though it would not be acceptable or "okay" to indulge these feelings elsewhere—particularly in front of prospective clients or during actual coaching sessions with existing ones.

Similarly, I began to recognize how the larger social context shapes the narratives the coaches produce. Factors such as the economic climate, labor conditions, and political atmosphere each played a role in some way in the coaches' everyday lives, and hence, offered substance for the narratives they constructed. For instance, in the above case of the coach who had been released from her "permanent" organizational position, she chose to not draw on this raw material, instead opting to emphasize a tragic life event that would potentially lend more sentimentality and dramatic effect to create a memorable identity narrative for her audience. At the same time, this discursive choice

allowed her to position herself as a proactive career-minded professional, not as a "victim" of corporate downsizing.

I return to these ideas in Chapter Two, as I consider the contextual factors shaping the project's refined focus, and consequently, the data produced and interpretations that emerged. Next, I will discuss the broader research opportunity that presented itself to me, and inspired the undertaking of this dissertation project.

The Research Opportunity

In American society, work is a considerable determinant in shaping one's identity. We are socially programmed, upon being introduced to someone new, to ask "what do you do?" We believe that "who we are" is inextricably linked to "what we do." The assumption, of course, is that the "doing" refers to employment. Ours is a materialistic society, one in which judgments and decisions are made on the basis of economic value. This principle extends to our judgments and decisions about individuals—that is, we evaluate on the basis of activities that carry a monetary exchange value—one's work. It can therefore be argued that one's "worth" as a citizen in a market-driven, capitalistic nation is derived from one's economic contributions, particularly those (i.e. employment income) that enable us to be "good consumers."

Traditionally, the employing organization—through its culture, symbols, norms, and practices—provides the context for member socialization, which contributes to a work identity. In the field of Organization Studies, much work has focused on organizational identity (for an overview, see Hatch & Schultz, 2004). However, as *Time's* special report forewarns, the employer/employee dynamic is shifting, particularly for white collar, knowledge professionals. And as growing numbers move into

contractual work and temporary projects with a variety of clients, self presentation becomes ever more important as a reflection of the skills and services for hire. Now, however, these individuals do not have the assistance or resources of an organizational employer to help shape, guide, and maintain their professional identity.

It can therefore be argued that the self-employed professional's identity is not tied directly or closely to a single employing organization, but rather, that it reflects a stronger identification with a core profession or an industry (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003). Viewed in this light, the issue of identity becomes even more salient, as it indicates not only who the self-employed individual is, but importantly, what they do and the services they offer. This notion has been captured in the concept of "self-branding" (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005), where one "markets" the services they offer by creating and projecting a strong, recognizable identity. For instance, by creating a personal logo or a "tag line," and including it on all business cards and letterheads, the goal is to distinguish oneself from other job seekers.

Given the growing trend of self-employment, particularly among white collar service professionals (Dohm & Shniper, 2007), it is important to understand the issues that affect this class of workers. Identity work, which is largely invisible and uncompensated in the process of service production, has been examined to some degree within either traditional organizational employment or enterpreneurial ventures. For this project, I wanted to explore how this concept operates within the context of a growing class of worker—the self-employed professional. Specifically, this investigation was guided by the following set of research-orienting questions:

> How is identity work(ing) accomplished among self-employed professionals?
> How do individuals make sense of this process?

> What strategies, tools, resources, and practices are drawn upon for "doing identity"?
>
> What are some alternative/unheard identity stories of being a self-employed professional? When individuals create, modify, and interpret their life and work experiences in one way over another, what are the benefits of doing so? What are the dangers?
>
> How do the micro-processes of identity work(ing) relate to the current historical, economic, political and socio-cultural conditions? What linkages can be traced between self-employed professionals' experience and the broader social context?

This is obviously a complicated collection of questions, and there is much to unpack. First of all, the idea that identity is something that one "does"—that is, actively shapes, performs, changes, and contests—makes certain assumptions about the nature of identity. Secondly, it needs to be defined, who is considered a self-employed professional? How are they similar to or different from other types of workers? Why are these individuals or this population worth examining? I explain my theoretical standpoint and review relevant literature on identity in future chapters; questions regarding who is a self-employed professional are addressed in the following section of this chapter.

Using the context of personal coaching[1], I sought to explore the above research questions and to understand how one creates, maintains, alters, resists, and performs the identity of a "self-employed professional." The field of coaching offers a particularly interesting and timely research context, since it is undergoing a process of formalization and legitimization (Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007), as it strives to become recognized as a profession in its own right (Ozkan, 2008). As well, since personal

[1]Although various terms are used in practice to distinguish this type of service work from athletic coaching, a common one is "personal coaching." I will therefore use this term throughout the document, particularly at times when there is a danger of confusion with athletic coaching. Mostly, however, it will be shortened to just "coaching."

coaches embody and symbolize the often intangible qualities of the services they market (George, 2008b), there is likely much awareness of self-identity issues among these actors. Based on these elements, the world of personal coaching offers potentially fertile ground for the study of identity.

This project takes (what I refer to as) a *critical interpretivist* approach, which is informed by symbolic interactionist (SI) and ethnomethodological (EM) traditions, along with social constructionist and labor process theory concerns. As a theoretical lens, SI is important for understanding the self and how people make sense of their symbolic worlds (Mead, 1934). This approach is therefore conducive for understanding issues of identity, because it connects the individual or "self" with their symbolic social worlds. It recognizes that meaning is both created and interpreted within its interactive, social context, and thus acknowledges that one's identity is an active process, continually being negotiated, constructed, maintained, and contested within the context of interaction with others.

If an SI approach is able to answer "what" questions—with regard to socially constructed meanings—then EM works to address the "how" questions. This perspective looks at how the taken-for-granted happens by focusing specifically on the disruptions to the normal, everyday routines and activities. By examining these interruptions to business-as-usual, an EM orientation allows us to reveal or expose the enormous effort that is required to maintain such an air of effortlessness.

While the above gives a brief overview of the theoretical approach, it will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. As well, in Chapter Two, I provide further background on the specific group of interest—personal coaches—thus demonstrating that

the individuals working within this emerging profession are particularly suitable for examining identity construction among self-employed professionals. For now, the section that follows immediately helps to contextualize this investigation by describing trends in the labor market and career patterns in the U.S. over the past few decades.

The Rapid Expansion of Self-Employment in the U.S.

The landscape of the American labor force has changed drastically in the last 30 years. Since the 1980s, there has been tremendous growth in the service sector and a corresponding decline in manufacturing industries. The labor market has consequently shifted from "blue collar" manufacturing and industrial jobs—now outsourced around the globe to be performed by cheaper sources of labor—to increasingly "white collar," "professional," and "knowledge-intensive" service work. As well, the ways in which we organize work and workers have also witnessed dramatic changes; arguably the most dramatic being the rapid expansion of the contingent labor force. This segment consists of workers who are hired by organizations on different terms than regular full time employees, such as part-time, seasonal, temporary, and contractual arrangements.

There are two popular frameworks for understanding the rise of contingent work: the institutional argument and the free agent perspective (Barley & Kunda, 2004). The institutional argument examines shifts in the labor market and changes in organizational practices to explain the increased demand for temporary workers. For instance, the organizational practice of "downsizing" became popular in the early 1990s as a strategy to reduce labor costs by shedding "unnecessary" middle layers from the organization. As a result of this practice, firms attempted to maintain (or, if extra-ambitious, even increase) productivity levels with fewer employees. There are times, however, when fluctuations

in demand require the firm to increase its labor supply. Rather than recruit full time employees, it is more convenient and cost-effective for the firm to hire temporary staff for a terminal period, or just until the completion of a specific project. Firms are thus increasingly making use of contingent labor to fulfill their fluctuating needs.

In contrast to the institutional argument, the free agent viewpoint embraces contingent work as a means for individuals to move freely between jobs, to be in full control of their choice of assignments, and to avoid getting "stuck" in a dead-end job ever again (Barley & Kunda, 2004). Daniel Pink (2001) is credited with borrowing the term *free agent* from professional athletics and popularizing it within a management/career context. In the sports world, notably within professional baseball and basketball leagues, a free agent is an athlete without a contract, and therefore does not currently "belong" to a team. The athlete is considered "on the market" and can "shop around" for a contract. A bidding war may ensue between any number of teams who wants to secure the individual to wear its jersey.

In the context of careers, "free agents" refer to (presumably white collar) workers who are in similar circumstances, in that they are not "owned" by a single employer. Pink (2001) describes them as individuals who float effortlessly between assignments. They are kept challenged by the range of projects they work on, learning new skills with each and adding to their experience. Crucially, they must be masters at marketing themselves, since they are often competing with other free agents for contract work. Free agency also means an individual can exercise a high degree of control—control over the hours worked, the locations chosen, the assignments taken on. And greater control, Pink (2001) argues, means greater freedom.

Compared with the institutional argument, the free agent perspective promotes an overwhelmingly positive interpretation of contingency work, viewing it as an opportunity to take charge of one's career. Free agency embraces the ideals of self-sufficiency, initiative, empowerment, personal responsibility, and proactiveness, which are associated with the "enterprising self" (du Gay, 1991, 1996)—the embodiment of success within the new economy. It is critical to point out that in the world of free agency, when the term "contingent labor" is used, it is with the assumption that an intentional career choice has been made by the individual to become self-employed.

This can be misleading, however, as the contingent labor force encompasses a variety of employment arrangements, including part-time workers, who are still classified as "wage and salary employees." In other words, these workers are still employed by a firm. Additionally, individuals who find their work through temp agencies may be classed as "contingent" or "temporary" staff by the client firms who provide their assignments. However, because the agency is responsible for paying taxes and other contributions, they are also classed as "wage and salary employees." In both cases, these workers would *not* be categorized as self-employed under the BLS typology.

At the same time, individuals who are classed as self-employed are not necessarily regarded as part of the contingent labor force; a common example of this is entrepreneurial individuals who start their own business. If they do arrange work with a client firm, the contract is drawn up under the name of the business, not the individual.

The above examples illustrate how easily terms can become conflated and confused. When we talk of "contingent labor," it is usually from the institutional perspective—that is, from the point of view of the firm which hires and makes use of that

labor. Free agents therefore fall into a unique category. Such individuals are self-employed because they are responsible for securing and arranging work assignments directly with the client, and do not rely on employment agencies or other mediating bodies. However, they are also considered contingent labor, since they are hired by clients[2] on a contractual or temporary basis, but do not become the client's "employee."

Self-employment is increasingly becoming a way of organizing work life. As the fastest growing category of work, self-employment in the United States grew by a staggering two million workers, from 8.3 million in 1995 to more than 10.3 million in 2005 (BLS Reports, cited in Ashford, George, & Blatt, 2008: 75). According the Bureau of Labor Statistics, self-employment is projected to increase another 5.5 percent to reach 12.9 million jobs by 2016, and ageing Baby Boomers are expected to contribute substantially to this growth (Dohm & Shniper, 2007).

Who is the Self-Employed Professional?

Although the management literature on the self-employed is growing, it is a comparatively small body of work. Entrepreneurship is one type of self-employment, and by contrast, the work on this topic is vast and includes numerous dedicated journals. Somewhat confusing is the interchangeable use of the labels "entrepreneur" and "self-employed" to describe particular kinds of workers. For instance, the term entrepreneur is commonly associated with a certain type of business – implying more about the nature of the business or venture and economic arrangement than the employment situation. Indeed, much of the published research on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs appears in the field of economics, and is therefore defined in economic terms.

[2] "Clients" may include both individuals and organizations/firms.

Bogenhold (2004) has pointed out the problems of equating entrepreneurship with self-employment, the latter encompassing multitude of different employment circumstances, as discussed at length in the previous section. The two terms can therefore be distinguished as follows: entrepreneurship implies a strong association with a type of business and its growth or development trajectory; self-employment is instead a work arrangement where the individual is responsible for securing work with organizations or generating an income through goods or services produced.

Defining who or what an entrepreneur is exactly has proven to be quite tricky. Mainstream management studies—those adopting economic or psychological perspective—have focused theoretically on identifying entrepreneurial traits or attributes. Much of this literature is devoted to trying to identify who is an entrepreneur, or to come up with a basic definition or theory of entrepreneurship, which is reminiscent of the vast literature on leadership and how a leader can be correctly identified. For instance, some scholars have focused on what makes an entrepreneur 'different' psychologically from the rest of the population (Beugelsdijk & Noorderhaven, 2005). This research may generate statistically amenable identifiers, but there are serious explanatory limits with this type of knowledge. Methodologically, by treating the entrepreneur as a homogenous archetype, research that produces an understanding of the lived experience of being an entrepreneur is quite rare (apart from a few case studies). There have been many calls for taking a more ethnographic approach to the study of entrepreneurship (Curran & Burrows, 1987; Ogbor, 2000), and a number of scholars have already made efforts to answer that call (for example: Bruni, Gheradi, & Poggio, 2004; Holliday, 1995; Hytti, 2005; Kondo, 1990; Ram, 2000).

So while it may be true that entrepreneurs are self-employed, not all self-employed individuals are considered entrepreneurs. As well, those who are self-employed (or work on a contractual basis) may perform a wide variety of labor: from manual and "blue collar" (i.e. carpenters, plumbers, truck drivers); to personal care, domestic, and "pink collar" (i.e. barbers, manicurists, massage therapists, child care workers); to professional, knowledge, and "white collar" (ex: executive assistants, management consultants, journalists, graphic designers). Hence, it is important to specify that for the purpose of this study, it is the last category of worker which is of primary concern. One motivation for taking this focus is to examine a *growing* class of workers, since white collar professional work is increasingly being organized on contractual terms. Indeed, those who currently belong to the self-employed category were likely considered "wage and salary employees" in the (not-so-distant) past, and are therefore still adjusting to life as a "free agent."

Document Overview

This dissertation document is divided into a number of chapters. In Chapter Two, I contextualize the research by sketching the historical backdrop, including political and socio-economic conditions, which is crucial to consider when interpreting the data. I also provide an overview of the coaching profession and its emergence in the last 15 years.

Chapter Three positions the research (and me, as the researcher) theoretically and methodologically. I discuss my theoretical orientation, and how this shapes the nature of the concepts under investigation (i.e. identity), as well as the methodology for how these phenomena are best examined. I also review the literature for what has been done in the

area of new careers and self employment, and compare it with what this research promises to achieve.

Chapter Four describes the full research process, including fieldwork, methods of investigation, and data analysis.

In Chapter Five, I explore the various narrative tools, resources, and strategies that are employed for doing identity work, which are available to individual coaches by the wider professional community, including governing and accreditation bodies (like the ICF), as well as research institutions, training programs, and coaching websites, books, articles, and the like. In order to reveal the "doing" of identity, in the true ethnomethodological sense, I focus on moments of *contradiction*, *conflict,* and *challenge*, which create anxiety within the individual, thus inducing greater identity working efforts. Crucially, what I found was that these disruptions were most frequently surfaced when the individual coach felt the tension of competing identity working demands. On the one hand, coaches were faced with performing their own individual identity work as self-employed professionals; on the other, as members of the coaching community, they were expected to carry out work for the wider profession, thus facilitating the legitimization process. But rather than help the individual craft an identity as a coach, the resources provided by professional bodies often produced more conflicts and tensions, which the individual coach was then left alone to negotiate and reconcile, with little support.

Chapter Six widens the analytical focus to examine the complex connection and interplay between material realities and coaches' identity working. That is, I argue that identity working goes beyond the narratives of coaching and "talk" of being a coach; it entails the thoughts, decisions, and actions that result from these words, which then

influences the future narratives that are produced. What's more, these identity working efforts cannot be divorced from the larger social and material conditions, which mutually impact and shape one another.

I introduce a typology of three coaching orientations: *proficient, profitable*, and *pragmatic*. More than just offering labels for the different kinds of behaviors that coaches displayed, the typology helps us understand the competing frames of logic that may be used to guide one's coaching work, and critically, the shifting between orientations that can occur, especially when the material realities of self-employment—like the pressures to find clients and make a steady income—are taken into consideration.

The focus of Chapter Seven is the social and relational aspects of identity working, as well as identity regulating and controlling. Since the coaching industry is predominantly organized via self-employment, I illustrate how the geographical dispersion of its members complicates the goal of establishing a unified, coherent, and standardized identity for the profession. In the first of two case studies, I examine the relational aspect of identity working and how this is influenced by with the changing status of work relations. Drawing upon my own experience as a coaching client, I demonstrate how the coaching profession "recruits" participants—even outside the confines of the professional community—in the identity working process to accomplish its legitimacy goals. In doing so, those recruited are expected to adjust to the revised way of relating to others—employing a more transactional and business-based logic—which reflects the changing world of work.

In the second case, I analyze how the deeply social processes of identity regulating and controlling—which are crucial for coaching as it continues its process of

professionalization—are changing to incorporate new mechanisms and forms of organizing; for instance, social media. Specifically, I recount the unfolding of an online discussion thread, to show the subtle and virtually imperceptible ways that members attempt to "manage" and "reform" Ned, a fellow discussant. My goal is to illustrate how Ned's comments about economic conditions, which are judged as unorthodox and deviate from the profession's dominant rhetoric and culture of positivity, must therefore be silenced, as they threaten to disrupt the established order within the coaching community.

Finally, Chapter Eight concludes the document with a summary of the findings, as well as implications for theory and practice. With respect to the coaching profession, I provide feedback to professional bodies, organizations, and key decision-makers, based on the data produced for this project, about how its existing practices may (albeit unintentionally) support and benefit some members of its community more than others. To this end, I also offer some suggestions for how this imbalance might be addressed in the future.

Regarding the future of work and employment, I contend that this project, although grounded in the world of coaching, can serve as a more general contextual exemplar for studying and understanding the changing patterns that will increasingly characterize the "new world of work."

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH: THE PERSONAL COACHING PROFESSION AND WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT

Introduction: Sketching the Historical Context

I begin this chapter by mapping out the historical context, including the economic, political, and socio-cultural conditions, which has given rise to the personal coaching profession. Next, I discuss how coaching can be considered both a new economy service and a new economy career. Finally, I attempt to illustrate that the world of coaching, as an emerging profession, offers a particularly auspicious and compelling backdrop for examining identity construction among self-employed professionals.

According to Somers' (1994) conceptualization of narrative identity, our sense of self cannot be separated from the historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural context in which these narratives of identity are constructed, because of the intimate relationship between the co-constitution of individual identity and the wider world. In the next sections, I describe the United States' current political, economic, and socio-cultural context. While it is important to appreciate the historical development of the present social conditions, my brief examination here is partial and limited to the recent past (i.e. the last two decades or so), with a particular focus on the four years surrounding my fieldwork, from 2007-2011. The events that took place during this time were fresh, and thus salient, in shaping the everyday social context of my informants. As well, although they are presented here as separate issues, it is important to acknowledge that the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions are deeply entangled; indeed, they inform and shape one another.

Economic and Political Context: "America's Broke!"

It seems that no one can escape the economic situation in the United States; it is the topic of conversation among politicians and special task forces, in boardrooms and classrooms, in workplaces, cafés, and homes across the country. The most visible sign of the economic crisis is the staggering national unemployment rate, which lingered at an average of 9.1% in 2011 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011a). This is quite remarkable if one considers that when I began my fieldwork in 2007, the annual rate of unemployment was half this level, at just 4.6% (BLS, 2011b). To add to this bad news, those who are jobless now face longer periods without work than ever before. At the end of my fieldwork in 2011, the average length of unemployment was up almost 250% from five years before, climbing steadily since the economic crisis hit in late 2008. To illustrate differently, in September 2008, an unemployed person could expect to spend an average of 18.6 weeks between jobs; two years later in 2010 this figure rose to 33.4 weeks. As of September 2011, that same unemployed person faced a daunting 40.5 weeks out of work (BLS, 2011c).

With such grim economic circumstances, it's no wonder that the American population is growing disgruntled and frustrated, and is rapidly losing faith in many overarching institutions, notably big banks and the federal government. Borrowing from US banks and financial institutions has become much more difficult since the government bailout of 2008. There has been a public outcry over the US Administration's handling of the financial crisis, such as the millions in bonuses paid to banking executives, using Treasury (i.e. taxpayer) funds. In turn, the banks have done little to pass on any of the settlement to consumers, instead making it almost impossible to secure loans and hiking

up credit card interest rates. The result: homeownership and consumer spending have both fallen, while distrust of big banks and financial institutions continues to spread.

In August 2011 Standard and Poor downgraded the United States, for the first time ever, from its prestigious triple-A rating. The culmination of these conditions, but the downgrade in particular, has caused panicked and unpredictable behavior on Wall Street, with stock prices fluctuating wildly—peaking one day, plummeting the next.

The condition of the country's infrastructure is also not healthy. Due to years of deferred maintenance, the nation's schools, bridges, and transportation networks are in dire need of repair. There is definitely an eager labor supply, ready and willing to be put to work on these "rebuild America" projects. However, after promises to put citizens back to work, Washington is struggling to agree on the country's priorities, and thus too slow to take the needed steps to fund these projects.

Unfortunately, the United States is not alone; the economic situation in other countries is not any more encouraging. Recent financial crises and subsequent bailouts in Greece and Ireland have created worldwide uncertainty for the Euro currency. Greek workers have held general strikes to protest the government's proposed austerity measures.

A common explanation being thrown around for the current economic conditions, high unemployment, and lack of funding for the nation's declining infrastructure is that "America's broke." First uttered as a sound bite by some political pundit, and soon adopted and repeated by politicians themselves, mainstream media, and eventually the general public, this rationale has become, for many, a taken-for granted truth. The

argument is that there is no money left to fund social assistance programs, like Medicare and Social Security, and so drastic cuts are needed.

However, this is only one account of the situation. An alternative and less-heard version is that America is, in fact, *not* broke. Rather, the current state of affairs can—and, it is argued, should—be blamed on an unfair corporate tax system. As stated in a recent report in the United Auto Workers magazine *Solidarity* (2011: 14):

> We hear these statements about the US economy all the time: We're broke. We're drowning in debt. We're being taxed to death. We need to rein in government spending to get our economy back on solid footing.
>
> Here's the truth: We're not broke. The problem isn't out-of-control spending. It's an unfair tax system. Instead of spending cuts that hurt retirees, working families and the poor; we should demand that corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share.

This current political debate, regarding America's shaky economic position and how to go about strengthening it, is the source of much frustration for many Americans. Because there is no agreement in the Senate, there has been little progress in the form of real action. Meanwhile, growing numbers of citizens are claiming bankruptcy, being laid off, and foreclosing on their homes. It is little wonder, then, that a blanket of anxiety and fear covers the population, given these unstable economic and political conditions.

Socio-cultural Context: Living and Working in the Age of Insecurity

One way to describe everyday life in this country in the present historical moment is that we are living in an age of insecurity. Last year marked the 10th anniversary of 9/11, the horrific tragedy where thousands lost their lives, and millions more were forever changed. In the interim, Americans have had to learn how to live with the perpetual fear of terrorism and attacks on this nation as "a symbol of freedom and democracy." The events of September 11, 2001 have united citizens quite unlike any other in recent

history. Americans, known around the world for their intense individuality, have bonded through collective feelings of national pride, resilience, patriotism, and gratitude—but also of paranoia, suspicion, discrimination, and fear.

The consequences of these acts of terror that deeply touched citizens, while devastating, are not the only source of anxiety in contemporary American society. In the world of work, the rise of globalization and increasing economic uncertainty over the last three decades has resulted in drastic changes in the American labor market (Osterman, 2001). Specifically, the decline of the nation's manufacturing sector, coupled with the growth of service industries, particularly in high tech and knowledge intensive fields, has created different labor needs and skill demands. These changes in the industrial landscape have, in turn, brought about new workforce trends—namely the decline of full-time permanent employment and the rise of the temporary and contingent labor force. Furthermore, the practice of "downsizing" and "rightsizing," which swept workplaces in the 1990s has now become a legitimate and accepted way of doing business in a global economy. The imperative to be "globally competitive" is so ingrained in the American psyche that workers no longer seem to question this rationale, nor the measures used to achieve it.

Although obviously different in domain and degree, what is similar between the two sets of events are the ensuing feelings of anxiety and dread by the "survivors"—in one case, those who escaped the terrorist attack directly; in the other, those who were spared in the latest round of lay-offs. In the business scenario, however, we also have insight into what happens to the "victims" of downsizing: they too must cope with feelings of anxiety and dread—perhaps initially, from haunting thoughts of not being

good enough or not doing enough to keep their jobs. And subsequently, the anxiety and dread shift to the burden of attaining different employment and a new source of income (see Ehrenreich, 2005; Uchitelle, 2006).

Added to the list of anxiety-inducing changes is the breakdown of the traditional employment relationship, with the "Organization Man" (Whyte Jr., 1956) as its ideal career model. But rather than question why these changes have come about, workers are encouraged to alter their expectations of employers accordingly. Furthermore, not only are individuals now required to assume more personal responsibility for their careers, work satisfaction, and income security, but they should also be eager to do so because this signifies freedom, autonomy, independence—values that are celebrated in the post-industrial, market capitalist American culture.

Amidst this bleak economic climate, it is justifiable that those individuals who are employed feel fortunate just to have work. With an estimated 13 million looking for employment, 40% of whom have been out of work for extended periods (BLS, 2012), it would appear that now is not the time for those with jobs to be exploring new career opportunities. These conditions make it such that one would be unwise to complain about their current work situation, let alone consider negotiating a raise. One false move, it seems, and a worker could be so easily replaced by one of the desperate job seekers, who is willing to take on any kind of work at the drop of a hat—and likely for a pay cut.

While this may be a dramatic portrayal of the current employment situation, it is not unrealistic. There are implications for the employed individual as well as the unemployed; where one lives in fear of losing the job they have, the other lives in fear of never finding work again. And even for those workers who feel fairly secure in their

employment—for instance, individuals who work in an industry that is currently not in decline, like healthcare or financial services—they almost certainly still feel the consequences of the economic downturn, for instance, in terms of wage and salary levels, and demand for services. In other words, every person has been affected in some way by the current recession—as a worker, as a consumer, and as a citizen.

Having established the larger social backdrop, I now turn my investigation to the world of professional coaching and how it fits into this wider context.

The Emergence of Coaching: A Profession, A Service, and A Career

The field of personal coaching has been chosen for exploring issues of self-employment and professional self-identity in the context of changing employment relations. Originally associated with athletics, "coaching" is another metaphor pinched by management scholars and practitioners from the world of competitive sports, much like "free agent," "team player," "game plan," and "scorecard," to name but a few.

According to its website (2009a), the International Coach Federation (ICF) is the:

> leading global organization dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification, and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches…The ICF's core mission is to advance the art, science and practice of professional coaching.

Claiming itself as "*the* voice of the global coaching profession" (2009a, emphasis added), the ICF regularly produces research reports on the field of coaching, but admits that it is growing so rapidly, it is difficult for statistics to keep up. For instance, in the last decade, ICF membership has grown by a staggering 700%, from 2,122 members in 1999 to more than 14,000 in 2009 (ICF, 2008, 2009a). To date, more than 5,100 coaches around the world have been certified by an ICF-approved coaching program (ICF, 2009a). However, since neither certification nor ICF membership is required to become

a personal coach, the exact number practicing is unknown. The American Management Association (AMA) offers a conservative estimate when it states that upwards of 30,000 individuals are actually offering coaching services worldwide (AMA, 2008: 2). Environmental complexities, created by increased downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, and outplacement, are cited as a possible cause for the explosion in the demand for and supply of coaching services since the early 1990s (Hudson, 1999).

There are several different types of services under the personal coaching umbrella. Among them are life, health and wellness, business, executive, spiritual, and career coaching. The nature of coaching—regardless of specialization—centers on the growth, change, and development of the individual client or "coachee." Unlike its closest cousins, therapy and counseling—which tend to be "problem-focused" and investigate one's past to arrive at a diagnosis—coaching is "solution-oriented", its outlook firmly set on the future to envision where one would *like to be* (Crockett, 2007; Ozkan, 2008). Commonly, goal setting is used to realize this vision, and concrete action plans are established to meet the client's goals (Grant, 2003; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). The coach then accompanies the client on this journey, offering support and encouragement, talking through victories and struggles, together revisiting and modifying the action plan as needed.

In a sense, coaching work is centered largely on developing "the self." Normally, the individual client[3] would contact a coach on their own volition, after identifying if not the specific problems, the general life areas they wish to address. Thus, some initial self-

[3] In the case of executive coaching, someone other than the individual executive, such as an HR professional, may determine the need for coaching. The organization which hires the coach is therefore considered the "client."

analysis and assessment on the part of the individual usually occurs in order to identify the need for coaching.

A great deal of writing has been generated on the coaching profession since the turn of the millennium, most of it published in the popular press. The ICF (2008: 14) reports that in 2007 alone, an impressive 1,614 "clips" on the topic of coaching were gathered worldwide. These coaching clips appeared in such reputable sources as the *New York Times, Wall Street Journal* (US, Europe, & Asia), *Washington Post, London Financial Times,* and *Globe & Mail*.

The scholarly work on personal coaching has not been quite so prolific, but has grown substantially in recent years. Much of what has been produced is concentrated in the field of Counseling Psychology. For instance, *Coaching* is a peer-reviewed journal that focuses exclusively on academic research and theory about personal coaching. In the management literature, the emphasis has been almost exclusively on executive or business coaching, addressing managerial concerns such as the evaluation of coaching skills and practice (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007), its effect on organizational performance (Agarwal, Angst, & Magni, 2006; MacKie, 2007) and benefits to coached individuals (Jay, 2003; Spence & Grant, 2007). Coaching has also been linked to organizational variables, such as emotional intelligence (Bharwaney, Bar-On, Maree, & Elias, 2007; Blattner & Bacigalupo, 2007; Boyatzis, Druskat, Sala, & Mount, 2006; Bricklin, 2002), as well as its relation to the field of positive psychology (Foster & Lloyd, 2007; Locke, 2002). More recently, budding research interests include the coach's role, the coaching process, and the coach-client relationship (Passmore, 2007; Spence, Grant, Cavanagh, Grant, & Kemp, 2005).

As an emerging field, personal coaching presents a fascinating background for the study of professional identity. Not only must individuals grapple with legitimizing their services and their identities as coaches, they must also do legitimizing work for this nascent profession as a whole (see Clegg et al., 2007; Ozkan, 2008)—a burden not likely encountered in the well-established, "traditional" professions, such as medicine, psychiatry, and the law.

Although individual coaches may represent a wide variety of concentrations—personal, life, spiritual, health and wellness, executive, and career, to name a few—they operate under similar conditions, with regard to the way that their work is organized and how they perform it. Regardless if they coach full or part-time, or offer their services to individuals or organizations, every self-employed coach is responsible for enlisting and maintaining clients, as well as marketing, pricing, and billing for services rendered.

And while coaching philosophies and areas of expertise might be diverse, coaches do share in common the *identity work of a self-employed professional.* In this respect, such efforts are not unique to coaches, but applicable to anyone who might fit this category, including: translators; journalists; writers/editors; software engineers; adjunct faculty, management consultants; and financial advisors. Coaches are, therefore, just one example of a more general class of worker known as the "self-employed professional."

The emerging field of coaching is both a product of, and a response to, the current conditions and market demands of our post-industrial society. In the sections that follow, I examine the rise of the coaching profession through its two major branches, reflect upon its process of professionalization, and also consider coaching as both a career choice and a sought-after service.

The Professionalization of Coaching

It is imperative to examine the occupational context in which coaches are situated, in an effort to understand how these conditions shape the demands and expectations for identity working. Coaching is a growing field, and consequently, still very early in its journey towards professionalization.

A very loose definition of a profession is an "exclusive occupational group applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases" (Abbott, 1988: 8). A certain profession can be distinguished from other occupational groups by an expert body of knowledge, often accompanied by a specialized language or vocabulary of terms, concepts, techniques, and frameworks. Abbott's (1988) approach to the study of professions emphasizes their operation within a larger interdependent system, where different professions compete with each other for control over knowledge and its application. Abbott claims that interprofessional competition is fundamental to professional life and should therefore be the focus of research on professions, since "control without competition is trivial" (1988: 2).

Building on Abbott's (1988) foundational work on professions, Leicht and Fennell (2001) suggest the term "professional project" to expand the focus on the professional, which has been traditionally fixed on the relationship between the professional worker and client, to one that encompasses the professional in relation to peers within the same community, as well as others in competing occupations. Thus, the notion of professional project takes in a more holistic account of the key players (direct and indirect) within a vocation, and is especially useful when examining the development of an emerging profession.

It therefore makes sense to consider coaching in terms of a professional project; one that is currently in progress, undergoing rapid changes, and engaging in a great deal of interprofessional competition as it establishes its boundaries. The concept of professional project is also crucial for discussing the individual in relation to the professional community, as the broader examination of one's counterparts and rivals brings to light the reciprocity and interplay between the individual's decisions and actions, and the functioning of the profession as a whole. These points will be explored more fully in Chapter Five, where I draw upon my data to demonstrate how coaches construct an identity by positioning themselves in relation to other professionals, while also performing important identity work for the coaching profession.

With respect to the nature of coaching work, it has been considered, from a sociological perspective, as a new class of service work. George (2008a) contends that coaching is a highly personalized, intangible activity which combines elements of Hochschild's emotional labor (1983), aspects of interactive service work (Leidner, 1991, 1993) and certain characteristics of paid and unpaid care work (Abel & Nelson, 1990; Diamond, 1992; England, 2005). George (2008a) thus categorizes coaching as "expert service work"—which falls somewhere between professional and low-skilled service work. Such a category is characterized by less work regulation than more established and "institutionalized" professions (i.e. law, medicine, psychotherapy), yet similar in terms of its highly customized, interpersonal nature.

Those who practice coaching (and with whom I spoke and interacted), however, would likely argue that it is indeed professional service work. There exists a plethora of obstacles to instituting professionalism in coaching, as would be the case within any

budding occupation. Although greater numbers of coaches are earning credentials, because the field is for the most part unregulated, there are still wide variations in certification requirements among the plethora of coaching training programs that exist (AMA, 2008: 4). According to its website, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) is the self-anointed "voice of the global coaching profession…dedicated to advancing the coaching profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification, and building a worldwide network of credentialed coaches" (2009a). To this end, the ICF regularly produces research reports on the field of coaching, in an effort to develop a knowledge base and to offer a snapshot of the professional landscape. However, since the industry is growing so rapidly, it is difficult for statistics to keep up with these developments. The ICF has also taken extensive measures to advance the coaching profession by developing a code of ethics and an inventory of coaching competencies.

The ICF maintains that it can serve the field most effectively by bolstering "professional coaching as a distinct and self-regulating profession" (ICF, 2009b). On the one hand, for those who join this occupation, self-regulation means dealing with less red tape and fewer hoops from intervening state and other external regulating bodies. On the other, barriers to entry are minimal, and hence, virtually anyone can call themselves a coach, as no formal training or credentials are required to do so. And, as I will later demonstrate through informants' stories, these factors have serious repercussions for those practicing within this coaching community in terms of their own professional identity, and the collective identity of the profession and industry.

Establishing credibility among the masses is also a challenge. The 2008 Sherpa Executive Coaching Survey (2008) concluded that despite some recent improvements in

public perception, the coaching profession's credibility is still much lower than the perceived value of the coaching process (cited in AMA, 2008: 17). It is not surprising, then, that high on the priority list for the coaching field—that is, its practitioners, researchers, and concerned bodies, like the ICF—is to carve out a niche that clearly distinguishes it from related areas, like therapy and consulting, and to define it as a professional sphere in its own right (Ozkan, 2008). A recent study on organizational identity, Clegg, Rhodes and Kornberger (2007) chose to examine the coaching profession, precisely because it offered a rich context for examining the struggles of constructing legitimacy in up-and-coming industries.

So why is the professional status of coaching important to this project? By understanding its current position in the professionalization process, it becomes possible to appreciate the implications this has for its individual members. One of the most pressing, based on my observations in the field, is the burden that falls on the coaches' shoulders to perform important identity work to help legitimize the profession and educate the public about coaching. As well, the coaching profession's overall standing has an impact on the credibility of the individuals working in this nascent occupation; these issues will come under greater scrutiny in Chapter Five.

Serving Different Markets: Executive vs. Personal Coaching

The rise of the coaching profession as a whole can be attributed to a combination of factors. And, depending on the coaching specialization, the individual trajectory might appear quite different. While the areas of coaching expertise continue to expand, it is generally agreed they each fall under one of two broad categories: executive/business coaching; or personal/life coaching. A further distinction between these groups is that

executive coaches are most commonly contracted by organizational clients; personal coaches, by contrast, usually provide services for individuals.

With regard to executive coaching, entrants to this field are generally former business executives and professionals, scholars, or management consultants. For this latter group, becoming a "coach" is, in many cases, merely a name change. When pressure from global competition grew in the 1990s, management consultants were brought into firms to analyze how costs could be cut, thereby increasing overall efficiency. To this end, terms like "downsizing" and "delayering" were introduced to the business lexicon and soon became common practices. Consultants were considered the detached voice of reason and, though they may not have been the ones doing the actual firing, they became demonized by workers for recommending these actions to management. Furthermore, consultants were often blamed by their clients for charging exorbitant fees for suggesting somewhat simple solutions, but then leaving before the "hard work" of implementation and change was required. As such, management consultants earned a reputation for being costly dispensers of common sense, with little investment in the practical outcomes of their recommendations.

From my readings and conversations with informants, I was able to deduce that business and executive coaches distinguish themselves from consultants in two important ways. First, with regard to context, coaches place much greater focus on building and maintaining long-term relationships with organizational clients. This effectively demonstrates the coach's commitment to making sustainable changes and assisting in their implementation, while also increasing accountability for their work. Arguably, these are both attractive benefits to the client and an improvement on the conventional

consulting arrangement. Second, in relation to content, coaches do not work strictly on "business" issues, but often partner with individual managers and executives to develop their communication, interpersonal, and leadership skills. In this sense, a coach's task is to help develop the potential of the "coachee" (i.e. the employee), in accordance with the client's (i.e. the organization's) goals. This logic is consistent with Ozkan's (2008: 8) claim that the emergence of executive coaching is both "…a product of and response to a fast changing corporate environment where continuous self-improvement is required to adapt to the volatility of markets."

One thing management consultants and executive coaches do have in common is they typically have contractual work arrangements with their organizational clients. An exception to this is an "internal coach"—an organizational employee who works in a human resource or training capacity. As in the case of some consultants, the "internal coach" may just be a title change, with or without additional training or certification in coaching techniques.

The advent of the more "personal" coaching specializations—like relationships, careers, health and wellness, spirituality, and general life matters, to name a few—can also be explained by recent socio-cultural shifts, particularly in the area of our work lives. At present, Americans are working longer hours than ever before (Doohan, 1999). For the working class and low-skilled labor, the extra hours are usually derived from second or even third jobs, due to a stagnant minimum wage and generally low pay levels, coupled with the rising costs of living. For the middle class, the work situation is rather different. Putting in long hours at salaried jobs has become a norm encouraged and supported by white-collar employers. To illustrate with an example, Sun Microsystems

was a pioneer in the "all-inclusive workplace" by providing on-site conveniences, including a fitness center, car wash, and laundromat. The company even permitted employees to bring pets to the office in an effort to make it seem more like "home" (Useem, 2000). While these measures might not be the norm (especially in the current climate of unemployment and layoffs), creating such a workplace culture certainly draws attention in the media, and therefore does act as an exemplar for the rest of corporate America to blur the lines between "work" and "home"; between "professional" and "personal."

Extended work weeks translate into fewer hours that can be dedicated to "non-work" areas of life. This predicament has become a major concern and source of stress for many Americans. With less time to spend on everyday tasks, white-collar workers have therefore had to prioritize these responsibilities according to what limited time they do have available. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2003, 2005) claims that this "time crunch" has simultaneously opened up opportunities for the provision new services, particularly in the domestic domain. For example, where families once personally cared for their children or aging parents, these duties are increasingly becoming "outsourced" (Sandholtz, Derr, Buckner, & Carlson, 2004). That is, non-family members are being paid to provide such services, either at the family home or other premises, like a crèche or a nursing home (Dizard & Gadlin, 1990).

The services available for purchase, however, are not just limited to childcare or house cleaning. It appears that the marketplace is reaching ever deeper into more "intimate" realms. Areas of life that were once thought "too private" to be bought and sold—such as dating, spirituality, and relationship guidance—have now become the

subject of commodification (Hochschild, 2003). Indeed, the border between what we commonly consider "private" and "public" seems to be shifting along with the multitude of socio-cultural changes wrought by the new economy in this era of globalization.

Against this contextual backdrop, it is possible to see how and why personal and life coaching services have come about to meet the current demands of daily life. These "new" services, targeted at overworked and predominantly upper- and middle-class Americans, have shown intensifying demand since the late 1990s, signaled by the upsurge in the number of coaches providing such services (ICF, 2008, 2009a). As well, the list of offerings continues to grow, in an effort to touch every possible life area where a client might need guidance and support—career, business, parenting, health and wellness, writing, relationships, and even prison[4] and plastic surgery (also known by its more witty label: "knife coaching").

An interesting bridge between the executive/business and personal/life divide is career coaching. Due to changing organizational forms through downsizing and mergers, and the intensifying reliance on outsourcing in the last two decades, functions like employee training and human resource management (HRM), which were traditionally housed within the walls of the organization, are now increasingly being contracted out to external firms and service providers. Consistent with this observation, many of the career coaches I interviewed had previously been employed in full time, "permanent" positions in HRM departments within organizational settings. Career coaches predominantly work

[4] The prison coach's task is to help business professionals prepare for and transition to prison life, as they "do time" for their white collar crimes. This term (and service) no doubt became more popular with the recent collapse of the commercial banking and financial industry. The job of prison coach was mentioned rather tongue-in-cheek in a 2009 New York Times article.

with individual clients, since the worker—not the employing organization—is now responsible for mapping out a career path, assessing skills and knowledge, planning for retirement, and making oneself as "marketable" to employers as possible. Workers must constantly work on these issues because at any moment, they could find themselves on the job market. A career coach can help one manage their career life to ensure readiness for when a great new opportunity comes along.

With such intense focus on the next job or project, some individuals have recognized that coaching *is* one of those great new career opportunities. With this in mind, I now move on to discuss coaching as a very appealing career for our post-industrial, service-based, knowledge economy.

Coaching: A New Career for the New Economy

Coaching is a profession where the vast majority of those working in this field are doing so in a self-employed capacity. As such, coaching work provides an attractive alternative to organizational employment, especially at present, when the jobless rate has been hovering around 9% for most of 2011, and the competition for salaried positions is fierce. And while some coaches are working within organizational settings—particularly executive, leadership, and business coaches—they are nevertheless employed on a contractual or "free agent" (Pink, 2001) basis. The result: almost all coaches operate under similar conditions, with regard to how their work is organized and how they choose to perform it. Whether working full or part-time, serving individuals or organizations, every self-employed coach is responsible for soliciting and maintaining clients, not to mention the marketing, pricing, and billing for services rendered. In this light, the structuring of employment within the coaching profession is an accurate reflection of

current developments in the US labor market, and could therefore be considered a "new economy career" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b; D. T. Hall & Mirvis, 1996; M. Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee, & Morris, 2000).

Gone are the days of lifelong employment to one organization or even within one career, which was the norm a couple generations ago. At the present moment, for one to succeed in the "new economy," one must be willing to embrace and embody its values. That is, individuals must be flexible, responsible, autonomous, creative, and adaptable (du Gay, 1991) . The field of coaching thus provides an opportunity for such enterprising individuals to their realize career aspirations of doing "meaningful, professional work" in a manner consistent with this "new work order" (Time, 2009c) .

Coaching Identity Issues: The Endless Existential Search

Given the current social conditions, coaching, as an industry and a profession, has a unique place. As a service, coaching is a mechanism by which individuals, who are burdened by increasing responsibility to manage various areas of their lives, can cope with the "business" of everyday life. Regardless of the specific professional or personal domain for which coaching is offered, coaches work with clients on matters of self development and growth , and this, inevitably, touches upon issues of identity.

First of all, coaching specializations delve into the "personal" realms of client's lives; Hochschild (2003, 2005) referred to this phenomenon as the commodification of intimate life. Over time, the once "off limits" matters of one's being are now increasingly being seen as "fair game" for business-minded "professionals" to help manage, control, shape, and maintain. This provokes questions surrounding the larger issues and structural forces which have influenced and helped create the need for

professional assistance to navigate the confusing and often messy terrain typical of twenty-first century post-industrial life.

If coaching can be viewed as outsourced identity work, then coaches can be considered existential workers. A study of identity working could focus on the content of coaching, and the kind of services and assistance that the coaches offer to their clients. This makes the world of coaching ripe for studying identity working, due to its numerous sources of uncertainty, and resulting feelings of anxiety and insecurity. With such conditions, there are more frequent incidences in which to "see" the otherwise invisible micro-processes of identity working. And the broader social context of economic and political turbulence heightens insecurity, which makes the need for identity work that much more pressing, and allows me, as a researcher to see the identity work being done through the disruptions, contradictions, and negotiations

In addition to the content of coaching work, a second juncture can be recognized in the management of personal coaches' identities. Not only must individuals grapple with legitimizing their services and their identities as coaches, they must also do legitimizing work for the profession as a whole (see Clegg et al., 2007; Ozkan, 2008)—a burden not likely encountered in the "traditional" professions, such as medicine, psychiatry, and the law For many coaches, it is crucial to "walk the talk"; they understand that the success of their coaching businesses is a direct result of their actions. As well, as with other forms of expert service work, where credentialing is varied and regulation is low, personal coaches must rely on other sources to build credibility. To give an example of other expert service workers, personal trainers are aware that their

own physique is a selling point when trying to attract new clients and retain existing ones (George, 2008a).

In this sense, coaches may be regarded as walking marketing material for their own services, and may even be held as models of the "ideal self" which their clients wish to emulate. That is, their own lives may be considered as case studies in the "successful management" of work and non-work domains, as the border between these territories becomes increasingly blurred.

In the chapter that follows, I move away from this more general discussion of context to position this particular research study both theoretically and methodologically.

CHAPTER 3

POSITIONING THE RESEARCH: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

An investigation about the identity construction of a "self-employed professional" could be carried out in any number of possible ways. What drives the design of any study, however, is the theoretical positioning and assumptions of the researcher, and consequently, the research questions that are (and can be) posed.

The present study can be broadly described as *critical interpretivist* in nature. This orientation draws upon a mixture of theoretical approaches; namely interpretivism and social constructionism, relying on elements of the symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological traditions, with sensitivity to labor process concerns. The focal points of each perspective are different, thereby permitting different questions to be asked and different goals to be accomplished, and are discussed in turn next.

The Critical Interpretive Lens

The *interpretive* perspective is built on the fundamental belief that people socially and symbolically construct and sustain their own organizational realities (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Gioia & Pitre, 1990: 588). Where *functionalism*—the dominant paradigm for management and organization studies—reifies social processes and structures, interpretivism recognizes that all structures are the product of human processes, and are therefore open to change/reinvention. Functionalist work has an inherently managerial bias; in contrast, interpretive work focuses on multiple organizational realities, emanating from members who hold different titles and positions within the organization. However,

like functionalism, interpretivism seeks to understand patterns of behavior (and sometimes deviations from this will expose the dominant reality).

Linda Putnam (1983) argues that the interpretive paradigm can be further divided into *naturalistic* and *critical* perspectives – linked respectively to the interpretive and radical humanist paradigms of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typology. Putnam emphasizes the interpretive nature of both naturalistic and critical perspectives because they each focus on the meanings that we give to symbols, and how we make sense of the reality that derives from this—an element that is somewhat lost in Burrell and Morgan's depiction of *radical humanism*. While the naturalistic angle seeks to describe and understand how reality is constituted, accepting "reality" as it is, without question, the critical approach attempts to expose the underlying structures and relations of power that help maintain the status quo, to question why it must be so, to reveal who benefits/suffers from such an arrangement, and significantly, to offer alternatives.

One of the key principles embraced by an interpretive approach to knowledge production is *social constructionism*. Harré (1986) explains that social constructionism is not so much a theory, but rather, a perspective, which colors how one perceives the world. It is characteristic of both naturalistic and critical interpretivism (Putnam, 1983), since it places the emphasis on subjective accounts of "reality."

Labor Process Theory: Concern for the Worker

Labor process theory (LPT) is concerned with how work is structured, how it is carried out, and the context in which workers perform their work (for an overview, see: Braverman, 1998). Work is of central importance in peoples' lives and dictates how other everyday activities are structured and organized (Marx, 1988). From this perspective, the

worker is a social being, and work is largely a social activity. This would therefore include looking at the complicated web of employment relationships and the balance of power that exists within each.

Workers are recognized as embodied beings, and therefore, their sex, race, class, sexual orientation, education, and other distinguishing qualities that shape their lives are taken into consideration. LPT research is therefore contextualized; it is concerned not only with the individual workers' personal histories and life experiences, but also the environment in which they work (ex. industry, sector, type of work, etc.). These conditions cannot be separated from the study of career paths, and thus, they are factored into any investigation that takes place.

Research from a LPT orientation therefore tends to examine work from multiple angles; that is, each party and how they are affected by the employment relationship—the "organization," the individual workers, and the larger society as a whole. Because there is particular concern for representing the voice of the worker, qualitative ethnographic methodologies, in the form of participant observation, interviews, and shadowing, are often employed to capture this sensitive data.

Symbolic Interaction: Questions of Self and Meaning

This study draws upon the *symbolic interactionist* tradition. First articulated by Blumer (1969), but enormously influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead (1934, 1982), among others, the SI approach contends that one's interaction with others and the social world is the context for all meaningful experience. Blumer articulated three principles associated with SI, namely: 1) human beings act toward objects based on the meaning they have for them; 2) this meaning arises from social interaction; and 3)

meanings in general are modified and negotiated through an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969: 3).

Particularly relevant to the proposed study, SI, as an interpretive theoretical approach, emphasizes the relational aspect of identity (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). The connection between the self and the social world, which forms the conceptual foundation of identity in this project, is a key facet of any SI exercise (Denzin, 2003). It is therefore fitting that a SI lens be used to study how self-employed professionals construct identity through every day practices.

SI has gone through several iterations and has been influenced by numerous intellectual movements since Blumer's time (Denzin, 2003). And though it is conventionally associated with naturalistic research, SI can be used quite effectively for critical purposes (for example, see Kleinman, 1996). It can therefore be somewhat confusing for qualitative scholars, as the SI school has many different orientations – some retain the Blumerian originality, others are more heavily influenced by the postmodern movement of the mid-1980s. While language has always been central to Meadian SI theory, the "linguistic turn" provided a welcome opportunity to return to this emphasis, which had been somewhat overlooked in Blumerian SI theory. Indeed, Mead claimed: "the language process is essential for the development of the self" (1934: 199).

As mentioned before, identity can be conceptualized and thus studied in various ways. For instance, if identity is seen as something which a person possesses or "has," it would make sense to use a survey or interview to ask questions directly. The responses given could be taken at face value; that is, that the individual understand their identity and the best way to learn about it is to ask direct questions.

If, however, identity is viewed through an interpretive lens, as is the case in the present study, then identity construction, as a process of self-reflection that unfolds in social interaction (Wåhlin, 1999; cited in Hytti, 2005: 597), would be an ideal research problem to employ the principles of symbolic interaction. The key points are that identity is "constructed" – that is, actively and created by humans in interaction with one another, and thus shaped by the social context in which one lives and acts. This is quite a different take on identity than the dominant ideas supported in more "mainstream" management and organization studies. If functionalism views identity as a fixed, static "thing" that one assumes and adopts—like a mask or a name tag that one puts on—an interpretive perspective of identity could be thought of as a character that one enacts. This idea implies that human action is necessary to bring the character to life.

As mentioned previously, contemporary versions of symbolic interactionism (SI) have been heavily influenced by postmodernism and the "linguistic turn." However, some important distinctions should be made between SI and poststructuralism, as they are especially meaningful to this project. Arguably, the most important difference between the two theoretical orientations rests in the belief of a conscious, social self. That is, where poststructuralism supports only the notion of a discursively produced "subject," Meadian SI theory recognizes a conscious self, ascribed with agency to instigate, enact, and perform change. Consciousness is where reflexive, symbolic awareness and activity reside, but it is also dependent on social experience, which is constituted in social relations. Hence, this is reflected in the SI conceptualization of the self as both a subject (the internal "I") and object (the external "me").

Furthermore, while SI recognizes that language is necessary for the existence of social reality, it does not share the poststructuralist idea that all meaning and behavior can be reduced to linguistic or textual practices (Wiley, 1994). In defense of Meadian SI theory, Dunn (1997: 688) argues this point rather effectively:

> while poststructuralists have privileged discursive relations at the expense of subjectivity, Mead attempted to situate language and meaning in processes of social interaction, transforming the Hegelian-derived philosophical orthodoxy of subject/object relations into an intersubjective community of actors.

The nuances of the poststructuralism-influenced SI approach become fundamental to the present study when considering the way in which the key issues—identity, self-employment, and careers—are defined. They are recognized here as being social processes that are accomplished by actors. These actors are not only able to reflect on their experience and make sense of it, but they are able to actively change their behavior or the way they go about doing their work. In this sense, they are not merely "acting out" a prescribed identity that has been imposed on them by outside forces or discourses (as a strictly poststructuralist orientation might assume). Rather, the actors of this study are assumed to be actively engaged in the creation, maintenance, and modification of their careers, their work, and their self-identities. Thus, one of my primary beliefs is that the people who participate in this study are actors with agency and the capacity to reflect on their actions. These assumptions are readily accommodated using the mixed theoretical approach outlined here.

Ethnomethodology: The Doing of Everyday Life

The ethnomethodological (EM) approach is often associated with the metaphor of theater. As humans, we are "actors"; our routines are "performances" and, depending on the circumstances, we are cast in different "roles" with their own particular "scripts." As

an interpretive form of research, EM seeks to uncover how the routines of everyday life "done." That is, how humans actively produce normal events that are largely taken for granted, through their social and symbolic interactions, is the intention of an EM investigation.

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel is credited with coining "ethnomethodology," based upon his studies of mundane behavior. His research drew attention for the seemingly unremarkable nature of its subject matter, but also for being at odds with the mission of conventional social theory-building. Other notable work has been performed by Joan Emerson (1970), particularly in her article "Behavior in Private Places." In this investigation, Emerson applies an EM approach within a somewhat controversial setting—a gynecological examination. It seems almost contradictory to study such mundane performances within unorthodox contexts; however, it is precisely this paradoxical relationship, between the ordinary and extraordinary, that the ethnomethodological approach illuminates best. Another remarkable exemplar of an EM orientation is West and Zimmerman's groundbreaking study which uncovers the "doing" of gender. Contrary to the assumption that it is a set of fixed categories or a typology, the authors reveal gender as a "routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 125).

EM, in itself, is not critical, as its foci include routines, the status quo, and the maintenance and reproduction of social order. The data and analyses that such an approach generates, however, are free to be employed for various purposes. If, for instance, a scholar wanted to demonstrate how systems of domination are maintained through our everyday interactions, she could employ an EM approach to reveal such

micro-processes. Similarly, the goal of West and Zimmerman's project is to re-educate others about gender, not as an individual trait or property, but as an emergent feature of social situations. The authors uncover how routine performances of gender assist in maintaining inequalities, and through their theoretical reconceptualization of gender, they hope it will inspire greater interest in, and awareness of, this important aspect of social reality.

In the present study, observation will be used to understand the "how" behind the identity work(ing) of the self-employed professional. To build this understanding, identity construction must be broken down into its smaller components, in an effort to "see" the "doing" of identity. The process of identity work(ing)—like most human processes that strive to maintain "reality" and "order"—is largely invisible. It is only when the stable façade of identity is challenged, compromised, or threatened, that the process is made visible, its "fractured surfaces" (Westenholz, 2006) thereby exposed.

Narrative Constitution of Identity

In this project, I adopt the theoretical/methodological position that identity is narratively constituted. Following in the footsteps of other organizational scholars (Down, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; Down & Warren, 2008), I draw heavily upon the work of Margaret Somers, in particularly her 1994 *Theory and Society* article. In this piece, Somers not only lays a strong theoretical foundation for the narrative constitution of identity, but gives important historical context for the academic evolution of narrative as an ontological rather than a representational methodology.

So what, exactly, does it mean for identities to be constituted through narratives? In order to address this question, *narrative* must first be defined. Simply put, narratives

are stories – or parts thereof (Down, 2008: 9) – for which we have authorship. Through the act of story-telling, we determine the information which is included in the narrative and that which is left out; we prioritize the details, foregrounding some, while relegating others to the backdrop; we set the pacing of the story, the climax, the tone. Narratives help us make sense of our experiences and create a coherent logic for events in our lives (Somers, 1994). While it is also known as a "discursive practice" (Collinson, 1992), the term *narrative* implies an awareness of "the linked and holistic aspects of human speech and action" (Down, 2008: 9) and is therefore not reduced to words or text alone.

When we construct narratives, Somers (1994: 616) explains, it allows us to transform our individual random events and experiences within temporal and spatial relationships with others, into "episodes." That is, we must be able to "selectively appropriate" the various events and experiences of life, and then "emplot" them in accordance with specific themes. To emplot is "to create a plausible and intelligible plot or story line" (Down, 2008: 20). However, we must discriminate in some way between "the infinite variety of events, experiences, characters, institutional promises, and social factors that impinge on our lives" (Somers, 1994: 617). Consistency in narratives is provided by the emploted themes, which also need an "evaluative framework" shaped by "a set of fundamental principles and values" (Somers, 1994: 617).

Since narratives are created by individuals to provide coherent stories about their lives and experiences, it becomes important, at this point, to distinguish between "identity" in general, and "self-identity" more specifically.

What is Self-Identity?

Giddens' articulation of "self-identity" has been adopted by a number of critical organizational scholars (for example, see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Down, 2008), and will be employed in this research project. Giddens describes the concept as follows:

> Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography…self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted reflexively by the agent…A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a *particular narrative* going.
>
> (Giddens, 1991: 53-4, original emphasis)

Furthermore, Giddens stresses the ability to create a story (or many different but related stories) of one's self "over and above what people *do* and how they *interact* with others" (Down, 2008: 19, emphasis in original). This conceptualization is further elaborated by Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 626), who contend that self-identity is narratively constructed out of "cultural raw material," such as language, symbols, sets, and values. This raw material is derived and gathered from our unconscious processes, our experiences and interactions with others, and our exposure to messages produced and distributed by social institutions. Self-identity is thus gradually and continuously shaped by identity *working* and identity *regulating*. In short, "self-identity" is the label we use to capture, think about, and communicate our understanding of "who we are" – to others, as well as to ourselves.

Self-identity implies both conceptual sameness, and conceptual difference; defining boundaries around what is "me" and "not me" (Giddens, 1991). It is therefore possible for an individual to move towards – as well as away from – certain self-identities. Here, it is useful to refer to MacIntyre's "characters" when thinking about

self-identity. Characters are well-established figures or role models in society which act as "social roles which provide a culture with moral definitions" (MacIntyre, 1981: 29; cited in Down, 2008: 22). In other words, they are moral reference points. One can tell if one is a "good" entrepreneur by comparing oneself to the character of a successful entrepreneur. This plays into the idea of "public narratives," as characters are one form of this type of narrative which helps provide some of the evaluative criteria required to create a narrative identity.

MacIntyre's (1981) concept of "character" also allows us to distinguish between social role and self-identity. The former is "static, formal and ritualistic" (Davies & Harré, 1991: 43), where the latter is situated and enacted by individuals. As well, the historical and temporal contingency is emphasized in self-identity, yet absent in social role. "Self-identity is thus both a static and dynamic aspect of human experience that reflects the life course of individuals. Inherently, therefore, there is a transience about understanding our selves and how others see us which is not captured by the term *role*" (Down, 2008: 23, emphasis in original).

Theoretical and Methodological Concerns

According to Somers (1994: 617), there are four dimensions to the narrative constitution of identity: ontological, public, conceptual, and metanarratives. Starting with the perspective of the individual, *ontological narratives* are "the stories that social actors use to make sense of – indeed, to act in – their lives" (Somers, 1994: 618). In short, they help us to understand *who we are*, which can then guide us on *what to do*. Importantly, Somers informs us that narrative and ontology share a processual relationship in that they

are mutually constitutive. For instance: our actions lead to the production of new narratives, which can in turn lead to new actions.

Ontological narratives, however, do not just emerge out of the blue, but must be derived from somewhere. Because they are not self-generating, they rely on and are sustained over time by the *public narratives* exchanged in social and interpersonal interaction. Somers describes public narratives as: "those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand, micro- or macro-stories about American social mobility, the 'freeborn Englishman', the working-class hero" (Somers, 1994: 619). In his work on small business owners, Down (2008) could include "entrepreneur" on this list of public narratives, and similarly, I might add "coach," "free agent," or "self-employed professional."

The third dimension in the narrative constitution of identity that Somers refers to is *metanarratives*. She explains that they are "'masternarratives' in which we are embedded as contemporary actors in history and as social scientists" (Somers, 1994: 619), for instance: "Progress" and "Enlightenment". Metanarratives capture the "epic dramas of our time" as noted in such legendary struggles as "Capitalism vs. Communism" and "the Individual vs. Society."

The last dimension that Somers discusses is *conceptual narrativity*. This is particularly important for what we, as social researchers, strive to accomplish – that is, to explain what we observe in the social world, with reference to "social forces" (ex. market conditions, institutional practices, organizational constraints). Somers (1994: 620) states that conceptual narrativity poses a challenge for social researchers:

> to devise a vocabulary that we can use to reconstruct and plot over time and space the ontological narratives and relationships of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives that inform their lives, and the crucial intersection of these narratives with the other relevant social forces.

In this sense, conceptual narrativity is able to connect all of the other dimensions of narrativity to allow us to reflect upon and understand them in a way that is able to accommodate their relational, spatial, and temporal qualities simultaneously. This is something that static analytical categories – such as "actor" and "society" – are unable to capture.

The significance of Somers's (1994) work to the present study is its sensitivity to the dynamic nature of identity, recognizing it as temporally, spatially, and relationally bound. As well, it recognizes its historicity, which is crucial in my research, to demonstrate how identity and identity construction in its micro form can be connected to the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of the historical moment in which these phenomena and processes are contextualized. For instance, how one "does" the identity of a self-employed professional is embedded within and shaped by the larger "social forces" at play – labor market trends, organizational and institutional practices, and the workings of capitalism and enterprise in the new economy. However, the microprocesses and micro-practices of identity help, in turn, to constitute, shape, and alter the "structural" conditions that characterize our lives. The narrative constitution of identity, as conceptualized by Somers (1994), is thus able to embrace all these different elements, recognizing their interdependency, yet not privileging or valuing one aspect over another.

Identity, New Careers, and Self-Employment: Reviewing the Relevant Literature

The literature review is important for locating where this research project belongs within the extant scholarship and to demonstrate the expected contribution to these bodies of literature. This literature review is divided into a number of sections, to distinguish between the various areas within organization studies that are brought together for this study. The first few sections will focus on the identity literature and research – first differentiating between three broad approaches to studying this phenomenon, before pausing on one particular type – the narrative construction of identity.

Following this, I explore the work on careers – specifically "new careers" and the praise/critique this phenomenon has generated. From there, I examine the idea of "enterprise" and how this may be brought into a study of identity. Finally, I look at the intersection between the identity and careers literatures, reviewing a number of exemplars that have provided both guidance and inspiration for this project.

Overview of Identity Research in Organization Studies

Identity is something that we are all familiar with, yet it can be difficult to put into words. Inspired by that existential question "who am I?", identity is a fundamental aspect of the human condition. As such, exploring and demystifying identity has been a scholarly pursuit in the humanities and social sciences alike, and is therefore not the exclusive subject of any one discipline. Literature, art, sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics and management have each made efforts to understand this elusive and puzzling phenomenon.

Identity can also be studied in numerous ways, depending on the assumptions made about its nature. According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (1994), identity is

defined as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual." However, whether this is conceptualized as a "thing" one has (i.e. a noun), or is an action/performance /process (i.e. a verb) is a highly contested issue.

In their 2008 review of the identity literature in organization studies, Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas (2008: 12) categorize this vast body of work into three dominant theoretical approaches: social identity (how individuals locate themselves as social and organizational beings); identity work (how individuals endeavor to construct a sense of self); and identity control (how identity is accomplished through the operations of power). From within the perspective of organization studies these three lenses are broadly related to the functionalist, interpretive, and critical paradigms, respectively (see Alvesson & Deetz, 2006; Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

In the following sections, I employ Alvesson et al's (2008) framework to assess what work has been done with respect to identity matters in management/organization studies, while highlighting the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of identity within each approach. In doing so, I also address each stream's limits regarding the kinds of questions that may be asked and studied, and with what effect.

Social Identity

Due, in part, to management and organization studies' close ties with the various schools of psychology, the vast majority of identity research in our field would fall under the first theoretical stream of Alvesson et al's (2008) framework: *social identity*. In this body of work, a clear distinction is made between individual (personal) and collective (social) identity. However, it is the latter of the two identities that concerns

organization/management scholars, since by examining the social identity of individuals, this can help us better understand the complexities of organizational life (Alvesson et al., 2008).

Owing largely to the work of social psychologists and colleagues, Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1974; 1985; 1975), two major theories that inform this body of identity literature: social identity theory (SIT); and, to a lesser extent, self-categorization theory (SCT). Building upon this foundation, Ashforth and Mael (1989: 135) define social identification as "perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate." Organization studies scholars rely on SIT as a key theory to explain how individuals come to identify with the organization and thus become socialized into its culture.

A prime illustration of how these theories can be applied in a management studies context comes from the ASPIRe (Actualizing Social and Personal Identity Resources) model of identification, developed by Haslam, Eggins and Reynolds (2003). The authors describe the four-stage ASPIRe model as an effort to translate the insights of SIT and SCT into a process model of organizational practice. In particular, it represents a means by which organizations can harness social identification from its members to improve "desirable" outcomes, such as team productivity, diversity management, as well as employee satisfaction and commitment.

In employing the ASPIRe model, methods, such as interviews and surveys, are used initially by researchers and management to establish the potential bases for self-categorization (e.g., race, gender, skills, education, and work department) that employees believe are most salient to improving work performance. Once determined, management

divides employees into groups along those critical bases, where they are asked to caucus, debate, and discuss ways to improve their work processes. The intent is to facilitate the "natural" self-categorization processes that lead to the formation of collective identities, while at the same time generating practical ideas for improving operations. Notably, the authors caution (Haslam et al.,2003: 255):

> management has to be viewed as facilitating, not forcing, this process, otherwise employees will resent the perceived manipulation of their identities and might form collective identities that take a cynical, anti-management shading

In stage three, appointees from each group meet to share and identify common concerns and goals, thereby creating a strong organizational identity out of the various group-level identities. In the final stage of the ASPIRe model, top management exercises its leadership role in "shaping" the emergent organizational identity by first determining if the identified goals and interests are "appropriate" for the organization.

Within this body of work, identity is ontologically assumed to be a "thing" that one "possesses" and little effort or work is required by the individual to maintain "it." Similar to other "universal" categories in mainstream management studies, such as gender, race, or class, identity is essentialized. Furthermore, the issue as to whether or not an individual "has" a particular identity appears to be unambiguous and unproblematic. These characteristics of and ideas about identity are consistent with the tenets of functionalism; that is, that an "objective reality" does indeed exist and universal truths are unquestioned (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Multiple identities, sometimes referred to as "parallel identities" (Marks & Lockyer, 2004) is a limited but growing theoretical interest in the social identity research stream. In a recent conference presentation, Marks and Hallier (2009) examined

movements between parallel groups as a shift in identity. Interestingly, they described these "shifts" as "vertical movements" depending on the status of the group (i.e. shift up for higher status, shift down for lower status), but "horizontal movements" to depict movements between professional and organizational identities. I find their use of the directional metaphors to describe different identities relative to their position in a social or work hierarchy not unlike the use of job titles. Their use of imagery confirms that identity is a "thing" that one assumes, and it carries a social value. Conceptualized in this way, identity looks almost identical to social status.

Social identity research has also broadened to examine other targets of identification, including profession, occupation, and race/gender subculture (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; M.G. Pratt, 2000; M.G. Pratt & Foreman, 2000). For instance, a commonly used definition for professional identity comes from Ibarra, who refers to it as: "the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Ibarra, 1999: 764-5). Building on this concept, Ibarra calls "working identity" (2003) the process of applying effort to reshape their existing professional identity. Although this is recognized as a *process*, organizational scholars working in this theoretical stream tend to focus on the *outcome* – at any one point in time – of this process. For the most part, identity remains a stable research variable, and the development of "complex" process models still serves the functions of explaining, predicting, and ultimately, controlling the interaction of the individual variables contained within. Quantitative methods, which are favored in social identity research, are used to measure antecedents and effects, but are unable to capture the dynamic nature of the process as it unfolds.

The rationale for studying identity and identification in this way is primarily to understand their relationship with key outcomes and interests that populate mainstream management research. For instance, studies have been carried out to determine how the strength or degree of one's identification with the organization affects such organizational outcomes as commitment, loyalty, and motivation (Blake E. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach, 1999; A. Haslam, 2004), and not surprisingly, positive relationships were found. Thus, these finding suggest that management should strive to create an organization with which its employees can identify, in order to reap the rewards of increased productivity and a satisfied workforce. An alternative strategy is to concentrate on recruiting the "right" employees – those who buy into the employer's goals, vision, and values – to ensure greater identification with the organization.

Social identity research takes for granted the *formation* of "identity," and therefore cannot address many "how" questions, such as: How do identities emerge? How do individuals transition between various identities? How do we come to understand and accept roles as social categories? Also absent from this body of identity research are the issues of meaning and symbolism, and the related questions that might be posed. For instance: what meaning do different identities/roles hold for different individuals? How do individuals make sense of their various roles to maintain a coherent self-identity?

In order to accommodate such questions, identity must be conceptualized and studied in a very different way. The phenomenon of "identity work" enables us to ask the "how" questions which the social identity literature does not. I will discuss this stream of research next.

Identity Work(ing)

The second theoretical lens on identity as articulated by Alvesson et al (2008) focuses mainly on the process of doing *identity work*, which embraces complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction, as recognized within the interpretive paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Identity work(ing) is defined as "the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinct, and positively valued" (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15). This process is often evoked, and can thus be examined, when the routinized reproduction of a self-identity in a stable setting is interrupted or disturbed and can be triggered by uncertainty, anxiety, or self-doubt. It may also be triggered through encounters with others that challenge one's understanding of self (ex. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

In this research vein, ontological assumptions of identity work(ing) are consistent with the interpretive paradigm; identity is thus perceived as a social process in which humans engage. More specifically, through our words and actions, and our interaction with others, we actively socially construct our identities. In short, we do not "have" identities, we "do" identities. And because of the inherently social nature of identity, the distinction between "personal" and "social" identity – as recognized in the social identity literature described previously – no longer holds or makes sense under these assumptions.

The theoretical approach of identity work(ing) allows us to examine this phenomenon as a process and fully recognizes its ongoing, dynamic nature. Many studies have explored questions of *how identity is constructed or "done."* One of the ways in which we "do" identity work is through story-telling and producing narratives. In his research on the work lives of middle managers, David Sims (2003) examined how

their stories changed, depending on the audience – superiors, subordinates, or themselves. In this respect, Sims' research emphasizes both the interactive nature of constructing narratives and the significance of answering the question "for whom is the narrative produced?" Methodologically, taking a narrative approach enables Sims to uncover the vulnerabilities experienced by his informants, which might not be evident using surveys or other methods. In doing so, Sims observes that "working life is characterized by having to give an energetic telling to conflicting stories for different audiences under circumstances where [we] know that [we] are always on the edge of dishonesty" (Sims, 2003: 1209). I will elaborate on the narrative constitution of identity in the next section.

A popular subject for studying identity work is in the case of stigmatized workers/dirty work (ex. B.E. Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; B.E. Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007), influenced by Goffman's *Stigma* (1963), where he explores how individuals cope with "spoiled identities." Individuals who perform "dirty" or stigmatized work – for instance, exotic dancers (Grandy, 2008) – may try to distance themselves from the "tainted" identity and perhaps construct new roles in order to restore a positive self image. In some cases, it becomes apparent that the workers must construct a positive identity order to maintain a sense of dignity, and perhaps to reduce cognitive dissonance between their beliefs about who they are compared with what they do. Other occupations where "dirty work" has been studied are the police force (Dick, 2005) and correctional officers (Tracy & Scott, 2006), where the use of physical violence or coercive force on the job must be justified and negotiated with regard to creating and maintaining a positive self-identity.

More recently, and particularly relevant to the present study, research in this stream has focused on the construction of professional identity (ex. Bain, 2005; Marks & Baldry, 2009; Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). It is not surprising that this interest in this context of work/class of worker has emerged, given the frequent switching of employers, changing employment relationship, and the movement to "professionalize" virtually any occupation—from truck driving to construction to massage therapy.

Within the professional context, scholars have made efforts to understand the conditions under which identity construction might be triggered. For instance, in a qualitative study of medical residents, Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) were able to study the unfolding of the identity construction process over a six year period. Specifically, Pratt and colleagues recognized that identity *working* is triggered by what they term "work-identity integrity violations"—where there is an inconsistency between their actions (what they did) and their beliefs about who they are. The residents employed different strategies—enriching, patching, and splinting—to restore a consistent self-identity when one of the violations had taken place.

The qualitative research which characterizes the identity work stream is extremely rich in detail and insights regarding how exactly, identity is "done." Studies of this nature are therefore especially conducive for executing inductive analyses and for building new theories.

Through the theory of identity work(ing), we now, importantly, have a means for understanding the ethnomethodological issues of "how" identity is done. What might not be addressed in this line of investigation, however, is the *need* for such identity work—that is, the motivation or pressure to work on one's self. Questions as to why, for whom,

and with what effect identity is done are still not voiced nor answered in this body of literature. In the next section, I review Alvesson et al's third stream of identity research in organization studies, which is better able to get to these matters.

Identity Regulation and Control

The third theoretical lens of Alvesson et al's typology views identity, particularly in an organizational context, as a powerful form of social control (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004). In this work, issues of power and regulation of the self are central (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15-16). Scholars working in this tradition share an interpretive understanding of identity, in that it goes against the popular notion that identity is a "thing" that one "has" by subscribing to the belief it is a social process that one actively "does." Furthermore, organizational mechanisms and practices of control – for instance, rewards, hierarchies, and the division of labor or job design – do not operate externally to the individual's search for identity, but rather, interact and merge with the identity work(ing) of organizational members. Doing identity work is thus recognized in this research orientation as a significant medium and outcome of organizational *identity regulation and control* (Karreman & Alvesson, 2004).

The professions and professional associations, it can be argued, exercise a similar type of control over individual behavior, appearances, and practices to that which organizations – or more specifically, organizational cultures – impose on their members. By offering codes of ethics and practices, constitutions, credentialing systems, and not least, a common language, the "profession" produces rules and norms that are shared by those in the community, and can act as a way to keep outsiders out, and insiders in line.

Research in the identity regulation/control stream that looks at the professional identities of workers has tended to do so through a discursive lens (Jaros, 2009). An example of a discursive analysis to study how dominant discourses – for instance, neo-liberalism and enterprise – mingled with hospital clinicians' construction of a self-identity produced some complex findings (Doolin, 2002). The discourses were associated with governmental health reform programs, but were appropriated and/or resisted by the clinicians as they negotiated work identities. This is one way that structural or "macro" force may impose "raw material" and resources for identity construction, which the individual, at the "micro" level, must then incorporate somehow into a coherent sense of self.

One fairly recent example of identity regulation through discursive practices includes Wright's (Wright, 2008) study regarding the "reinvention" of HRM. He explored how, through the use of normative discourses (ex. "business partners"; "internal consultants"), the legitimacy of the HR professional identity was actually diminished. Such discourses helped to 'reposition' HR, thereby opening up the field up to rivalry from new occupational groups.

These last two avenues of research – identity work and identity regulation, or more appropriately, identity *working* and identity *regulating* – will be of particular interest in the present study. While presented in Alvesson and colleagues' framework as separate bodies of work, I view this distinction as merely an analytical convenience. Instead, I believe identity work and identity regulation are closely intertwined and mutually constitutive, much in the same way that the individual and the social are understood in the symbolic interactionist tradition (please refer to Chapter 3 for further

explanation). Put more specifically in terms of the present research context, the professional coaching associations, governing bodies, and multitude of training institutions, are expected to be important identity regulators for the members of the coaching community. The individual coach thus relies on the material, cultural, and symbolic resources manufactured by such regulating bodies to engage in identity work.

This study widens the frame, through a critical interpretive approach informed by relational, social constructionist and symbolic interactionist perspectives. The theoretical approach I have taken recognizes the behaviors and interactions of individuals, as well as narratives and the deployment of discourses. But while language is crucial to this perspective, it is not privileged over other forms of experience or ways of knowing.

Questions remain regarding how, exactly, one can study the reciprocal processes of identity working and regulating among geographically and temporally dispersed, self-employed individuals. These matters are explored in greater depth in Chapter 3, Framing the Research: Theoretical and Methodological Orientation, as well as the narrative constitution of identity, which is adopted for this project. In the next section, I consider the popular view, supported by numerous management and career studies scholars, which touts evolving career patterns as creating new, more stimulating opportunities and employment trajectories for workers (e.g. Hall & Mirvis, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). I then contrast this with a more contentious perspective, which cautions against the hidden dangers to the individual and larger society that may result from such changes.

New Careers: Praise and Critique

Since the early 1990s, the focus in career scholarship has shifted from "traditional" organizational employment and hierarchical promotion trajectories, to the

property of "boundarylessness" (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). As the body of literature on new careers continues to expand, 'boundaryless' is viewed as a "shorthand descriptive term summarizing the large-scale macro-adaptation of society to its turn-of-the-new-century's economic and technological environment" (Hirsch & Shanley, 1996: 220). It thus acts as an umbrella category that encompasses a variety of employment arrangements and career models – such as portfolio (Handy, 1995), protean (D.T. Hall, 1996), and post-corporate (M. Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). The individuals who subscribe to such career patterns are known alternatively as "free agents" (Pink, 2001), freelancers, individual contractors and the self-employed.

First championed by Charles Handy, he defines "portfolio work" as a "collection of different bits and pieces of work for different clients" (Handy, 1995: 175). More specifically, the portfolio worker is not dependent on any one employer. This work arrangement also implies that the worker must be versatile enough to repackage their skills and knowledge to appeal to a variety of employers, thus securing different projects and assignments (Mallon, 1998). In this sense, the portfolio career could be called a "micro small business" (Brodie & Stanworth, 1997), since the individual is responsible for the marketing, selling, and delivery of their services to a variety of clients, oftentimes across multiple fields.

The mainstream management literature on "portfolio," "boundaryless," and other monikers for "new careers" has been predominantly positive in tone. Indeed, Handy put it in plain terms: "sooner or later, thanks to the shaping of the organization we shall all be portfolio people. It is good news" (Handy, 1995: 146). Much of the focus on new careers has been on the advantages available to the individual, particularly in terms of

flexibility, control, and choice. "Boundaries" are viewed as restrictive to the twin goals of maximizing one's control and choice when it comes to career management. In fact, Arthur and Rousseau proposed a new, less pejorative meaning for boundary: "something to be crossed in a career behavior, or in managing complexity" (1996a: 371). This new definition attempts to capture the opportunities that boundaries, when encountered, can offer.

While "traditional" ideas about career may be considered outdated or no longer applicable – for instance, having life time employment with a single firm – the need to *have a career* and prepare for it carefully are still crucial. The goal now, however, is to achieve "employability security rather than employment security" (M. A. Peiperl & Arthur, 2000: 12). These changes can make planning a career in today's labor market quite a complex and daunting process. As a result, individuals are now encouraged to engage in "protean careers" (Hall & Mirvis, 1996) and to become "career self-managers" (King, 2004).

Employees tend to benefit from this new contract, explains much of the management and career literature, as they are now able to set their own career goals, and to determine the next career steps which will be most personally meaningful (D. T. Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Many employees are also able to escape the "rootedness" characterized by old structures, further opening up possibilities to realize their dreams, their passions (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). The "old model," where career trajectories are subject to external forces and guides for how work should be sequenced, is therefore gradually being replaced by a "new model" where careers are shaped by and enacted through internal, self-generated guides (Weick, 1996).

In contrast to the idea of "new careers," El-Sawad (2005) found that the majority of participants in her study used very "traditional" conceptualizations of career success. External structures and goals are imagined and strived for by the participants in El-Sawad's study – not Hall et al's "psychological success." Hall and Mirvis (1996) claim that within the "new career" contract, the person – not the organization – is the driver; but El-Sawad's findings tell a very different story. The majority of her subjects had "mixed views" about their abilities and desire to self-manage their own careers, and half of the participants found that their career development was limited or controlled by their organization. El-Sawad concludes that despite the pervasiveness of "new career" literature, careers have not fundamentally changed.

Empirical career scholarship, such as that of El-Sawad, exposes the possibility that theorizing may be shifting even though the fundamental experiences of actors remain the same. Therefore, the question must be posed, who's views/experience are being represented and voiced in the theories such as "new careers"? And, importantly, who stands to benefit – and conversely, who could be harmed – from the promotion of these theories?

There are growing concerns, however, that this rosy outlook on "new careers" is too simplistic, too one dimensional, and only serves the good of the business organization that follows the logic of globalization. Research carried out in the fields of sociology and labor studies, in particular, has provided more nuanced and "balanced" accounts of how those who assume such career trajectories actually experience and manage them. The high-tech and knowledge-intensive sectors have been popular contexts in which to examine how "new careers" play out in practical terms. In *White Collar Sweatshop*

(2001), a study of high-tech contingent workers in the Silicon Valley, Jill Andresky Fraser reports a very different account of "flexibility." One of her informants, a contract software engineer, introduced her to the concept of "multiple levels of redundancy" (J. A. Fraser, 2001: 136),which he and many of his contractor friends relied upon as a "career defense strategy." This describes the practice of taking several different consulting jobs simultaneously in order to offset the threat of work loss and income instability. The result is that the individual actually ends up working much longer hours than a single full-time job, thus running the risk of becoming stressed out, ill, and/or burnt out very quickly. And based on the high turnover of contract workers that Fraser encountered, this practice seemed to be widespread across the high-tech sector and other industries which rely heavily on a contingent workforce.

Scholars have also highlighted the social consequences of "new careers." Charles Perrow (1996), for instance, warned against the inevitable decline of civil society with the advent of "boundaryless" careers. He explains that historically, organizations and employers started to absorb some of the responsibilities that were once located in the public domain – such as the provision of public health care and pension funds. However, as firms in the 1990s started to downsize, cut jobs, and turn towards more contractual and temporary arrangements to satisfy their labor needs, the benefits and perks that were once enjoyed by their permanent employees also began to disappear. Thus, as job security becomes ever more elusive and workers transition increasingly to boundaryless career arrangements, they do so, Perrow (1996) contends, in the midst of a weakened civil society, without the social support mechanisms to cover the areas that employers once provided for.

This line of investigation – specifically that which investigates the actual effects of the "new careers" movement on the individuals who pursue this path, either by force or by choice – needs to be explored and articulated more thoroughly, particularly in the management and organization studies literature. By "actual effects" I refer to the everyday consequences of new careers, as voiced by those who are trying to make a living through them, and this study proposes to address this dearth in our field's literature.

Identity Work(ing) and Self-Employment

Studies of identity construction have been done in contexts that reflect the changing employment relations. Smith (1998) contends that the work lives of nonstandard workers – which, in addition to the self-employed, includes virtual, contract, and temporary employees – are more likely to be marked by discontinuity. Consequently, she argues, their identities are more likely to be fragmented than their permanent, organizationally-employed counterparts. Among this group of workers, the self-employed, however, have a uniquely difficult challenge, in that they are fully responsible for finding the "raw material" and resources to help shape, maintain, and project a work identity. And since the quality of their skills, knowledge and services is connected to and judged through this identity, there is a great deal – not least their economic livelihood – resting on its public presentation in a marketable and desirable way.

In his highly-cited article, Collinson (2003) claims that the concept of *insecurity* has been underestimated in organizational studies of self and subjectivity in the workplace, with regard to its ability to help us understand power relations, practices, and

strategies of organization. Insecurity can take many forms, such as psychological, economic, and social, and these in turn can intersect and operate simultaneously.

Entrepreneurship is one kind of self-employment where identity has been examined quite extensively. In fact, taking a narrative approach to the study of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial identity is gaining recognition and has already been embraced by a number of scholars (B.E. Ashforth et al., 2007; Cohen & Musson, 2000; Down, 2008; Down & Warren, 2008). Narrative analysis, from a feminist, post-structuralist perspective, has also been used to show the reproduction of gender stereotypes and gendered notions of entrepreneurship through the analysis of entrepreneurial case studies (Ahl, 2007).

Down (2008: 17) considers his work as joining that of other scholars residing "at the margins" who are attempting to redress the theoretical deficiencies in entrepreneurship and enterprise research (ex: Cohen & Musson, 2000; Fletcher, 2003; Hjorth & Steyaert, 2004; Warren, 2004). According to Down (2008:9), if we want to understand the narrative processes of self-identity, it is not necessary to have a firm and static definition of social roles or categories. In this case, a "self-employed professional" and more specifically, a "personal coach" do not have to be predefined by the researcher[5], but rather, keeping them ambiguous allows the informants to construct their definition through their self-identity narratives.

[5] Of course, there must be some initial criteria established in order to identify appropriate participants for the study. For instance, in the present research, anyone who called themselves a "coach" or indicated that they did "coaching work" was eligible to participate in the study. How they come to understand their self-identity of coach or "self-employed professional" will emerge as the analysis unfolds.

Cohen and Musson's (2000) combined case studies of the formation of entrepreneurial identity takes a more post-structuralist and fieldwork-based approach than du Gay's more deterministic arguments regarding the "culture of enterprise" (see Fournier & Grey, 1999). One of the points they make is that the "enterprise discourse" is not monolithic, as du Gay has contended. Work-based identities are formed and influenced by many factors; instead the enterprise discourse is "appropriated and used by people in a variety of ways depending on their position, circumstances, and the economic/social/cultural/political world(s) in which they live" (Cohen & Musson, 2000: 46). Their work focuses a great deal on the entrepreneur's reproduction of the enterprise culture through their thoughts and behaviors, and thus, limits the amount of agency and reflexivity ascribed to their research subjects (Down & Reveley, 2004: 236).

Down and Reveley (2004) take more of an "interactionist" approach to the study of entrepreneurial identity, which is influenced by the work of Mead (1934) and Strauss (1993), and gives primacy to the human interaction in the development and emergence of selves and social worlds. They state: "identities are pluralistic accomplishments" (Down & Reveley, 2004: 236), which develop through a process of "negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (Wenger, 1998: 145). Down and Reveley's analysis also acknowledges the "situated nature of self-identifications" (Fine, 1996: 112).

Self-Employment: A Life of Flexibility or Uncertainty?

Self-employment is an increasingly common way of organizing work, particularly among white-collar professionals. With this new work arrangement comes new ways of relating to others and thinking about employment. For instance, for the contractual self-

employed worker, the organization is no longer considered an "employer" but a "client." Likewise, we are bombarded by messages in popular media urging us to think of ourselves as one-person businesses rather than as employees—even if not self-employed. As Tom Peters (1997) famously advised: "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc."

The common arguments in support of self-employment and free agency list the benefits to the individual in terms of greater flexibility, autonomy, and control over assignments (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b; Hall & Mirvis, 1996; Peiperl et al., 2000). This "flexibility" takes the form of discretion over when, where, and how to perform work, as well as the nature and quantity of work that will be performed. With respect to the organization's interests, the advantages include reduced labor costs by offering short-term contracts, and diminished training expenses, since it is now possible to hire individuals with the necessary skills and release them upon the project's completion.

However, research on the lived experience of "new careers" and self-employment offers other perspectives. For instance, in their study of "portfolio working" translators, Fraser and Gold (2001) found that translation work, which requires a high level of expertise, gives the worker substantial control and bargaining power when it comes to negotiating contract terms, such as rates of pay and project deadlines. Also important to this finding is the fact that the translators interviewed actively chose to pursue "portfolio working"—it was not a reactive strategy in response to layoffs or organizational downsizing. In other words, the type of work one performs, as well as the circumstances which prompted one to leave organizational employment, both matter when it comes to the experience of self-employment.

In many industries, such as the high-tech sector, direct care work, and office administration, employing organizations often prefer dealing with employment agencies over individual candidates, as it allows for certain aspects of the recruitment process to be outsourced and managed externally. When employment agencies get involved, this tends to diminish the discretion that the individual worker has over assignments, particularly in terms of negotiating hours and pay (Fraser, 2001).

Research has also illustrated that whether by choice or by force, as more workers pursue the "new career" model through contract or temporary employment, competition for this type of work increases, thereby weakening individual bargaining power (Fraser, 2001; Fraser & Gold, 2001). This, in turn, shifts the power balance in the organization's (both the employer and the employing agency's) favor. Furthermore, feelings of insecurity over finding the next job or project often compel workers to accept less than favorable terms with respect to pay and working conditions, which consequently drives down the standard for what can be expected from contractual work.

The "new careers" model is also promoted as a means to help individuals achieve balance between their work-life responsibilities (Hogarth, Hasluck, Winterbotham, & Vivian, 2001; cited in Fenton & Dermott, 2006: 207). Depending on the type of work and project, contractual arrangements are often stated in terms of outputs or outcomes, so how one completes the work is (i.e. when, where and how) is at their discretion. For some, this means the flex-time schedules or the freedom to work from home, allowing time to be dedicated to domestic tasks if needed. However, in *White Collar Sweatshop* (2001), a study of high-tech contingent workers in the Silicon Valley, sociologist Jill Andresky Fraser reports a very different account of "flexibility." Fraser discusses

"multiple levels of redundancy" (2001: 136), which she describes as a "career defense strategy" relied upon many of her informants. In essence, this is the practice of taking several different consulting jobs simultaneously in order to offset the threat of work loss and income instability. The result is that the individual actually ends up working much longer hours than a single full-time job, thus running the risk of becoming stressed out, ill, and/or burnt out very quickly. So in the world of high-tech contractors, the façade of work time flexibility might draw them in, but the reality often ends up being more time for more work.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING FROM THE FIELD TO THE DESK: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, AND DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I recount the research process for carrying out a critical interpretivist investigation into production of professional identity. I first provide an overview of the general research plan, including a description of the research setting and participants. Following this, I turn towards issues of research access and Human Subjects/IRB compliance. I close the chapter by delineating the specific methods employed for "producing"[6] the data, and finally address the data analysis process.

General Research Plan

Broadly speaking, there were three (somewhat overlapping) phases of data production in this research project; each will capture some perspective on identity work and the crafting of the "self-employed professional." During the first phase I relied predominantly on participant observation and informal conversations at coaches' public meetings and presentations. This stage was instrumental in defining the research project itself, as well as providing essential data about the research context.

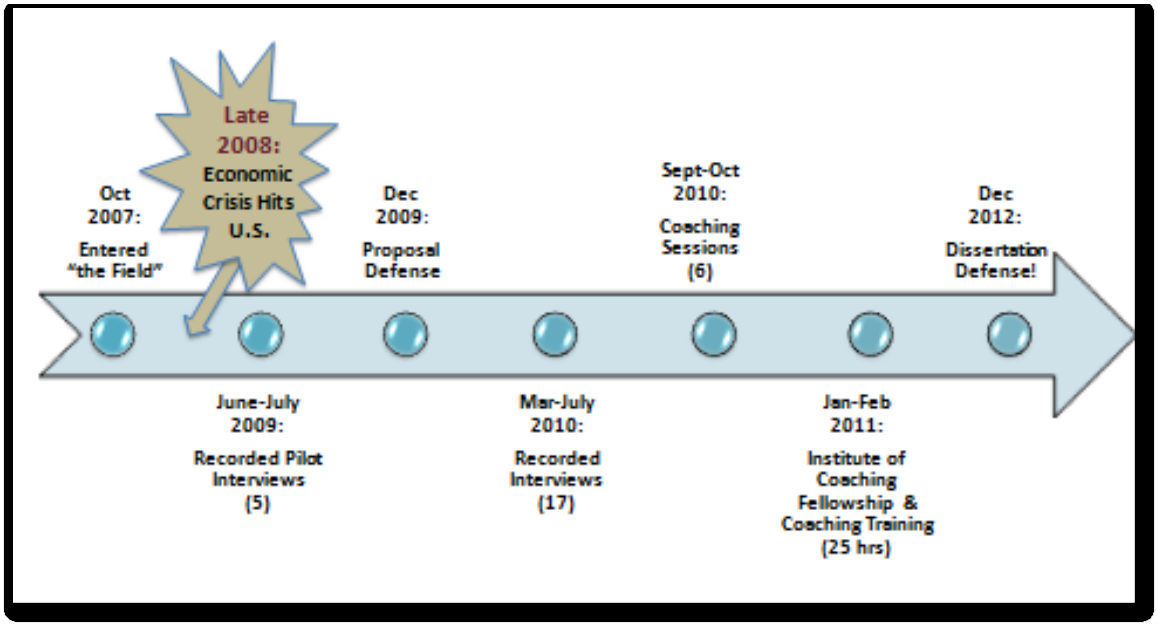
The second phase consisted of narrative interviews to understand how coaches talk about their work and their work identities. Narrative interviews are used to capture personal stories through which participants construct a self-identity. Specifically, these

[6] I refer to this not as the "collection" but as the "production" of data, following Professor Janne Tienari's comments during his presentation at the Isenberg School of Management on April 16th, 2009. I concur with his statement that if one assumes that the process of doing research is social, engaging both researcher and informants, then the term "data production" more accurately reflects this.

narratives reveal the ways in which informants present and interpret their actions and experiences, with respect to a coherent sense of self.

As the project progressed, I realized my initial plans of shadowing were proving to be impractical. Hence, the third phase of research was somewhat improvisational, and involved further participant observation, follow-up conversations and interviews, document and website analysis, and anything else which I believed was necessary to analyze and help make sense of the data already produced. The major fieldwork component was participant observation at an intensive coaching training weekend. During this activity, I had a wonderful opportunity to experience firsthand the initial journey into the coaching profession, along with 15 other trainees.

Figure 1: Timeline of Dissertation Process Milestones



In Figure 1 above, I present the major milestones that were reached during this project. Of particular note is a Fellowship that I received from the Institute of Coaching in January 2011. Not only did this funding allow me to carry out additional fieldwork—

in particular, the coaching training workshop in February 2011—it also helped shaped my research questions and interests. I will return to these issues when I share my thoughts and recommendations for the coaching profession in Chapter Eight.

Research Setting and Participants

Unlike some other qualitative studies in the field of management, this research project is not "located in" an organization. The subject of interest is identity and its construction among a specific population—self-employed professionals. The world of personal coaching provides the particular "setting" or "context" for the project (Please refer to Chapter Two for background information on the coaching profession).

Having identified a network of personal coaches, located in a Northeastern state, I performed much of my participant observation around this group's activities, and it later became my primary source for interviewees. The membership is varied, and includes both certified and non-certified coaches providing a range of services—from executive, leadership, and career assistance, to spiritual, writing, fitness, and relationship guidance. Coincidentally, for the last few years, the alliance has been undergoing an organizational restructuring; they are slowly transitioning from a loose alliance of independent coaches, to a tighter, more formalized network of professionals who share and exchange information, resources, and referrals. There is also a strong interest in publicizing their services—and the coaching profession more generally—to the larger community.

The research participants were recruited initially via "convenience" and "self-selection" sampling (see Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000: 171-6). Through my involvement with the coaching network, I met potential participants and had the opportunity to describe my research interests, as they were evolving. Indeed, these

individuals have actively shaped my interests and guided the development of this project. The members of the alliance have become partners in the co-production of this research, and I am indebted to them for their assistance in the process.

Individuals were free to accept or decline my invitation to take part in the study. I did not pressure anyone—at least not knowingly—to get involved. I do believe that my prolonged attachment with the alliance demonstrated my commitment to learning about the world of coaching—probably more so than an outsider's well-written solicitation on official letterhead. I attribute their expressed curiosity in the project and desire to help to the fact that I have become a familiar face in their circle.

Additionally, I relied on members of the coaching alliance to introduce me, through their various networks, to other potential participants. Known as "snowball sampling," this is a particularly valuable method for identifying informants, since the word-of-mouth referral is considered a short cut to establishing the researcher's credibility and trustworthiness. I also recruited a small number of participants, not directly connected with the coaching alliance, through my own contacts.

The issues surrounding self-employment seemed to be the main subject of conversation at each alliance meeting I observed. Given this focus, it's not surprising, then, that virtually all members of the alliance are self-employed, and this was the main pool for finding research participants. I therefore established one other major criterion for participation in the interviews: the individual must self-identify as a coach, or as engaging coaching work.

The vast majority of informants indicated they were self-employed, which includes a variety of work arrangements.[7] For instance, one coach is an independent contractor, hired by various organizations to provide coaching services, but is not considered an employee of those organizations. Similarly, another coach works from a home office, coaching individuals or groups. In both cases, the individuals are considered self-employed because they are each responsible for marketing and delivering the coaching services, setting rates and billing clients, as well as preparation of their own income taxes, arranging insurance, and supplying the materials required to perform their work. Even if a coach does hire an accountant to prepare their income taxes, it is ultimately their responsibility, as a self-employed individual, to ensure the taxes are filed.

In the course of my interviews, it was revealed that quite a few informants were only coaching part-time—for various reasons;[8] some had even returned to other organizational employment and were only coaching on an occasional basis. In fact, the coaches' working arrangements became more complicated as the conversations unfolded, demonstrating this matter is not simply captured by discrete either-or survey items, but is better voiced and explored in depth via interview.

Table 2 provides select descriptive statistics, to offer a general portrait of the research interview informants (this summary does not include the participants with whom I interacted during meetings, presentations, training and other fieldwork).

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[7] For a review of self-employment arrangements, please see Chapter One.

[8] This finding of part-time employment is pursued further in the chapters that follow.

Table 2. Selective Sample Descriptives

Category/Characteristic	Desired Proportions	Actual Informants n = 22	Actual Proportions
SEX			
Male	25%	**6**	*27%*
Female	75%	**16**	*73%*
EMPLOYMENT STATUS			
Self-Employed Only	75%	**18**	*82%*
Other Arrangements^	25%	**4**	*18%*
AGE/STAGE OF WORKING LIFE			
< 35 yrs (Early working life)	20%	**3**	*14%*
35-50 yrs (Mid working life)	20%	**6**	*27%*
> 50 yrs (Late working life)	60%	**13**	*59%*
COACHING EMPLOYMENT			
Full Time	80%	**13**	*59%*
Part Time/Occasional	20%	**9**	*41%*
YEARS SELF-EMPLOYED			
< 3 yrs (Novice)	35%	**5**	*23%*
3 – 8 yrs (Intermediate)	40%	**10**	*45%*
> 8 yrs (Veteran)	25%	**7**	*32%*

TOTAL NUMBER OF INFORMANTS IN EACH COACHING NICHE/SPECIALIZATION*			
Creative (Art , Music, Movement)	**4**	Life	**6**
Baby Boomers	**3**	Marketing & Sales	**3**
Business (Small, General)	**5**	Non-Profit Organizations	**3**
Career	**9**	Organizing & Decluttering	**1**
Diversity & Inclusion	**1**	Relationships (Family, Couples)	**4**
Executives	**4**	Spiritual	**1**
Health & Wellness	**1**	Training (Coaching, General)	**5**
Lawyers	**2**	Women	**3**
Leadership	**3**	Writing	**1**

^This includes any working arrangement where the informant is considered an "employee."

*Each informant was free to indicate as many niches/specializations as desired.

In addition to the major "coach" criterion, there were a number of secondary characteristics (such as sex, age, niches, etc.) that I took into consideration when recruiting participants. Based on the initially established sample size of 20 interviewees (the sample ended up n = 22), I then estimated "desired proportions" for each criterion or characteristic, in an effort to reflect the diversity of the coaching profession's population

(as indicated by ICF), while also accounting for local demographics and alliance membership. For most characteristics, the actual numbers are close to the desired ones, but for some, the participants' profiles (ex. coaching full or part-time, years self-employed, etc.) could not be ascertained prior to interview.

More details about each of the research interview informants, including online contributors to the data, can be found in Appendix A: Research Participant Mini Bios, and Appendix B: Coaching Specializations of the Interview Informants.

Access, Informant Consent, and Ethical Issues

I was very fortunate with respect to the issue of identifying a research site and negotiating access. As mentioned previously, I connected with a local network of personal coaches, in October 2007, and have been attending their monthly meetings. I became a member of the alliance, so that I could participate in their "business" discussions, which occur prior to the "public" portion of the meetings.

The coaching alliance members have always been extremely welcoming. Individually and collectively, they demonstrated a willingness to support me in my research endeavors, and an enthusiasm to include me as a part of their organization. In April 2008, I distributed a notice about my prospective research, in order to gauge interest in participation. The response was very positive; almost all members who received the information expressed willingness to talk with me "whenever I was ready."

For this project, I recognize the principle of negotiated and *processual consent* (see Crawshaw, 2005: 9-11). What this means is that securing participant consent and cooperation is an ongoing process, and each person has the right to change their mind about the information to be provided, the questions they are willing to answer, and the

activities in which they are willing to take part. Throughout this project, I endeavored to carry out my research in a transparent and respectful manner, recognizing the privacy and dignity of all who became involved. My commitment to gaining processual consent is, I believe, evidence of fulfilling this objective.

Based on exemplars from earlier research projects, I developed a research participant consent form, with three goals in mind. First, it is a means of keeping a signed record of one's agreement to take part in the research, which may be required for follow-up or if changes occur later. Second, it offers general information about the research study, but specifically, further details about what participation entails in terms of time and energy, potential risks, and confidentiality concerns. In my view, providing such information enables potential participants to set more "realistic" expectations, which in turn results in consent that is better "informed." Third and crucially, it gives contact details for the researcher and institution, should any questions or concerns arise at any point throughout (or even after) the study. Such measures are necessary to truly support the principle of processual consent discussed earlier. An example of the consent form can be viewed in Appendix C.

Methods of Data Production

In order to answer the specific research questions of this project, the chosen methodology must be consistent with the researcher's theoretical assumptions. In the sections that follow, I offer more detail about each data production method, and explain their unique contributions to the greater objectives of this research project.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a popular method used in ethnographic studies. As theorized in this study, participant observation recognizes that the researcher cannot be divorced from the research context and is an active agent in shaping the events and interactions that take place. That is, together with the research participants, the researcher co-produces the data.

I have been engaged in participant observation—which includes informally interacting and conversing with the informants—since October 2007 and as a result, an enormous amount of data have been generated. From the onset, I began asking questions in order to focus my successive observations in the field; in short, the use of questions to probe the subject matter further is an essential part of the analytical process. Since this research project is exploratory in nature and intended to mirror real-life experiences and issues of coaching, identity, and self-employment, I realized early on that it would be necessary to invest a substantial amount of time initially in the field for this project to take shape. In other words, considerable participant observation was required in order to understand what kinds of issues were surfacing and how they fit in and compared with extant literature, to then determine which questions were ultimately "worth" investigating. For instance, upon observing several meetings of the local coaching alliance, it soon became apparent to me that the members' focus was not primarily on coaching techniques or dealing with difficult client situations or cases. Rather, conversation centered on *the issues and challenges of self-employment*. This awareness eventually provoked questions about the contextual conditions of working as a coach, and ultimately became the focal point of this research project.

Narrative Interviewing

Narrative research assumes that people are active agents, relying on choice and imagination in their accounts of who they are; that is, in the construction of personal narratives (Goodson, 2001; Johansson, 2004). Narrative interviews, sometimes referred to as "story-telling interviews" (Hytti, 2005: 597), allow informants to shape their own responses, without the pressure to accommodate a predetermined structure or list of categories set out by the interviewer (Mishler, 1986). Informants determine what is important to talk about, the language they will use to talk about it, but also, by process of exclusion, what is irrelevant or not worth talking about.

It is important to acknowledge that in shaping one's story, one makes choices about what is worth sharing and what is not. And while these choices might be made unconsciously, they are still purposeful. In creating a coherent story, one includes details that will ultimately help advance the story from the past to the present, and excludes other information that does not quite 'fit' in or does not seem relevant. An identity is most commonly expressed as a coherent, consistent set of qualities that remains somewhat constant through time and context. Given this understanding, identity work(ing) is performed in the creation of such narratives in an effort to maintain a sense of cohesiveness (Down, 2008; Giddens, 1991; Somers, 1994), especially when conflicting information and situations threaten to expose gaps in the logic or ruptures in the consistency of the story.

Because of my presence in the interview encounter, I recognize that I, as the researcher, am co-producing the data with the informant. That is, we are jointly constructing the self-identity narratives that emerge. Interviews can therefore be

considered "less a method for ascertaining the truth than a vehicle for producing it" (Down, 2008: 123).

During this phase of fieldwork, I interviewed 22 informants; with a couple, I had follow-up conversations. Since there is no required amount or "magic number" of informants for such a qualitative study, I consulted my committee members to determine how many interviews were needed. Together, we came up with 20, as we thought that around this number of interviews, I would probably reach the "data saturation point." When this occurs, the researcher is less open or able to absorb and process any further information, and commonly reports that they "cannot see anything new" in the data.

The interviews were largely unstructured, with mainly open-ended questions, to allow the informants to freely develop their narratives. Too much structure within the interview may create a question-answer dynamic between the researcher and informant, which I believe inhibits the free flow of conversation. The objective of a narrative interview is to create, as much as possible, a comfortable and safe environment; one that inspires trust between the actors. These efforts are made to encourage the informant to talk about what they believe is important and interesting to reveal, which means not necessarily "following the lead" of the researcher, as would be the case in more structured or "conventional" interviews. A copy of the interview protocol, which was used as a guide to ensure certain topics and issues were addressed, can be found in Appendix D.

The use of in-depth narrative interviews also gives the informant permission to participate more fully in the research process. By reflexively recounting and reconstructing their experiences for me, they begin to articulate their self-identities—a

sense-making endeavor not only for the researcher to witness, but the informants themselves. From the interview encounters and the narratives generated, I then tried to uncover how these become meaningful in "doing identity"—as a coach and as a self-employed professional.

Ad Hoc Fieldwork

While I greatly valued the interview responses, which were shared with the utmost sincerity and enthusiasm, they nonetheless masked any prior energy —or, for lack of a better word, coaching—that went into making these sound bites seem effortless and even self-evident. For me, and for the purpose of my analysis, these words can be considered the outcome or end product of the socialization process of becoming a coach. My intent is not to accept these words strictly as "The Truth", but rather, to demonstrate just *how* they are used to construct a certain identity. That is, the *content* of the answers to my questions is not as crucial as the fact that through the research interview, we had created an occasion to witness the identity working *process*. Indeed, I had provided my informants with a captive audience for their identity performances.

So in order to understand the informants' words as active tools, techniques, and resources in the identity working process, matters like where they came from and how the coaches learned to use them, also had to be examined. It was while carrying out interviews that I started to realize the necessity for further fieldwork, and if possible, to get first-hand experience of a training program to better appreciate the process of creating the coach identity. To this end, I continued engaging in participant observation. During a weekend in February 2011, I took part in an intense 25-hour coaching certification

workshop, in an attempt to contextualize and thus scrutinize the identity working taking place during the interviews.

Data Analysis Process

Once data have been "produced"—whether through participant observation, narrative interviews or informal chats—written notes should be recorded as soon as possible afterwards. For example, during the coaching alliance meetings when I was engaged in participant observing, I discretely took fieldnotes of the conversations and goings-on. Likewise, for interviewing, I used a digital voice recorder—with the prior permission of the informant—to capture our conversation. Although I prefer to listen to the "tapes" repeatedly during the data analysis process, accurate transcripts are still essential to compile, organize, store, and retrieve the data in a manageable way.

Transcribing is a tedious, but crucial, task. Besides keeping the textual data in order, the process of transcribing is valuable in demonstrating the sheer volume of data with which the researcher must contend. For instance, an hour-long interview might not seem like an overwhelming amount of data to process. However, when that conversation translates into over 30 single-spaced pages of text, the prospect of data analysis can become quite daunting.

I transcribed all my interviews and most of my fieldnotes, particularly those "voice notes" I recorded. I chose to perform the work myself because, even if I did hire a transcriptionist to assist with my research, I would have had to carefully check all typed text against the rough fieldnotes and audio recordings. Despite the work and time involved, I am very happy with this decision, as I believe it contributed enormously to the quality and richness of the project's findings. One of the greatest benefits of transcribing

is that it permits the researcher to quickly gain an extremely intimate knowledge of the data. Listening to the same recording *ad nauseam* also facilitates the data analysis process, so that it is possible to transcribe and analyze simultaneously.

In the process of conducting the interviews and reviewing the tapes, I was also analyzing the data, listening for commonalities and themes within the conversations with various participants. In earlier interviews, this would give me questions to ask and themes to explore in later interviews. However, as the interviews were drawing to a close, true to the iterative research process, I recognized the need for further fieldwork to assist in my understanding of the informants' narratives. I requested funding to observe a weekend coaching training module. With respect to this event, now that the narrative data had been produced through the interviews, I thought it important to understand the "raw material" that the coaches use to create their identity narratives, specifically the "public narratives" from which they draw. A recurring theme that emerged from the informants was the ways in which the coaching training shaped their ideas about who they would be and how they would work as coaches. While witnessing a coaching workshop firsthand enriches my contextual appreciation of the coaches' experiences, it also plays a crucial role in understanding and determining what other interpretations are possible.

In addition to formal narrative interviews, informal conversations, and continued participant observation, I relied upon extensive research of the coaching industry via document analysis, and website/internet searches to understand the "raw material" that the coaches draw upon to create their identity narratives. I continued to use these methods, as well as reviewing the academic literature, as I analyzed the data.

Analytical Tools and Strategies

The significance of Somers' work to the present study is its sensitivity to the dynamic nature of identity, recognizing it as temporally-, spatially-, and relationally-bound. Furthermore, Somers' framework recognizes historicity, which is crucial in my research, to demonstrate how identity and identity construction in its micro form can be connected to the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions of the historical moment in which these phenomena and processes are contextualized. For instance, how one "does" the identity of a self-employed professional—and specifically, a coach—is embedded within and shaped by the larger "social forces" at play (i.e. labor market trends, organizational and institutional practices, and the workings of capitalism and enterprise in the new economy). However, the microprocesses and micro-practices of identity help, in turn, to constitute, shape, and alter the "structural" conditions that characterize our lives. The narrative constitution of identity, as conceptualized by Somers, is thus able to embrace all these different elements, recognizing their interdependency, yet not privileging or valuing one aspect over another.

As stated earlier, analysis takes place within the moment of observation or in the interview interaction. Reviewing my notes and listening to the recordings, I begin identifying several things. First, *within* each interview, I try to look for the use of ontological and public narratives—that is, how individuals talk about and make sense of who they are (ontological—for example: "I'm different, I've always known I was a different, and I wanted to do my own thing"); and how they draw upon cultural and institutional discourse and knowledge (public) to create a unique sense of self (for instance, from the coaching discourse: "As a coach, I believe that the client is the expert,

and I am there to just help them get to where they want to be"). I also pay close attention to patterns of talk or themes that surface *between* participants, and try to connect these themes to larger "social forces." For instance, if I recognize a recurring theme about the economic recession and its effect on business or income, this might signal a common structural factor or constraint. In doing so, I will have to go back and forth between interviews, constantly reviewing and comparing, to see if ideas "show up" in the same way, if they appear differently, or if they are absent or unimportant.

With regard to Somers's other two dimensions—metanarratives and conceptual narratives—these are broader, macro ideas that emerge from the "micro" work of examining each interview account for ontological and public narratives. My analytical focus is to start with the microscopic view—that is, to understand how individuals make sense of who they are as coaches and the work they do—and to progressively widen the lens to look at the themes emerging between the informants, and ultimately to the larger structural context. By taking this approach, I attempted to uncover how the individual coach's experience relates to those of other coaches' and to the coaching industry as whole, but without losing any of the fine-grained detail that is captured so well through longitudinal, qualitative study. Within Chapters Five and Six, I review the specific analytical strategies that were employed to make sense of the data.

I used the qualitative software program, MAX QDA (MAX Qualitative Data Analysis), to assist with managing the data and the data analysis process. MAX QDA is appealing because it's relatively user-friendly and easy to learn—qualities that proved to be elusive with some competing software brands. However, I primarily depended upon Microsoft Word and Excel to manage the data during analysis, using each to perform

searches and to create new documents based on emerging categories, narratives, and themes.

CHAPTER 5

COMPETING DEMANDS: IDENTITY WORKING FOR ONESELF VS. THE COACHING PROFESSION

Introduction: Professional Resources for Identity Working

Although virtually anyone can call themselves a coach, due to the lack of regulation and thus barriers to entry, those who decide to pursue coaching training and/or certification undergo a process of indoctrination. To this end, the professional coaching community—that is, the governing bodies (ex: the IAC and ICF), coaching training schools and programs, (ex: IPEC, CoachU, and Coachville), and other coaching-related organizations (ex: Institute of Coaching)—provide entrants with a variety of knowledge, techniques, vocabulary, and other tools for creating a strong professional identity. The common assumption is that by equipping new recruits with such resources, and instructing them about their proper usage and application, these individuals will have earned their place as rightful members of the professional community. In other words, they will have what they need to become "good coaches." What I have found, however, is that these resources are often not enough, at least, to sustain a coaching business.

In this chapter, I delve into the narrative tools, strategies, and resources with which new coaches are supplied, usually through their training programs but also through other materials circulating in the coaching community (i.e. websites, books, articles, presentations, etc.) In order to understand how one constructs a coherent and positively-valued identity as a member of the larger professional community, it is necessary to unpack the kinds of cultural materials available and to examine precisely how they are expected to be deployed. My objective is to examine the role that the coaching profession, as an institutional force, plays in the construction of individual coaches'

identities. The primary focus of this chapter is to therefore address the first two of my research-orienting questions:

> How is identity work(ing) accomplished among self-employed professionals? How do individuals make sense of this process?
>
> What strategies, tools, resources, and practices are drawn upon for "doing identity"?

I also consider how the conditions which characterize a new and growing industry may pose special challenges to create a legitimate, professional identity. Through this analysis, I wish to convey the often unrecognized labor done by individual members of the coaching community in an effort to enhance and promote the professional project of coaching. Such obligation to perform identity work for the coaching industry as a whole adds an extra burden to their own identity working demands as individual professionals.

Before inspecting the various narrative resources and materials offered by the coaching profession to its new members, I briefly cover the main themes of identity working which will organize the data analysis that follows.

Making Identity Working Visible: Prominent Analytical Themes

To review, identity work(ing) is defined as "the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of self that is coherent, distinct, and positively valued" (Alvesson et al., 2008: 15). The process of identity working is often summoned when the normal reproduction of self-identity in a stable setting is *interrupted*, *disturbed*, or *challenged*. These interruptions or events may be assessed as relatively positive, negative, or neutral in nature (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). For instance, by inviting informants to be interviewed about their coaching work, this could be perceived as a positive opportunity to engage in identity working.

However, the emphasis of critical studies of identity construction has been on the perhaps "less-positive" incidents which trigger such efforts. Collinson (2003) contends that *insecurity* is a major determinant for identity working. That is, events, actions, or conditions which heighten a sense of insecurity also typically increase self-doubt and anxiety, which in turn means more energy is channeled into identity work to quell these feelings (Knights & Willmott, 1989). Insecurity, in broad terms, can take various forms that commonly intersect and overlap. For example, psychological insecurity may arise when one has doubts about their own identity or attempts to remedy contradictions between multiple roles. Economically, feelings of insecurity could be associated with one's income or job prospects. Finally, social insecurity can be triggered when one is challenged by others about their status in society—who they are, what they do, and the like (ex. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

I now turn to the task of presenting the analysis, referring to these analytical tools and themes to address my initial research questions and help make sense of my observations.

Defining and Defending Coaching's Professional Boundaries

In the present investigation into the emerging profession of coaching, it is crucial to examine how institutional forces shape and influence the identity construction of individual coaches. Like organizations and organizational cultures, professions and professional associations employ a similar type of control over individual behavior, appearances, and practices on its members. Through its code of ethics and practices, constitution, credentialing system, and not least, a common language, the "profession" produces rules and norms that are shared by those in the community. If successful, these

mechanisms should ultimately weed out those who do not belong, while retaining those who do. It must not be taken for granted, however, that such professional codes, norms, and practices, rely on humans to be activated, and therefore rendered effective. But it is also within these moments that *contradictions, conflicts,* and *challenges* may arise, calling for intense identity working. Consequently, my analysis seeks out these moments of heightened anxiety in order to expose the efforts needed by individual coaches to sustain a professional identity in the face of such difficulties.

Reviewing my data, I was able to identify three focal points through which the coaching community attempts to distinguish itself from other professions: the role of a coach; the coaching philosophy; and the relationship between coach and client. These themes are somewhat arbitrary divisions because they overlap and cover much of the same material. What they do have in common is that first, the coaches rely on these professional resources in their everyday work; and second, they provide "high-level" or broad distinctions in order to exemplify the differences *between* coaching and other lines of work. Undoubtedly, there are also shades of difference *within* the coaching community, depending on one's training and area of specialization or niche. In essence, these three subject areas are important pieces for understanding the professional project of coaching. I discuss each of these points next.

The Role of the Coach

During interviews, I would ask informants about coaching, what they do, how they think about their work, etc. and there was much similarity in what I heard. Most informants were able to give eloquent answers to these questions—after all, when I had approached them to be interviewed for my research, I did indicate these were the primary

topics of interest. It is not surprising that most informants were well-prepared to answer such questions and even saw it as an opportunity to "educate" and perhaps enlist a new client. In fact, one participant emailed me to ask for a recording of our conversation so she could review it. As it turned out, she had just been invited to do a live radio interview, and believed several of the replies she had given to me were particularly good examples for clarifying and articulating her thoughts about her work.

Coaches are frequently confronted with the question: "What is coaching?" Being a relatively new service industry, there is not a great deal of cultural knowledge among the general public regarding what it is this profession has to offer, nor how coaching works. During our conversations, it was not uncommon for interviewees to take some time to explain to me what coaching is and how it differs from similar, yet distinct, professions, such as therapy and consulting. One technique for explicating something new (i.e. coaching) is to compare/contrast it with something more familiar (i.e. therapy, consulting, etc.). It therefore seems reasonable that any thorough training program should clearly delineate coaching's professional boundaries, especially for those who are about to join its community.

At times, efforts to demarcate the professional boundaries between coaching and its closest cousins (ex. therapy, training, consulting, etc.) must be more decisive. That is, coaches are required to answer forthright questions like: "What's the difference between coaching and therapy?" Career coach Liz explained how she makes this distinction:

> ME: Ok, so...ok so I just want to ask then, how...how would you distinguish yourself from being a therapist? How is what you were different—how is what you were doing different from what a therapist does?
>
> LIZ: Well, I think one way, major way which is different is I do not work with people on emotional issues, (ME: Ok.) that require the training certification that a

> therapist would get. (ME: Ok.) I'm not trained as a therapist, I don't know how to do therapy. (ME: Right, right.) And what I do know is I can certainly tell between a person's need for career coaching, which is what I do, and something that goes much more deeply into their emotions and their well being, as related to their emotions.
>
> ME: Right, right. So, you wanted to distinguish yourself from that.
>
> LIZ: Yeah, I think that...I think it's very important because people who come to you don't distinguish. (ME: Right.) And—because it's an artificial boundary.
>
> ME: Right, right. I mean, so would you still have people that came to see you that were really looking for therapy?
>
> LIZ: Yes, and actually I recommend to anybody who's going to see me that--my first, one of my first questions is: "Have you—Are you seeing a therapist?" (ME: Right.) And if they're not, as graciously as I can, when the moment comes, suggest therapy. Because it usually is a good idea to do both together. (ME: Right.) And I also strongly suggest that they let the therapist know that they're seeing a coach.

Liz makes an astute point in recognizing it is really an "artificial boundary" between coaching and therapy. It may be an uncomplicated matter for the governing boards and professional bodies to make clear and concise distinctions on paper, in the safety of a boardroom or within the confines of a conference workshop. Unfortunately, it doesn't usually happen that way in practice for the coaches who must contend with such challenges on a daily basis. In fact, much of a coach's time and energy is devoted to performing such identity work, as in the example above, to strengthen the presence and legitimacy of the profession.

The Coaching Philosophy

One's coaching philosophy is the logic behind their practice of coaching. It is the starting assumptions with which they enter the relationship with the client; it shapes their focus, their goals, their approach, and guides them with regard to appropriate actions—

what should be done and what should not. In short, one's coaching philosophy provides the framework—conceptual, practical, and moral—for working effectively as a coach.

One of my interviews at the beginning of this research project was with Maureen, a writing and career coach. I asked her to explain the philosophy that provides the foundation for her coaching work and relationships. Maureen put it this way:

> My coaching philosophy...is that people have the answers, their own answers, and I work in my coaching relationship with them to help them uncover their answers… I like the challenge of working with the person, helping them figure out what their skills are and how they apply them, and learn new skills.

This quotation upholds some of what Maureen had earlier described to me as the "co-active coaching" philosophy, the particular coaching school of thought and approach in which she was trained. Clearly, her beliefs about coaching mirror—or have been closely shaped by—what she was taught in her courses towards coaching certification.

As I spent more time in the field, I observed comments like Maureen's above being espoused in meetings, conversations, presentations, and on websites, business cards, and brochures. Consequently, as an observer and student of the coaching world for several years, I now recognize such remarks to be one variety of speech circulating in the coaching profession. In Somers's terms, this is a *public narrative*, provided by the profession and drawn upon by actors within its community to distinguish coaching from other fields while, at the same time, uniting and solidifying its place as a legitimate profession, populated by legitimate professionals. Small business coach Danielle's comments confirm this:

> Yeah, I like that about coaching, about the whole philosophy and method of it, it's a holistic approach. It's more rewarding for me, and I think it's more useful for the client.

Danielle makes an implicit comparison between coaching and some referent, an unnamed field or profession, as she depicts the coaching philosophy as "more rewarding" and "more useful." From this subtle utterance, one can catch a glimpse of the ways in which individual coaches not only put forth efforts to craft a self-identity, but also how they actively engage in identity work for the coaching profession as a whole.

It is not mandatory, however, that one's coaching philosophy should mimic a particular script learned during training; there is certainly room for personal creativity and expression. Thus, one's coaching philosophy can be considered a rhetorical device, offering an opportunity to attract clients by seasoning it with one's own values, beliefs, and assumptions, which they bring to their practice. A good illustration of this practice is demonstrated by executive coach Abigail, who specializes in the Baby Boomer population:

> ME: So, let's see...so how would describe yourself as a coach? (ABIGAIL: Oh wow.) So, so what kind of approach do you take, and what's your coaching philosophy?
>
> ABIGAIL: Ok, this is good. Well I named some of it, I really believe the answers lie within and we just have to find the tools to get to it. (ME: Ok.) That's a big part of my philosophy. And I really believe that everyone is born smart, with all the tools they need, with everything they need, and that issues get in the way from the time you're a baby, and that we get re-triggered, at different times, depending on how we were raised and you know, and what our childhoods and teen years were like. And so--but I really believe that there's a wholeness inside and that there's divinity inside each person. And again, I wouldn't tell people this who would be turned off by that. (ME: Right.) But that...
>
> ME: But that's...those are the assumptions that you work with...
>
> ABIGAIL: ...that I work with. And I also feel that as a coach, part of my job is to help people to get out of whatever box they're in, if they're in a box, to see new options and perspectives and possibilities. (ME: Right.) And so I do a lot of work with energy--I'm not talking about hands on reiki or anything. I'm talking about helping them, through breath, through wholeness and awareness. To get to wholeness, to be fully present, and to be authentic. (ME: Right, right.)

The Coach-Client Relationship

Studying the coaching philosophy and role of the coach points to the question of the coach's relationship with the client. Of course, every relationship is as unique as the individuals who are in it, but certain social norms can exist which dictate the general terms of the relationship and the role expectations of each party within. The coach-client relationship is no exception, and it appears to be a factor that differentiates it from other types of professional-client interactions.

Like the coaching philosophy and role of the coach, there is room for individual coaches to put their own spin on the relationship with the client. Taken from separate conversations, here are two different informants' views on the relationship they envision and strive to develop with clients:

> MAUREEN: I think that the client and I together shape the relationship. So, everybody's different, I mean to some extent every relationship I have with the client is different. I mean, there are ethical boundaries even in coaching, but...it's not one size fits all. So that's ok. I mean, I still have good boundaries, but... different people want and need different things. I think that it's kind of all of that stuff, and also...and you assume that your client is creative and resourceful and healthy. Well, I mean maybe they're not, but even if they're not, it's not like they're across the board, not.

> JEFF: So that's how really I approach a client coaching relationship, "Ok, what does this person need? What—where do they want to go? What do they want to do?" (ME: Right, right.) "And then, how might we get there?" Now, every client is different I think, as well, so I stay far away from a unitized or unified approach. You mentioned for example authentic, there's—I'd like to think that everything I do has an authenticity to it, certainly from my side, I think it does. Is that person fully achieving his or her authenticity, I don't know for sure, because that's...I don't think you can know that really. But then I work with folks who just want to get the next job.

For both Maureen and Jeff, there is a common theme in making sure the coaching relationship caters to the client's particular needs, thereby avoiding a "one size fits all"

approach. So even though Maureen and Jeff may each have certain ideas about human nature (i.e. creativity, resourcefulness, authenticity, etc.), they recognize, at the same time, the uniqueness of the individual with whom they are working.

Life coach and personal organizer Dana expressed her work and relationship with clients using the metaphor of a journey:

> DANA: I think there are infinite ways to support people and I don't know that everything I do is coaching per se, but I'm here in support. Like, one way I hold it is that you know, I hold people's hand for a while, for a stretch of their path that they need a little extra support. Sort of escorting them to the next umm...passage way, or their next level, you know?

Similarly, career coach and trainer Liz also referred to the idea of motion/moving in her client relationships:

> LIZ: I have a lot of experience and I'm very down to earth, and I'm seriously interested in...in having it be a warm and respectful relationship that helps people move forward, and I'm basing it on experience, and that type of thing.

From these images, one can make inferences about the nature of the client relationship—for instance, when Dana states she might "hold people's hand" if needed, as she "escorts" them to where they need to be, she is not saying that she is leading or pushing them. Rather, she is accompanying them, like a travelling companion, who is sharing in the experience. This conjures a very different type of rapport from the conventional medical model used in therapy, where one diagnoses, advises, and imparts knowledge to the other, and the hierarchical power relations associated with such an arrangement. Liz reinforces the idea of a supportive environment and more balanced power dynamics when she depicts the relationship as "warm and respectful."

Identity Working through Conflicts

Coaching as "Superior to" Therapy

Discursively positioning the coaching profession as somehow "better than" or "superior to" rather than merely "different from" therapy can be quite tricky, even treacherous—especially for those individuals who are trained as therapists and continue to practice therapy along with their coaching. One particularly memorable case in point occurred while talking with Sascha, a former therapist turned career and life coach:

> ME: Can you talk a little bit more about the differences between therapy and coaching? Or what...what really attracted you to coaching and how you felt, you know, this is really for me?
>
> SASCHA: Well therapy is amazing, and I think it can be amazing for people. And it's accessible for people because of insurance and it's familiar to people. So in no way do I want to put therapy down, (ME: Right.) or the work that therapists do. But it's a role where you diagnose people, and you take on an expert role, and you write treatment plans, and you...you work treating problems. You know, that's kind of the focus and I think some people are changing that in the field. But you're focusing on people's problems and the past, and kind of figuring out where it is--and some therapists do solution-focused therapy and they incorporate coaching, and I know that there's a real mix out there. But still, especially if you're working in a clinic or something like that, you still write out your treatment plan of what you recommend the person to do and diagnose them, and it's part of the medical model. Therapy--I mean, coaching, which just...it kind of flipped it on its head for me, where I didn't have to be the expert. I worked with people and I could REALLY just...I could really listen to the essence of WHO this person is and WHAT do THEY want out their life. And it was just very freeing for me because I didn't have to put in any judgment or I didn't have my own agenda, I could just really be with this person and help this person get to where they want to go, with different coaching techniques. And…so it was freeing, and it was just...it was a better fit for me, and those are the essential things I see as the difference.

Sascha's comparison of coaching and therapy includes many points of difference commonly alluded to by others: the expert role, diagnosis, treatment plans, and lack of judgment or agenda. Through her comments, she demonstrates that while different coaching schools have their own particular take on theories, techniques, practices, and

terminology, there does seem to be an overarching coaching discourse which guides the profession as a whole. Much of this institutional discourse is endorsed by professional governing bodies, such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the International Association of Coaching (IAC), and is generally accepted as the unifying ideology for the "professional" and "legitimate" coaching community.

At the same time, Sascha is very careful to not denigrate or "put therapy down," going so far as to call it "amazing" and referring to some positive aspects of this modality. She also mentions coaching was a "better fit" for her, underlining her career transition as a personal choice, not a rejection of the entire therapy profession. She is keenly aware that, even though she is no longer practicing as a therapist, any negative remark about psychotherapy could reflect poorly on her own career decisions—albeit made by a "past self." Hence, Sascha prefaces her coaching speech with affirmative comments about therapy. Simply put, this instance shows the active doing of identity.

So while it may be helpful for making distinctions between coaching and other professions to establish an understanding of this new line of work, the negative comparison tactic is not as useful or effective when transported from the coaching training manual or workshop, into actual practice. The reality is that many of the individuals becoming coaches have previously been (and sometimes still are) members of these other professional communities. To disregard or dismiss the referent professions, then, may be unwittingly disregarding or dismissing the individuals' knowledge derived from and time spent in these other occupations. This contradiction, between the past and present professional roles, can be a source of discomfort and anxiety, which triggers concentrated identity working to alleviate these feelings (Collinson, 2003).

Unfortunately, it is left to the individual to repair any damage done by defining coaching in this way, as they struggle to craft a professional identity which is "coherent, distinct, and positively valued" (Alvesson et al., 2008:15) over time. This was evident in Sascha's case above; she was cognizant that therapy had been set up as a "straw man" next to coaching, and therefore made sure to not fall into this trap which could inadvertently hurt her own professional reputation.

Balancing Coaching with Multiple Roles

Byrd is a licensed clinician who, when we spoke, had recently become a certified coach. She told me she had decided to expand her career into coaching because it allowed her to have more open, egalitarian interactions with clients, which she has been discouraged from developing in her clinical work. She refers to one case in particular to highlight this point:

> BYRD: I have a client, somebody who I'm working with, is...as a clinician, that I just...I have ethical, professional difficulty with that at times. And I REALLY believe...in a less restrictive...possibilities for my work with people. Now that...so that's the reason. And, I....just want to say I "get" the significance having worked with the people that I've worked with, in NOT disclosing my work with them, with people. (ME: Right.) So, I have no problems having these dual roles, that my work as a clinician is completely bound by the laws and ethics of that field. But I also, for me, wanted to be able to open my range of work up, differently. So they're not by any means...you know, when I'm in one hat, when I'm in one role, those are the confines or opportunities.
>
> ME: Right, right. That's interesting, I don't think anybody has talked about the therapy model being, you know, so...like such a template or so...you know: "You have to meet x number of times for it to be effective." You know?
>
> BYRD: Once a week is the standard.
>
> ME: Right. Without it even, you know, without even taking into account the client's needs? Or comfort level...?
>
> BYRD: ...or the client's needs, the client's income, the client's insurance, the topic of the material, how their support system is helping them, how they are

> managing the...material that they're working on. There are so many elements, yeah.

In the course of talking about the "laws and ethics" to which she is "bound" and claims she fully accepts in her role as a clinician, Byrd revealed that these standards and rules have been established not necessarily with the client's (best) interests or even needs in mind. So apart from the ability to interact with her clients on a more comfortable, human level through coaching, Byrd also has more independence and autonomy to determine the best coaching program based on the client's individual needs. Or, perhaps more accurately, each client is free to work together with Byrd to establish the terms of a customized coaching program. She goes on to say:

> BYRD: I'm a licensed clinician and I've been the clinical director of some medium to large size outfits with, you know 120 staff and...volunteers, and working with violent crimes. And, at a certain point I wanted to take my own advice to other people which was to have less violence in my life. And, so...the direction of opening up my work towards a variety of other things included what I could do through coaching...and I don't always want to be working as a clinician. I want to just be working with people without this issue of diagnosis, and the boundaries of clinical practice. And what I mean by that is I want to be able to work with people who are in a variety of locations to me. And whereas in clinical practice, if I see somebody walking on the street, I'm not even supposed to say hello to them. (ME: Right, right.) They're supposed to initiate the hello to me. And conceptually...I have problems with that.

To Byrd, not being permitted to acknowledge a therapy patient on the street or in public (unless they do so first) means, in essence, that she is not allowed to recognize their humanity, to see them as a fellow person. Instead, the clinical approach dictates she must approach them merely as a clinical object, which did not sit well with Byrd. She was therefore happy to learn the coaching ethos allowed her the ideological space to treat her clients in the manner she really wanted—as complicated, emotional beings, and undeniably human.

Byrd has crafted a narrative which reconciles what she views as the shortcomings of therapy (i.e. the overly formal and rigid interaction with patients) with her desire to work with people in a more supportive, friendly, and evenly balanced relationship. Put differently, she discursively positions her decision to become a coach as the solution to this professional dilemma. At the same time, however, she hints that some issues have not been completely resolved. For instance, she admits: "I have ethical, professional difficulty with that at times," referring to the impersonal treatment of her therapy patients, but then moments later states: "I have no problems having these dual roles," as a coach and a therapist. In both excerpts, she uses the present tense, implying these issues are ongoing. Since Byrd asserts the treatment of people is a fundamental concern to her and a key reason for going into coaching, it seems odd (to me, at least) that she would be quite willing and content to shift back and forth between these two starkly different types of client relationships.

These somewhat contradictory statements are evidence of incongruity between Byrd's two intentions: first, to make a strong case for the lure of the coaching profession (after all, this was the proposed topic of our interview); and second, to project herself as a legitimate professional, performing important and valuable work—including that which she carries out as a therapist. As argued earlier in this chapter, by framing coaching as a "better" alternative to therapy (here, with regard to client relations), it portrays those who still practice as therapists—such as Byrd—in a less-than-desirable way. Thus, she makes claims which ostensibly contradict earlier ones, in order to sustain a positive professional identity.

While Byrd did not make any such admission, I can only speculate the difficulty that might be experienced when one must switch "hats," especially between two roles having such disparate views of the client. Had I asked directly about this process, Byrd may have been reluctant to express any negativity, since this could be interpreted as an inability to deal with the stresses of juggling multiple work obligations. Thus, the need to be malleable, as one frequently changes between roles, can be a source of great unease. To enact each role properly, there are distinct rules, norms, and rituals that must be remembered and adhered to. And, as other scholars have argued, as feelings of anxiety increase, one is more likely to channel this nervous energy into identity working, in an attempt to offset any (self-) doubts of an articulate sense of self (Collinson, 2003; Knights & Willmott, 1989).

As a final point, Byrd is also careful to depict the dual roles of coach and therapist as *her choice*, and therefore acknowledges she must deal with the challenges that come along with wearing so many hats. Like other informants, she deploys a popular public narrative by voicing the "new careers" perspective. That is: self-employed professionals should ideally possess a variety of skills and qualifications, in order to offer a wide portfolio of services, thus securing more opportunities for work. Consequently, Byrd is constructing an identity as a conscientious self-employed professional; one who is taking all the right actions and doing everything necessary to be successful.

Titles and Labels: A Coach by Any Other Name?

The various titles that coaches use to introduce or present themselves to others—particularly potential clients, other professionals, and/or prospective referral sources—are important for distinguishing themselves from other types of professionals, as well as for

signaling their membership within a specific professional community. In this sense, it can be considered "overt" identity working, because the individual coaches are making conscious choices about how to present themselves to others. While titles or labels are one-dimensional elements and alone do not seem to capture identity as an active, lived experience, they can offer insight into identity working by probing the deeper issues regarding where such labels came from, who is using them, as well as how, when, where, and in what context. Thus, as a linguistic device, labels may be a significant window into the process of identity working, and the active construction and protection of professional boundaries. To further support this claim, even as I write my data analysis, I feel obligated to introduce every informant's comments with some indication of their title (i.e. career coach, business coach, etc.), thereby reinforcing the key role of labels in the process of identity creation and recognition.

Depending on the precise wording used, a researcher may elicit very different responses to what might seemingly be the same question. For instance, I would usually ask my informants near the start of the interview: "How long have you been coaching?" and then some time later ask: "What do you call yourself?" For many, use of the title "coach" has been a relatively recent adoption compared with the length of time they have actually been performing coaching activities. In some cases, informants self-identified as doing coaching work, but did not call themselves such. Again, taken alone, labels may be flat, static descriptors unable to get across the active process of "doing identity." But they are enlightening when regarded as social markers, hinting at changes in how people are thinking about who they are, and altering daily practices to reflect this.

For example, career coach Jeff told me that he started coaching in 1997, which was "more in the role of an internal mentor/coach" within the consulting company he was working for at the time. Our conversation continued as follows:

> ME: And so how...so is that when you started calling yourself a coach?
>
> JEFF: No, not really. So in terms of full time coaching, where I hung out my shingle, that was in 2003, so it's been six years. In that period from 1997 to 2003 I was alternately working as a management consultant and doing coaching and mentoring. So in terms of calling myself a coach, that started in 2003 when I put a website out and began with my career coaching company.
>
> ME: Ok. Before that time, before 2003 would you refer to yourself as a coach?
>
> JEFF: No, as a consultant. Then, if I needed a one word label for myself, it was 'Organizational Consultant'. That's more than one word *(we laugh)* but close to it.

Another case in point can be appreciated in career coach Abigail's story. She discussed her experiences with coaching, long before knowing conceptually what it was, or that the kind of work she was doing even had a special name:

> ABIGAIL: Well, I've been coaching for about 25 years, more or less. Yeah.
>
> ME: Ok, and have you always referred to yourself as a coach?
>
> ABIGAIL: Well, when I was at [Name of Former Organizational Employer], I thought of myself more as a career counselor. I was also the communications director for the office, and I spearheaded the marketing efforts of the office. And I've done a lot of event planning. So it wasn't just that, although I had a full schedule and so...toward the end, I realized that I was a coach, and I started doing some trainings in coaching. I already had a Master's.
>
> ME: Right, right. And so, when you set up your own kind of side thing, in '02, '03? '03, '04?
>
> ABIGAIL: Umm...I didn't...yeah. I'm trying to think, it was about two years before I left, so '03. Yeah.
>
> ME: So, then were you...were you calling yourself a coach? (ABIGAIL: Oh yeah.) Ok.

ABIGAIL: Yeah, I definitely was. And actually it was very interesting because I started to be interesting in coaching way before that, years before that, and I thought: "That's what I'm going to do, when I leave this job." Cuz after 20 years, that's a long time. (ME: Right.) And my colleagues had stayed there all that time too. I had a wonderful, visionary director, who was just wonderful. And every so often she would take trainings and something, and then she would share it with us. We would do an in-house training. (ME: Right.) And so she's the one who had us, gave each of us a book on executive coaching. And the career counselors—the directors we were called, the assistant and associate directors—we all met several times, and discussed the book, and talked about coaching and what it is and what it is isn't. And this was all executive coaching…

ME: Right. And when was this about?

ABIGAIL: This was probably in the early part of this century. Ok, I can't tell you the year, because I don't remember.

ME: No, that's no problem. It's just trying to get a sense of like, a timeline.

ABIGAIL: And, the epiphany for most of us was that's what we're doing.

ME: You recognized in the literature "this is what I'm doing already," right.

ABIGAIL: Yes, and in the discussions. There were some changes, some shifts that were different. And we were always making the distinction that career counseling isn't therapy, and coaching isn't therapy. So we were trying to figure out what the parameters were, what the boundaries were.

The above account demonstrates that sometimes the title or term follows the activity—Abigail and her colleagues had been doing coaching for many years before they had a precise label for it. In fact, they could be referred to as "professional pioneers" since, by struggling to articulate a working definition for coaching and to sketch out its functional boundaries, they were performing some crucial groundwork for the profession long before the formal coaching community, including governing bodies such as the ICF or IAC, were even established.

It is interesting to note, as well, that I during our conversation, I was quite fixated on asking Abigail to name dates for key events in an effort to establish an accurate

timeline for the adoption (by Abigail in particular, and the professional community in general) of the label "coach." In reality, however, few people actually think of these modifications to their speech in such terms. Reflecting on this incident now, I was nudging Abigail to give dates to each period of her life, when this was clearly not a natural way for her to think about these experiences. What can be taken away from this conversation is that the doing of identity work is subtle and often imperceptible—and the decisions to change the ways one thinks about, talks about, and presents oneself to the world can be imprecise, gradual, even unconscious.

For some informants, there is a struggle to hit upon the right titles to describe what it is they are doing or the services they have to offer. Unlike organizational employment, where titles, roles, and job descriptions are usually determined for the worker by the Human Resources officer or department, a self-employed person is free to choose—or, as the case may be, create—their own. And nowadays, we are no longer restricted to just one title to express the work that we do. With this in mind, Rosalyn spoke to me about her difficulty trying to pinpoint the appellation that best conveys the unique approach to job search and career development she markets to her clients:

> ME: Umm...so, ok, let me ask. Do you call yourself...what title do you use to refer to the work that you do?
>
> ROSALYN: A creative career consultant.
>
> ME: Ok. Do you say coach, or...do you use consultant...?
>
> ROSALYN: I don't say coach because I don't have like a coaching certificate, and I don't want people to get confused. And so far, nobody has questioned it at all. I guess it's just my own...for my own reason I just feel better not calling myself a coach, because I haven't gone to Coach U or anything like that. But it is coaching, just...
>
> ME: Right, right. The activity is coaching, but what you call yourself is...

ROSALYN: Uh humm.

ME: Yeah....it's funny because...I was speaking to someone who said like 10 years ago, he'd call himself a consultant, but now he calls himself a coach…But I was just wondering, 'cuz a lot of people call themselves different things, or they have a different title which try and...you know, encompass what they're doing.

ROSALYN: I've had a hard time with that actually, really trying to come up with the right title that brands me right, cuz what I really do is help people really think differently about their job search, not just as send a resume, wait for the phone to ring, but really create a brand for yourself. So I thought about having my title be like 'Personal Branding Specialist' or something. But that doesn't really lend itself to the career angle, that could be so many things. So I wanted to people to understand right away that I'm talking about like the job searching part. So...I'm still kind of working on it but it is so important because right away it like... triggers something...

I consider it quite ironic Rosalyn describes her work as helping clients "create a brand" for themselves, but admits she herself is struggling "to come up with the right title that brands me right." Understandably, there is even more pressure for her to pinpoint the proper label, since Rosalyn wishes to embody and thus market the successful career image, which her clients are seeking assistance to develop for themselves.

As our conversation went on, I wanted to let Rosalyn know that she was not alone in this challenge and, in fact, I had heard similar comments from other members of the coaching alliance. I shared with her one of these stories:

ME: It kind of boxes you—or not, but it labels you and it....people have expectations, I guess. That was another thing...when I was talking to one of the coaches and he said he was having a real problem trying to pin down what it is and narrow down what it is that would describe him in a like, you know, a "bite-size" bit. Or even a title—not just like a tag line, but like, you know, and he said he was...he struggled with it, because he does a lot, and...but people have their own ideas of what a coach is, a consultant is, you know, a mentor, so... And my suggestion to him was: "Well, who are you trying to get to?" And try to use the language of...of the people—or the language that people are comfortable with, of who you're trying to target...or familiar with. Because if you say something that's totally wacky or out there, people might not know exactly, like...if you say "Shaman" *(Rosalyn laughs),* you know, or whatever it might be. You know: "Is

he going to...cleanse me, or like, get rid of ghosts or whatever?" *(Rosalyn laughs).*

Perhaps exaggerating the point with humor, I did attempt to get across to Rosalyn the idea that language is meaningful. And for the male coach I spoke about, using a title like "Shaman" would most likely divide his audience between those who know what he is talking about, and those who do not. He also runs the risk of excluding people who have their own understanding of what a "Shaman" is, and may not be open to having it redefined for them in this particular way.

Struggling for Legitimacy: Training, Qualifications, and Credentials

In the most basic terms, a profession is associated with a specialized body of knowledge and/or set of skills, and possessing these is what distinguishes a professional from a non-professional. Training, education, ethical standards, and accreditation are some of the domains that can be controlled and regulated by professional governing bodies and organizations, and are consequently means for identity regulation and control. As well, credentials are considered a marker of legitimacy and may be used by potential clients as a "shortcut" in the process of selecting a qualified professional to provide a needed service. The local coaching alliance of which I became a member, however, did not place any certification requirements or restrictions for joining. Accordingly, some members had all kinds of coaching qualifications, while others had no formal training, but self-identified as coaches and/or as engaging in coaching work. And because the alliance was my main source for research participants, I had the chance to interview a broad range of certified and non-certified individuals.

For such a new and emerging profession, coaching enjoys a plethora of training schools and programs; there are currently dozens available, some ICF-endorsed, others

not. It is little wonder, then, that researching the different training programs, and their respective benefits and drawbacks, can be quite a daunting task. As a result, enrollment decisions are frequently based on word of mouth from trusted others.

Despite the proliferation of training options, there were mixed opinions regarding the necessity and value of certification for coaches. Starting with more thoughts from Liz, below are a few comments that I heard from different informants:

> LIZ: I think that there's certain commonalities [between certification programs]. (ME: Ok.) The school has to be recognized by the International Coach Federation, and then you have to take a test I believe, afterwards. And you pay a lot of money, and you get a certification. (ME: Right, right.) So, I think that there are people who are certified and they grow from it and they're very, very good coaches. I think that like who you said, who are NOT certified, but who are also very good coaches. (ME: Right.) Because I think coaching is a combination of counseling, education, and—well it's a style of counseling—and education, that many people have already been doing under other hats (ME: Yes! Right.) Under other umbrellas. So, it's only part of what I do with people, it's...not the main thing that I do.
>
> ME: Right. And, and has it been an issue with anyone who's sought your services?
>
> LIZ: Never. It's never been an issue. Most people don't even know what coaching is. They call me a career counselor. (ME: Right, right.) They don't even know what it is. It's...it's quite elite at this point, you know? And I...I think that what coach—the heart of coaching's something that I really feel very good about. You know, helping to empower people, helping them to get unstuck. Helping them to develop their potential in a respectful way. That's all...those are all wonderful things. And I don't think the title "coach" owns that process. And so...I, I'm not too swayed by it one way or the other. (ME: Right.) If someone wants to know if I do career coaching, I'll say: "Uh huh, I do!" Because I do. But if they want to know if I'm a career counselor, I'll say: "Yes, I am." (ME: Right, right.) And if they also just want to say, "Can you want to help me figure out how to get a job?" I'll say: "Yeah." *(we laugh)*

Because Liz works with mostly individuals on career issues, she noted a general lack of awareness about coaching, and hence, little concern about seeing her credentials. They simply wanted to know if she would be able to help them find desired employment,

and thus evidence—such as testimonials from clients who have secured work or past employment in an HRM capacity—would be much more persuasive than a certificate from a coaching training program. In this sense, credentials may carry less weight than other forms of legitimacy in an emerging profession, like coaching.

Speaking instead from the perspective of a student of coaching training, Abigail discussed the ever-changing requirements for certification, and how she eventually decided to abandon her program:

> ABIGAIL: So, at the second live event, I enrolled in the school...the coaching...the SOC, School of Coaching, it was a graduate program through Coachville.
>
> ME: So you were a graduate of the program?
>
> ABIGAIL: I never finished it. They kept changing what you had to do and I took so many online...telecalls. Dozens and dozens. And every time they changed, it produced a new roll out of what you had to do. And I realized, you know what? Between that and some other things, I really was getting disenchanted with Coachville. I still suggest people go on, because there's some good stuff in there, but I then joined IAC, International Association of Coaches or Coaching. (ME: Ok.) And I'm very slowly heading for certification, I'm not sure I need it, but I'm doing that. (ME: Right, right.) So...
>
> ME: And that was in, you joined that in...?
>
> ABIGAIL: I joined that in...maybe 2002, 2003 I think. (ME: Ok.) And...but I've been coaching ever since. I have a Master's in Human Services Counselling and Administration, which is basically Management. And for years I had an LCSW, and eventually I dropped that because I didn't really need it when I was at [Name of Former Employer], because we didn't go for licensing there. (ME: Right.) So what happened, so I dropped the LCSW, but I have all this experience. (ME: Yes.) Plus 15 years in human services, and...
>
> ME: And, actually...have you found that being certified is an issue or not?
>
> ABIGAIL: I think it is an issue in terms of certain opportunities that come up where people want certified coaches. And it looks good on your website or your business card. (ME: Right, right.) So I probably will go—I am studying for IAC certification, but I have to have...I have to make two 30-minute tapes. (ME: Oh!) And that's been very daunting for me…Yeah, and taking all those classes. (ME:

> Right, right.) I always found a pearl, a nugget of new information. But a lot of it, I already knew and I was contributing to the classes. (ME: Right.) Which is fine with me, but...

Abigail does recognize the benefits of obtaining a coaching qualification in terms of possible work opportunities and enhanced legitimacy when marketing one's services (and this point is apparent when she mentions her other non-coaching qualifications in our conversation—a habit in which many of my informants engaged). However, she began to question her reason for pursuing accreditation, especially when she already knew much of the material covered and was, in fact, able to contribute greatly to the discussions. This, coupled with the fact that ever-changing program requirements were depleting more of her time, money, and energy which she would have much rather spent on actual coaching work with clients, finally drove Abigail to withdraw from coaching school.

It is not surprising that Abigail was growing "disenchanted" with her coaching program, but this example does not apply to all professions. Abigail's experience seems symptomatic of a nascent profession, which is still trying to find its feet with regard to qualifications, accreditation, and the like. I believe Abigail's story speaks more to the coaching industry's struggles to professionalize than it does her commitment to—or ability to successfully—becoming qualified. Further, with the recent explosion of coaching training programs and erratic course content and program criteria, one is left to wonder if those behind the certification process are more concerned with *impression management*—that is, creating the appearance of coaching as a legitimate profession—than with the actual preparation of trainees to carry out high quality coaching work.

Identity Working through Challenges

The Precariousness of Coaching

Even though the coaches may be equipped with ample knowledge about what constitutes professional behavior within their community, and how it can be distinguished other fields, this only accounts for part of the equation. Talking about the expectations of and relationship with the client is fine when you are well-educated and trained in coaching doctrine, as my informants are. But what happens when the prospective clients, who represent one half of the coaching interaction, are not familiar with this emerging profession and its particular beliefs, norms, and practices? These exact issues surfaced in my conversation with Sascha who, at the time of our interview, was still new to the coaching world, having only recently transitioned from therapy to become certified as a life and career coach:

> ME: So...so it's been a shift for you to maybe take on this...this different role, as a coach. When you see clients, or when potential clients approach you, do they understand what coaching is? Do they think it's a form of therapy where you're going to tell them what to do? Or, you know...do people understand what their role is as a client...
>
> SASCHA: No! For the most part...*(we laugh)*
>
> ME: Ok! Do you want to speak about that a little bit? (SASCHA: Sure!) ...because I know that, you know...because coaching is new, and you've had to make an adjustment, and you're very well informed about what coaching is, I'm just wondering how potential clients, you know, do they know about it? Do they know what purpose it serves? Do they know what their role is in the relationship?
>
> SASCHA: That's a good question. And I'm still learning, I mean I'm still a new coach, so...there's so much more learning to do out there. So this is just where I am now. I found--especially, you had a good point about saying that career coaching is something that people can kind of wrap their heads around a little...easier. Life coaching--and probably because the field is not regulated, and it is new, and that there ARE so many different kinds of life coaches, and so many different kinds of approaches, and especially...And especially having a

> background as a therapist, it certainly can be confusing. And some therapists also do coaching, so it's... *(laughs)* It gets confusing. So, it has been a challenge to define myself and...and even to people...yeah, like...well, some people do think it's kind of the same thing but I'm just more of like the...I'm just more going to get you, you know...get you in gear! Or kick your butt a little more as a coach, as opposed to a therapist. So, I think most effective thing that I've found is kind of giving people an example of what coaching might be. Or ask them a question: "Well, what are you looking for?" Instead of trying to explain coaching. (ME: Right, right.) So I give them a sense of just what I would ask or who I am, rather than explain away what coaching is.

Rather than try to explain what coaching is and how it works with words, as many coaches attempt to do, Sascha chooses to focus on the potential client, what they want or need, and then try to address those needs through demonstration. This is an interesting strategy, as it is less about telling, and more about showing. Sascha is indeed still "educating the client" about coaching, but it is by employing her coaching skills and relating them directly to issues about which the person is concerned, not just talking hypothetically about what coaching can achieve. Consider the same situation in a different context: if a person is in legal trouble and decides to speak to a lawyer, they will want to know how the lawyer can help them with their specific problem—not necessarily the ins and outs of the legal system.

Sascha admits that trying to decipher between the nuances of coaching and therapy "certainly can be confusing" for the client. Since the coach is the "face" of the profession and has direct, personal contact with potential clients (and general public), the burden falls on them to provide clarity for such issues. Constantly fielding questions about what a coach does as compared to a therapist can be taxing on the individual, but deemed a necessary chore in order to acquire new business. Whether these queries are interpreted as a positive opportunity to explain what one does, or as an affront to one's

sense of self, they call for identity working efforts which would not be expected from those working in more established professions.

In a similar vein, while labels and titles can provide common terminology to denote the work that one performs, when used inconsistently, it has the potential to create more confusion than clarity. This is especially true in an emerging field, where a single, universal definition of "coaching" has not been set or accepted. To illustrate this issue, I share thoughts from health and wellness coach Loretta, regarding her decision to leave nursing to follow a different professional path. While doing research for her career change, she encountered much ambiguity and confusion over titles and roles:

> LORETTA: So from there, I started doing research, and I got on the internet—I think this was right around 2000 when I started looking...looking at health coaches. And, and it was everywhere, you know. Everywhere that—it popped up. But what I was really confused about was that there was no consistency. (ME: Right, right.) There was no consistency about who was a health coach—I had been a case manager for an HMO, and case managers were calling themselves ...they were now starting to take up the term "health coach" instead of "case manager." (ME: Right! Because...it was...) But the function—yeah, it was just a reframing of you know what...
>
> ME: Right, a more friendly term, or something? Right, ok.
>
> LORETTA: Yeah, I think so. It was more of a buzzword that they were using. And...and then there were people that were doing disease management that now became health coaches. And so it was just this big you know, convoluted kind of mixed-up mess. I couldn't find any...I couldn't find anybody that was...any kind of standards, you know, for it. And I couldn't find any kind of like format for accreditation, for validity. And so, that took me back to...you know, I sort of went back a little bit and started looking at life coaching. (ME: Right, right.) And I don't even know how that came out, I can't remember that exactly. But I started looking at life coaching, and then I realized there were standards for life coaching. There were standards, there was the International Coaching Federation. There was this framework, and so I thought: "Well, why don't I explore doing life coaching, then I can bring the health and wellness piece into that, you know. (ME: Right, right.) And so the next step was to actually start looking at schools that were ICF certified, which I researched—and at the time I think there were—in this country, I think there were about seven. Seven programs that were ICF certified.

Loretta's story is a departure from other informants' narratives, which portray the entry into coaching as more straightforward. Here, Loretta confesses that even when researching the potential programs, she found the information available was a "convoluted kind of mixed-up mess." This unevenness does not bode well for the profession, since some areas (i.e. life coaching) are more clear cut, while others are ill-defined (i.e. health coaching). As a result, Loretta chose to become trained and certified in life coaching, and then adapt this foundation to accommodate her specialized knowledge in health and wellness. However, she feels the need to justify and explain this route, since it is less conventional than the one most coaches take. From our talk, I sensed because of the confusion she experienced early on, Loretta was left with lingering ambiguity regarding her professional identity, and thus needed to put extra work into creating an element of logic into her career path. In other words, the heighted uncertainty about the legitimacy of her professional choices spurred Loretta to actively engage in identity working, to compensate for these traces of doubt.

Building on this premise, career coach Liz is all too cognizant of the fleeting fashion of titles, and the inherent risk of being nothing more than empty signifiers. She was candid with her views about the "misuse" of labels:

> LIZ: There's a lot of terminology that flies around that's in vogue and I don't take it too seriously. (ME: Right.) Because years ago I was a year career counselor and a trainer, now I'm a facilitator and a coach. (ME: Right, right.) You know, and I've been doing the same thing all this time.
>
> ME: Well, exactly! I mean, the terminology has changed, but maybe what you're doing hasn't really, you know? And, and that's one of the reasons why I ask people about, you know, when did you call yourself a coach, because I'm finding that it is a fairly new term, you know, or area that has a name, even though it's a group of...things, for lack of a better word, a group of functions that one performs, but it's under this umbrella term. Yeah.

> LIZ: Yeah, I think so. Actually, I think that there are people who misuse the terms. (ME: Really? Yeah.) Yeah, I think there are people...well maybe I shouldn't say "misuse" the terms. I think there are people who train [others] and that's all they actually do, and there's no coaching and no facilitation that goes on, and I don't think it's terribly effective. I think there's also people who call themselves counselors, and what they basically do is give advice, and I believe there are people who call themselves coaches who do the same thing. (ME: Right.) I think that...the core elements of coaching are pretty basic and they've been around for a very, very long time. And it has to do with knowing how to listen to people, knowing how to ask the right questions in the right way, knowing how to give feedback, and of course knowing how to...create a situation where the person feels empowered and their potential starts to come out because of that whole process. And I think whether you call yourself a counselor, a therapist, a trainer, or a facilitator, or a coach, that's a process that enters into any type of situation where you're trying to help people move on to a higher step.

Liz introduces another possible source of confusion with which the coaches must contend: the legitimate use of terminology within the profession. However, this issue goes beyond merely labels and titles to touch upon a more significant problem: the fact that practically anyone can join the coaching profession because of its virtually non-existent barriers to entry. Again, we confront issues of legitimacy, and how this impacts the coaches' identity working demands.

The Coaching Bandwagon: "Buyer Beware!"

Another challenge to legitimacy, and therefore one's professional identity, is the risk of imposters operating under the guise of coaching. Unfortunately, not all recognized the various coaching certification programs or qualifications as a source of protection from this threat. In fact, some informants were more dissenting in their views of coaching credentials than others. Take, for example, career coach Liz, who had a few choice words with regard to the issue of certification:

> LIZ: I think the one thing I'd want to share is that I would strongly suggest: "Buyer Beware!" (ME: Oh, ok!) I think that—and I'm not trying to be negative here, but I have to honestly say that because it's a relatively new concept, there are

many people jumping on the bandwagon, whether they're certified or not. And certification doesn't always mean somebody's a good coach.

ME: Mm hmm. Right. I've, I've been interviewing people that...are both. And...you know, it's...those that aren't certified, they said that it hasn't really been an issue for them. You know, it's more about building trust or the relationship with the person that they're with, but...yeah.

LIZ: Yeah. So I'd say to...to beware. And, to interview the person before you hire them. (ME: Right.) You know, that's why I offer a free session. I think that it's appropriate for both parties to decide if it's going to work. So I think that that would be a good part of it...because there are a lot of people out there who call themselves coaches. Just like there have been people over the years, and still are, who call themselves counselors. (ME: Right, right.)

Liz makes a compelling declaration: certification does not necessitate one is a "good" coach, just as other informants argued the converse: not having formal coaching training does not mean one is an unskilled or incompetent coach. I do think it's curious she prefaces her comments with "I'm not trying to be negative here"; clearly, the prevailing norm within the coaching community—and my observations attest to this—is to err on the side of positivity. And judging from the absence of pessimistic or even less-affirmative remarks in my data, this conduct carried over into the interview setting.

Earlier in our conversation, I had asked Liz to describe her approach to coaching. Other interviewees interpreted this question as a means of showing how they set themselves apart from the masses, from the textbook definition of "coach" to make it their own. Upon reviewing the transcripts, I noticed Liz had again touched upon the "fashion" of coaching, weaving this thread into how she thought of herself as a coach:

ME: Ok! *(we laugh)* And what would you say distinguishes you from other coaches? Someone else might describe themselves the same way, but what do you think is different about what you offer?

LIZ: I think there's a couple of things. One is that...coaching is very fashionable right now. (ME: Right, mm hmm.) And I'm really not interested in the fashion. It's pretty down-to-earth practice and by that I mean, I'd say that I'm pretty

> authentic and real with people. And I think that distinguishes—I hate to say any—I'm not talking about any particular colleagues that I have, but I think the fact that it is very real and I'm basing it on 30 years of working with people and their potential is I don't—I'm not trying to make a big amount of money from people. I'm not trying to...sell them something. I just want to help them move to the next step as expertly as I can. I don't know if that distinguishes me from people, but I think I'm pretty warm and grounded and this is not...a fashion stop of the newest techniques that you can buy online from [name of coaching school]. There's no gimmicks here. I don't do any gimmicks. It's the real thing, you know. (ME: It's...yeah...) I guess that's how I'd say I'm different. I think there's a lot gimmicks out there. I have a lot of experience and I'm very down to earth, and I'm seriously interested in...in having it be a warm and respectful relationship that helps people move forward, and I'm basing it on experience, and that type of thing. I don't know if that's the right answer!
>
> ME: Yeah! No, that's...it's YOUR answer, it's the right answer. Of course!

In contrast to this chapter's earlier discussions, Liz's intent here is less about distinguishing herself from other professionals in different fields (ex. therapy, consulting, etc.), and more to set herself apart from direct peers—that is, other coaches practicing *within* the professional community. At one level, coaches craft their philosophy to highlight what makes them unique, and then market this framework towards prospective clients with whom there might be a "good fit." At another level, Liz is referring to a serious issue rampant within the coaching industry. In plain terms, it is the problem of imposters who, she insinuated, were "…trying to make a big amount of money from people…trying to...sell them something." With negative undertones circulating among the public, it seems pseudo-coaches are already wreaking havoc on the professional image of self-proclaimed "genuine" coaches, such as Liz, and the valuable work they perform. In terms of identity working, this means extra labor is required to dispel these damaging stereotypes and to rebuild the profession's reputation as one that is valid, caring, and trustworthy.

I focus a great deal on Liz in this discussion since she was one of the only informants to raise the issue during our conversations. Indeed, she is cautious to speak in general terms, quick to explain her opinion is not a reflection of a particular colleague or member of the coaching alliance. Rather, she is expressing a what she observes as a widespread trend within the coaching industry, but one that affects her and her coaching practice on a personal level, nonetheless.

But even though Liz was the most outspoken about these concerns, she is clearly not the only one who holds them. Consider this: in 2012, the ICF (2012a) released its Global Coaching Study with findings from more than 12,000 participants representing 117 countries. According to the Executive Summary, under the category "Key issues facing the industry—Future trends," a staggering 43% of all respondents identified "untrained individuals who call themselves coaches" as the "biggest obstacle for coaching over the next 12 months" (2012b: 13). Apparently, a significant portion of coaches *do* feel the same way as Liz, but there was an obvious reluctance to express such trepidation during interviews. I interpret this as most likely due to the "social desirability" effect—that is, my informants' aspiration to portray the coaching profession in a favorable way. However, I also believe they did so not just from a sense of professional obligation to make the coaching community look good, but also, from a position of self-interest, to craft their own identities as proficient, credible, and authentic, having chosen this career. Hence, to even mention the problem of illegitimate activity—i.e. opportunists and charlatans, eager to "jump on the bandwagon" just to make a quick buck—might tarnish the image of the coaching community as a whole.

Coaching and the Issue of Expertise

In contrast to its frequent referent, therapy, the coaching profession has a distinctive stance on the issue of expertise. The widespread coaching rhetoric is a rejection of the expert role; rather, there is the recognition that "the client is the expert." While in my interviews and other conversations, therapy was recurrently talked about as coaching's most closely related occupation and the main supply for new entrants to its profession, but it is by no means the only vocational conduit. For instance, Hope left academia to work as a coach on diversity and inclusion issues. When we spoke, she revealed to me the differences in expectations between these two professional roles. Sensitive to the fact I am a graduate student and thus an "insider" of the academic profession, she was candid with her views, particularly with regard to the topics of "knowledge" and "knowing":

> HOPE: And there's also...what I learned as an academic was always to share your knowledge, you know. Talk about your knowledge, make it clear how much you know. That doesn't work in this space, because...you know, you don't need to get into what you know. You need to hear what they're talking about. So I've had to spend a lot of time to really be intentional about not going to MY default, in how I was trained as an academic, in sharing that knowledge in that way. And that's the speaking TO people, instead of speaking WITH them.
>
> ME: Right, right. Or speaking AT them. Right.
>
> HOPE: YES! Definitely. And, and people don't want to hear about theories. (ME: Right.) You know? And so, I just, and I've...and I've seen that in other coaches, where they talk about theories. And I'm just like, you know: "I get that you know it, wonderful. But what does that mean, you know, for me then?"

At first, Hope found the coaching world's rejection of the "expert" role quite a departure from her indoctrination and work as a scholar. With time, she was able to adjust her "default" position from being the knower of theories and ideas, to a listener to her clients' innate wisdom, but recognizes that other coaches still like to "talk theory."

Similarly, Loretta came to coaching by way of a different route—via nursing. She had identified the kind of role that she wanted to play in her work, but had found there were limits to what she could do within the medical field. She explains:

> LORETTA: Well, my training is as a nurse. I have my Master's degree in nursing. (ME: Ok.) … And it was just, I think it—my interest was that it was just really confusing and I wanted to be sort of like a guide, to help guide people to actually be able to listen and hear their own body and be able to make choices that were congruent with who they were as a person. (ME: Right, right.) So, health advocacy—so then I started to do a little bit of research about health advocacy. And I realized that just the term 'advocacy' really meant stepping in place of some--you know, helping someone--in other words, you would be making the, you would be more making the decision....
>
> ME: Speaking on behalf of? Right...
>
> LORETTA: ...on behalf of people, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted people to have their own voice. So that's when my sister mentioned health coaching.

Like Hope's experience in academia, Loretta was able to find escape from the role expectations of her former career as nurse and health advocate to become a holistic health and wellness coach, which was more closely aligned with the kind of function she wanted to perform in her work and for her clients. And like an "academic," a "health advocate" assumes more of an expert standpoint, speaking on behalf of the client with regard to health issues and decisions. Thus, for Loretta, it was a process of searching and trying out a few different avenues before she was able to find the role she had envisioned.

These anecdotes, from both Hope and Loretta, depict positive transitions to a career in coaching, each arguing it was a better personal fit. The informants have managed to craft their *ontological* or personal identity narrative in such a way that the choice to become a coach was logical, smart, and timely. As well, Hope and Loretta both cited the rejection of the "expert role" as an inducement for the switch to coaching. Each woman wanted to break away from that authoritative position within her respective

profession (i.e. academia or nursing), and coaching was the means to do so. Other informants have also mentioned discomfort with "being the expert" and welcomed more egalitarian client relationships.

Identity Working through Contradictions

A Professional without Expertise?

Despite its appeal to some individuals as an alternative to the medical model of therapy, the coaching profession's strategy to distance itself from expertise presents its own predicament with regard to its professional status. I observed that the coaches themselves were starting to feel the repercussions of taking this position. The quandary is this: if a coach does not claim to be an expert in *some* arena, can they claim to be a *true* professional? When I attended the intensive coaching workshop, I received a training workbook. Among the first few pages was the following description of a coach:

> Coaching is a collaborative effort that is solely based on what the clients [sic] wants and thinks he/she would like to do. Unlike a best friend, coaches are objective and nonjudgmental.
> ~ Coaching Workshop Materials, February 2011

Accepting this as a common definition of coaching, is it adequate that to be a legitimate coach, one is "objective and nonjudgmental," or must one also possess particular skills and/or a specialized body of knowledge to be considered a *professional* (and thus legitimate) coach? In other words, this particular *public narrative* of endorsed by the coaching community would seem to be at odds with the *public narrative* (i.e. common understanding) of professionalism. Given this contradiction, how can coaches claim to be professionals, when they do not meet one of its basic criteria?

This matter came up in several conversations; Sascha addressed the persistent rejection of the expert role, reconciling it in this way:

> Well, when I refer to expertise, I mean that the client is the expert of their own life. As a coach, I have expertise in the *process*, the coaching process.

A frequent argument in the coaching discourse which goes hand-in-hand with reversing the expert role is: "the client has all the answers; the coach is there to help the person uncover them". Of course, this line of reasoning may be more suitable for certain coaching domains—for instance, career or life, where the coach relies on the client to share important details about their personal situation. But what happens when a client is seeking very specialized information or guidance for questions pertaining to business, marketing, or health matters, to name a few? In other words, cases where the client does *not* have the necessary knowledge for or solutions to their current predicament?

So how does this relate to identity? Rejecting the expert role was a strategy elected by the professional community, and designed to distinguish coaching from therapy or even consulting, thereby appealing to individuals who were seeking a less-directive relationship which values the experience, views, and wisdom of both parties—but especially of the client. However, by employing this tactic, coaches may become more vulnerable to challenges from the general public, including prospective clients, with regard to qualifications and hence professionalism. And when more effort must be expended to convince others of one's worthiness as a coaching service provider, this can indeed raise insecurities deep within the individual, creating a vicious cycle of doubt—identity working—doubt, and so on.

There does appear to be growing awareness within the coaching community of the "I'm-not-an-expert-yet-still-a-professional" contradiction, and perhaps a rethinking of this stance. In the course of our chat, Loretta informed me about her biweekly training conference calls, where she discusses subjects of this nature with fellow coaches. In the

excerpt that follows, we had just been talking about how Loretta had managed to blend her nursing background with life coaching training to become a health and wellness coach, and the resulting "expert model dilemma" she experienced:

> LORETTA: Yeah, working with people in the health arena, rather than just having people cold...coming off the street, you know...
>
> ME: Right. Right, so there's established, like a basic, a base of knowledge there, yeah.
>
> LORETTA: And it was in, actually there were some interesting points to that, 'cuz even in working with this coach trainer that I had that was helping me just...you know, it was really interesting from a philosophical difference, because she kept always asking me: "So why would they need this information about health if your role is not to....as a true coach, you don't have the answers?" You know what I mean? And so they get into these dialogues about...you know. So, it was always...it was, because it is...the boundaries are blurred, you know? In terms of what coaching does.
>
> ME: Well it's funny because, you know, when...you know, if you're talking about life coaching, and...well this is what I've...I'm just repeating what I've heard so far, but if you're talking about life coaching, so there's some philosophies out there of coaching where the coach is just, you know, is kind of there with the person, but the person is the expert. Especially if you're talking about life, YOU'RE the expert of your life. (LORETTA: Right, right.) But, then there can be..knowledge, you know there—so you can have—like [name of Sales and Marketing Coach]. Did you...you went to his presentation? But his presentation on sales and marketing, so he has...he specializes in a field where he has some knowledge that the people who come to him may not. So then it's like you...you shift between that... "YOU have the answers, but I have some information!" *(laughs).*
>
> LORETTA: Yeah, yeah it becomes the expert model of...yeah. And so we would have these dialogues that if you're using the expert model, then it's not true coaching. So it was always this kind of back-and-forth... (ME: Yeah! Tension...) you know, that we had in terms of you know, whether this was you know, truly coaching or... So, but we agreed to disagree—well, we agreed that it would be a combination of both. That in some instances you may need to have somebody be that expert to be able to be a resource. You wouldn't be making the decisions, but you would need to have that resource. (ME: Right, right.) So it's a little bit of a difference, but anyway...

Fortunately, Loretta and her trainer were able to agree "it would be a combination of both"; that is, if the act of "true coaching" is about assisting others, sometimes the best

way to do so is via subject matter expertise. Sharing knowledge and information with others is a form of helping, not necessarily making decisions for another or advising them about what to do. Talking through these ideas, they together came to the conclusion that being a coach and being an expert are therefore not mutually exclusive.

Jonah, a part-time coach who works almost entirely with lawyers (having been one himself) and a previous coach trainer, also shared some provocative insights with respect to the issue of expertise. He firmly believes that coaching is better described as an approach or a set of skills, rather than as a standalone profession. He had this to say:

> JONAH: Well...what I think we're finding, and this probably doesn't answer your question, is that coaching's becoming more and more niche based. (ME: Right.) And someone calling themselves just a "life coach" is happening less and less, and being less and less successful. You know, a lawyer coach, maybe a solopreneur coach, maybe you know a couples coach, a relationship coach, an addictions coach, you know, health coaches have clearly become its own separate you know profession, where people... So I think we're seeing that more and more, and I think that goes along with a notion that all these people who've worked as trainers, you know, in this certain amount of time, they'll all learn coaching skills if they want to be really good. (ME: Right.) And can anybody learn them? Some people, to some extent. Anybody can improve them. I could improve them, I could improve mine. And anybody can improve where they're at. I don't see it as a clear body of knowledge that can be you know you have it, you don't have it.
>
> ME: It's like an approach or a method, a methodology.
>
> JONAH: And it's largely...and it's largely skill-based, it's largely a matter of what you can...of what you can pull up and having the—developing the instinct to do it.
>
> ME: Right. Yeah, that's....it's interesting. I have you know, from some of my interviews, I've heard people talk about becoming a coach, becoming a life coach, and over time having to specialize because...well first of all, in order to get clients, life coaching is this very nebulous concept that a lot of people...it's starting to—in some circles, it's starting to have a little bit of a cynical you know connotation attached to it, that it's something that's kind of new-agey, air-fairy...

To substantiate his viewpoint, Jonah told me he has witnessed a trend in the last decade, where individuals train and qualify as coaches, but then realize they must either

connect their coaching skills to particular body of knowledge, or target their coaching services towards a specific population, or both. He contends that to be viable and legitimate as a professional, the term "coach" should thus be preceded or followed by a modifier, indicating the arena in which the individual does have some level of expertise (i.e. business coach, coach for lawyers, addictions coach, etc.).

Closing Thoughts

The preceding sections considered the various tools and resources offered to new coaches as part of the professional socialization process, referring to accounts from interviewees, as well as my own participant observations in "the field." Although the specifics are unique to the coaching world (i.e. philosophy, terminology, labels, etc.), the broader concerns raised (i.e. establishing professional boundaries, educating the public, struggles for legitimacy, etc.) are ones symptomatic of a nascent profession. These issues might therefore be studied in different contexts; perhaps within budding industries or those occupations undergoing the process of professionalization, such as massage therapy, truck driving, and personal fitness training.

My goal was to demonstrate how the coaching community's major endeavors to professionalize, like staking a claim in the occupational landscape alongside therapy and consulting, have (albeit inadvertently) produced challenges, contradictions, and conflicts with respect to its members' professional identities. Such problems are exemplified by the discursive framing of coaching as superior to competing professions, with which a number of coaches are still involved (ex. therapy), or positioning coaches as non-experts in order to distance them from the authoritative role associated with the classical medical model. These decisions made and replicated by the highest levels of the coaching

industry (i.e. training schools, governing bodies, research organizations, etc.) have, in turn, created unforeseen stress, insecurity, and anxiety for its members. Individual coaches become more susceptible to self-doubt, as well as questioning and challenges from others, prompting intensive identity working to reinforce (and at times, repair) a positive and credible professional identity. Table 3 offers a summary of these key points.

At the same time, the unspoken expectation is that individual coaches will perform crucial identity work for the profession as a whole, without recognition or compensation. Due to coaching's tenuous status as a profession, there is relatively little knowledge among the general public, and thus, efforts to educate potential clients about coaching are necessary. For many of the coaches with whom I spoke, the time and energy devoted to publicizing the profession seldom resulted in new business. At best, they are reckoned as long-term investments which may someday yield a return.

In the next chapter, I will examine the material realities associated with self-employment, which both influences and is influenced by identity working.

Table 3: Summary of Identity Working Triggers from the Coaching Profession

Trigger → / ↓ Factor	CONFLICTS	CHALLENGES	CONTRADICTIONS
Source	• Coaching profession's discursive positioning as "superior to" or "better than" therapy • Need to balance multiple roles to be viably self-employed	• Confusion and little general knowledge about coaching • Emergent, largely unregulated profession increases competition, threat of imposters	• Paradox between public narratives of coaching and professionalism • Coaching profession's outright rejection of the "expert" role
Coach's Dilemma	• What if I am still a practicing therapist? (Byrd) • How do I reconcile my former career as a therapist? (Sascha)	• How should I explain coaching to others when it's not well-defined or clear to me? • How do I distinguish myself as a "legitimate" coach?	• Am I still considered a "professional" coach if I do not claim any expertise?
Identity Working Required	• Reconcile such conflicts by presenting all work (past and current) as professional, skilled, and valuable	• Convey confidence in knowledge and skills to be viewed as "real" coach, but accept that field attracts frauds	• Claim expertise in some field or area to be a "professional" but also stay consistent with coaching rhetoric
Strategies from Data	• Preface remarks to detach oneself from coaching rhetoric (Sascha: "I don't mean to put therapy down…") • Claim filling multiple roles is a choice (Byrd: "I have no problem with these dual roles…")	• Show rather than tell others about coaching, via demo (Sascha) or free session (Liz) • Become certified; join ICF-accredited groups (numerous coaches) • Use testimonials to show credibility (Liz)	• Emphasize other non-coaching credentials, like education, work experience, etc. (Abby) • Reframe coaching as a process, set of skills attached to a specialized body of knowledge (Jonah)

CHAPTER 6

MAKING A LIVING AS A COACH: CONNECTING IDENTITY WORKING TO MATERIAL REALITIES

Introduction: Coaching as an "Entrepreneurial Endeavor"

I open this chapter with the story of Luke. He left an executive career in manufacturing to become a business coach, and soon after established his own coaching school, purchasing a license to offer various training and certification programs in an exclusive geographic region. Luke quickly recognized an opportunity to get into the business side of coaching and ruminated on this experience during our interview:

> LUKE: What was kind of interesting was the individual who I was working with did not call himself a coach. And, but the conversation that we were having first of all was one-on-one, and secondly, it was more about me the person, rather than the company I was working for. So he was looking at me as a sort of whole person, rather than as a sort of pawn in this business game. And I kind of liked that, and when I discussed it with someone else and told them the nature of the conversation, they actually told me that: "Oh, that sounds like coaching!" I didn't even know what it was. And even though, you know, I had risen to reasonably, sort of decent level in terms of management development, I had heard of coaching as being, you know, as kind of in management as a sort of a methodology, but not as a profession. So, I was somewhat kind of blind to it when I had the experience, but then I kind of said: "I really like this! And I can see how it could be useful." And I began to think how with the coaching skills and the knowledge and experience that I had, that I could you know be of service to people. And I honestly believe that all the people come through our program, you know, they're not people just straight out of college. They're people with 20 years experience, so they bring a lot of wisdom to the table, and it's really a case of sort of leveraging that wisdom with the tools and skills that we teach, to go out and sort of promote the service that you have to offer. But, you know, to...to your point in terms of you know, promoting the idea that you know once you're trained—one of the things we try to be very transparent about is...is letting people know that this is an enterpreneurial endeavor. For about 90% of the people that come through the program, this is an entrepreneurial endeavor, and it's part of the reason they want to do it. It's not that they just want to be a coach, they want to have the freedom—what I wanted—they want to have the freedom to kind of cut the shackles of corporate life, and do something different. Do something that's a bit more fulfilling. But you know, we sort of make it very clear to them that, you know, just because you're certified doesn't mean that people come beating down your door. They won't. And to try and sort of address that, you know, within our

> program, and this is one of the reasons—and I'm not trying to plug our program or anything but one of the reasons that I was drawn to our program is that there is a business development component to it as well. That—now, we're not teaching you, you're not getting a Master's in marketing but you're learning some of the fundamentals, and that as you're going through the training you're thinking with the end in mind. I always say to people: "Don't wait to sort of market your services when you're certified. Do it when you register, that's when you've made the decision to do this." And really think in terms of: "How am I going to make this happen?" And you know, take advantage of all the people that are in your class, that are kind of embarking on a similar journey, and see what you can learn from each other. See what collaboration that you can come up with. (SR: Right.) You know, and it's...it's really, it's all those sorts of things combined that people kind of come into this with their eyes wide open. You know, I don't want the wrong people coming in here. (SR: Right.) And, you know, when people ask me: "Well, how successful are your graduates?" You know, well success first of all is a relative term. Like I have people who have been to our program who are making $20,000 a year, I have people who are making $120, 000 a year and more, and yet they all went through the same program. So a lot has to do with the individual's application, and the market they go into. (SR: Right.) You go into executive coaching, big money. Life coaching, a lot less. So, kind of...pick your poison, and sort of manage your expectations accordingly. But, you know, when people turn around and say: "Ah, there's nothing to be made in coaching." I would dispute that, because there is, but you know, it requires a certain level of skill, resolve, determination, all those qualities that are necessary, even if you bought a McDonald's franchise. (SR: Right.) Right? And there's loads of successful McDonald's franchises, but there's loads that haven't been as well. You know, so it's...it's also about application.

It is worth noting that our interview seemed more like a monologue by Luke, peppered with appropriate conversational utterances and the occasional question from me. This is in stark contrast to many other interviews, where I was a more active and equal contributor to the conversation. From the excerpt above, it is plain to see Luke's responses were protracted and detailed, but very assured and articulate—so much so that they did not come across to me as blatantly scripted, due to his masterful delivery. In my opinion, this exchange is remarkable when one considers that after our interview, I stayed for a "free information session" at the coaching training center. Much of what Luke said

to me during our one-on-one was repeated almost verbatim an hour later to the audience of 10 or so, but both times it sounded fresh, confident, and dynamic.

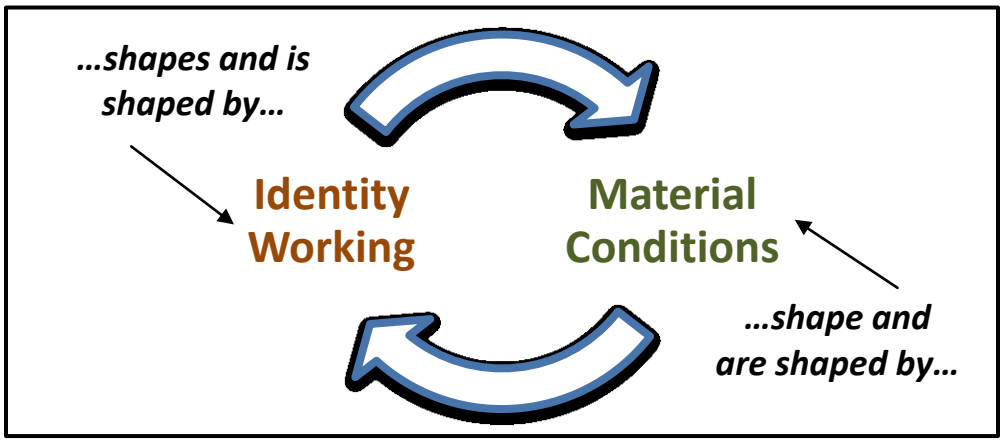
With regard to the substance of his comments, Luke believes a major motivator for going into coaching is "to have the freedom to kind of cut the shackles of corporate life." In support of this claim, he estimates for "about 90%" of his center's students, it's "an entrepreneurial endeavor." Luke does, however, acknowledge the apparent defects of *other* coaching certification programs, when he admits he was "drawn to our program" because it includes a "business development component." He also hints that competing programs might mislead their recruits, avowing "we try to be very transparent" about the fact that their participants should think of the business aspects of coaching from day one. And accordingly, this explains why in his training school there is a distinct emphasis on "some of the fundamentals" with respect to business skills and marketing matters.

Furthermore, Luke asserts that a good portion of one's success comes down to "personal application." To back this claim, he refers to several qualities he thinks are essential for establishing oneself as a coach, like a "certain level of skill, resolve, determination." Interestingly, he parallels starting a coaching business with a more familiar example: running a McDonald's franchise. While the products/services offered are poles apart, Luke contends the principles behind each endeavor are virtually the same.

I chose to share Luke's story in order to build the argument for the analytical typology to be presented shortly. As well, by highlighting his view of coaching as a chiefly entrepreneurial undertaking, I wish to draw attention to the sharp contrast between Luke's experience, and those of other informants which will be conveyed later.

In this chapter, my focus is on the interaction between the material realities of self-employment—whether perceived as constraining or liberating—and identity working. For the coaches, "material realities" encompass such practical and "worldly" matters as income level, working hours, number of clients, access to resources, and the like, which have an impact on their day-to-day coaching (and subsequently, identity) work. I do want to stress that the relationship between these two domains is not linear, but rather, they continuously intermingle and mutually influence one another, as depicted in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Relationship between Identity Working and Material Conditions



In order to portray the complex dynamic between the material conditions of self-employment and identity working, I had to widen my analysis from the previous chapter's more narrow focus on mostly the deployment of narrative tools and resources, to examine the practical strategies, decisions, and actions, which are involved and operate beyond the interview, taking in the larger social context. This chapter will therefore center primarily on the following research-orienting questions:

How do the micro-processes of identity work(ing) relate to the current historical, economic, political and socio-cultural conditions? What linkages can be traced between self-employed professionals' experience and the broader social context?

What are some alternative/unheard identity stories of being a self-employed professional? When individuals create, modify, and interpret their life and work experiences in one way over another, what are the benefits of doing so? What are the dangers?

Before sharing the analysis, I must first introduce key concepts and the analytical framework that will help organize and make sense of the various accounts of coaching and self-employment that follow.

Key Analytical Resources

The *enterprise culture*, which describes a type of social environment which has gained prominence in Westernized nations over the last couple decades, is a fundamental idea which I employed during the data analysis process. It depicts rapidly changing conditions, such as the dramatic restructuring and reorienting of organizations—even those purportedly not-for-profit—to fall in line with market capitalist principles (du Gay, 2000). Competitive pressures associated with ever-increasing globalization are the primary reason cited for such changes. Drawing upon neoliberal capitalist ideology, the enterprise culture promotes the ideals of personal responsibility, proactiveness, individualism, and initiative. The *enterprising self* (du Gay, 1991, 1996; Rose, 1996) is the embodiment of these lauded qualities, describing the kind of individual who thrives in such an environment. Nowadays, however, individuals are increasingly expected to assume greater individual responsibility for areas of their lives which were once administered socially or collectively (i.e. support offered through state-run social programs). For this reason, the enterprising self discourse is not merely descriptive, but

prescriptive, and thus held up as the successful model of personhood that we are expected to emulate.

Clear connections can be made between the enterprising self and the new careers discourses. *New careers* scholarship examines and theorizes the recent developments in employment forms and relations, based upon the evolving economic and social conditions wrought by the *new economy*. New careers theory supports these changes unequivocally, arguing they have resulted in more freedom, autonomy, choice, and flexibility for today's worker. By breaking free from the restrictions of traditional, "nine-to-five" organizational employment, we are now able to experiment with new modes of employment, such as freelancing, contracting, and portfolio working. Moreover, the *free agency* perspective within new careers theory fully embraces the values of the enterprise culture, intimating that the free agent is a role best filled, in fact, by an enterprising self.

Typology of Coaching Orientations

I wish to now introduce the analytical framework which I used to organize and make sense of what I observed in the field. Sifting carefully through my data, reviewing pages and pages of interview transcripts and recalling informal conversations and interactions I had with those in the coaching community, I noticed patterns of behaviors emerging. Paying attention to the commonalities and differences, I formulated a typology, presented as Table 4 that follows, which distinguishes three types of what I refer to as a "coaching orientation."

To clarify, I use the word "orientation" to describe the framework of logic and motives behind one's thoughts, decisions, and actions. However, the typology, as a collection of orientations, allows us to understand how and where clashes or conflicts can

arise between the different frames of logic. These conflicts need to be resolved by the individual, who must make a decision regarding which orientation to follow, and their course of action in turn shapes material working conditions. Further, depending on these decisions and actions with respect to the chosen orientation, greater identity working efforts may be required to reconcile any breaches or inconsistencies to the desired, positively-valued sense of self that they wish to project to others.

For this project specifically, each orientation (which guides one's thoughts, decisions, and actions) relates directly to one's coaching work, and subsequently, to one's identity work as a coach. However, as the document progresses, I develop the argument that the noted orientation types may be applied to other contexts of working for oneself. That is, as self-employment continues to grow as a model for how work is organized and performed, the three orientations can be used to decipher the specific logic behind one's actions, as well as possible sources of friction between competing motives. When taken together, the typology can help us understand how, when, and why an individual shifts between orientations, and the identity working demands that emerge from reconciling the competing motives.

To be sure, this collection of orientations is not intended to categorize or type the individuals with whom I interacted, but rather, the decisions and actions witnessed. It is therefore quite plausible that one individual might exhibit all orientation types or shift between the three, within a single conversation or observation, depending on the particular circumstances of the moment. Next, I describe each of the three coaching orientations, which are also summarized at the end of this section, in Table 4.

Proficient Orientation

A *proficient orientation* to coaching refers to professional actions and decisions which adhere strictly to the common coaching doctrine. Stated another way, the institutional discourse regarding coaching philosophy, the role of the coach, and the coach-client relationship, reviewed extensively in Chapter Five, is what primarily guides one's practice. The intended goals of this orientation are to embody the ideals learned in coaching instruction, and to demonstrate proficiency in coaching knowledge, techniques, and skills, such as active listening, asking open-ended questions, and taking a non-judgmental, non-authoritative position with the client. In short, following this agenda means one is engaging in proficient coaching, and the individual is thinking of oneself first and foremost as a coach.

To illustrate with an example, if working with a client on a particularly stressful or sensitive matter as they near the end of the session, the proficient-oriented coach would choose to "not break the flow," and instead, continue working with the person to get them through that difficult issue. This decision is based on goals of building and maintaining a high-quality coaching relationship and responding to the client needs in the precise moment, rather than adhering to an established time constraint that upholds a per-hour rate of pay. Thus, with respect to how such choices compare with those of an enterprising self, the proficient orientation may be at odds with the goals of enterprise.

Profitable Orientation

Under the banner of a *profitable orientation*, work-related actions and decisions are dictated predominantly by the profit motive. In this mindset, the coach understands they are providing a demanded service in exchange for payment—just like any other for-

profit enterprise. In the case of self-employment, however, the generated revenue (less operating expenses) comprises the coach's income. Should a coaching situation arise where there is a conflict between proficiency and profitability, the latter prevails.

To continue with the above example, if a coach is in the middle of working with a client on a difficult issue where more discussion is needed but they have run out of time, the coach will opt to end the session as scheduled, suggesting they continue in the next meeting or arrange a future one, rather than carry on the conversation without charging for the additional time. While this approach may seem somewhat mercenary, the underlying rationale is that without sufficient income, the coach cannot continue to perform their work, and consequently, help others. Thus, the profitability framework is deeply rooted within the enterprise ethos, and requires the outlook of an enterprising self to be most effective. In short, one must consider oneself a business person first, a coach second.

The chapter's opening excerpt from Luke is a prime example of the profitable coaching approach. Shortly after becoming certified as a coach, Luke recognized the opportunity to start a coaching training center—providing evidence the business aspect of coaching was always at the front of his mind. Interestingly, Luke is one of a handful of people who actually addressed the material work conditions in terms of "hard figures"—for instance, by indicating the annual income range between $20,000 and $120,000 that different types of coaches might expect to earn. He also makes his opinion known that one's success comes down to personal application, which is fitting with the enterprising self discourse.

I thought it was imperative to include Luke's perspective because first, not only does it capture the profitable coaching philosophy so well, but second, there were few other informants who expressed this position so adamantly or vividly. This point is less surprising when one considers that, as the training center director, a crucial piece of Luke's role is to promote coaching as an exciting career path and viable business venture to prospective trainees.

Pragmatic Orientation

As a type of orientation, *pragmatic coaching* represents an attempt to balance the demands of proficiency and profitability, and can therefore be considered a hybrid of the two. Under this categorization, the individual's decisions and actions are based on a desire to provide high quality coaching services, but with a keen awareness of the need to make an income. Undoubtedly, these competing obligations complicate the decision-making process, and therefore, skills such as negotiating, prioritizing, and compromising are often drawn upon. What's more, these abilities are in addition to the basic coaching techniques and small business management skills that individuals are expected, at a minimum, to possess.

With regard to the distressed client scenario presented above, pragmatic coaching could involve a number of strategies. The "proficient" part of the coach would continue coaching the client until the issue is resolved or a more appropriate time to end the session arises. However, the "profitable" coaching side would realize that this policy will cause them to lose money over time. They may therefore elect to change their rates or session length, or perhaps amend the general client contract, in order to accommodate such "overages" in the future.

Table 4: Typology of Coaching Orientations

Coaching → / ↓ Factor	"Proficient" Orientation	"Profitable" Orientation	"Pragmatic" Orientation
Underlying Goals	Meet the definition of "coach" as determined by IFC or certified training program.	Operate a successful coaching business that meets predetermined profit goals/targets.	Balance the demands of offering quality coaching services while earning a stable, living wage.
Primary Knowledge & Skills Required	Coaching techniques & skills ex: active listening, interviewing interpersonal, empathy/emotional,	Total small business management ex: sales, marketing, networking, communication/IT, HR, accounting	Prioritizing, negotiation, compromise, diplomacy, other "marketable" skills (in addition to coaching & small business mgmt)
Reflections on Self-Concept	"I'm a coach above all else and passionate about what I do."	"I'm a small business owner, and my business is coaching."	"I'm a coach, and doing whatever I need to do to make a living."

For the remaining sections, I draw upon my fieldwork to illustrate and support the claims presented in the coaching orientation typology. My first objective is to examine the broader social context within which the informants were working, and show how each orientation can be recognized within. That is, I want to give a general sense of the material conditions of being self-employed, bearing in mind that my fieldwork took place between 2007 and 2011, at the height of the US economic crisis. Second, my goal is to illustrate the realities, both material and symbolic, of being a self-employed professional among a specific population—career coaches.

Coaching as Self Employment: Multiple Layers of Insecurity

The social-historical context[9] in which identity working is performed actively constitutes the work itself—the two cannot be separated, as identity working appears (the "what") and is performed (the "how") differently, depending on who, where, when, and why it is being performed in the first place. In this section I assert the coaching

[9] The social-historical context was discussed at length in Chapter Two.

profession is a particularly fertile research context for the study of identity construction due to its multiple layers of insecurity (Collinson, 2003). Specifically, the sources of insecurity are derived from coaching's precarious professional status and tenuous job security, since the industry is organized predominantly on the basis of self-employment.

The new careers and free agency literature paint a rosy picture of self-employment, where the terms "control," "freedom," "autonomy," and "flexibility" are frequently used to portray the ideal working arrangement for today's busy, demanding, ambitious knowledge worker. Heading into the field, however, I was also aware of some of the other, less-heard interpretations of self-employment revealed by past research, particularly in the labor studies literature. Indeed, this perspective colored my own speculations about what working as a coach might be like. Conscious of these varying depictions, I was determined to learn from informants about their own experiences working for oneself. Admittedly, I was especially open and attentive to alternative stories which veered from the dominant new careers narrative, and curious to learn about the symbolic and material consequences of self-employment. I share some of these accounts next.

"I live alone and end up talking to my cat"

When interviewing informants, I would usually try to shift the conversation from the specifics of coaching to the more general issues of self-employment. I noticed that this presented a somewhat "safer" space to talk about the challenges of everyday working life; the coaches were somewhat cautious about speaking negatively about their chosen profession, especially as I had framed my research around learning more about this new line of work. Accordingly, stories of hardship would be allowed to surface when

referring to the broader topic of self-employment. In an attempt to gain reasonably balanced insight into the experience of working for oneself, I asked my informants to share both "the good things and the difficulties," but given the opportunity, most of the air time was consumed by the latter. This excerpt from my meeting with Celadora, a former life coach who is still self-employed, is to some extent typical of the way such conversations would unfold:

> ME: And then the last thing I wanted to ask is...what, what has been the difference for you between having a job with an employer and working for yourself? So maybe the good things and the difficulties?
>
> CELADORA: Oh wow, yeah. Well, the good things are you get to control your work life, you don't have to deal with office politics, you don't have to deal with someone else's priorities. (ME: Right.) And just the flexibility and freedom, you know, that you have from being on your own. I'm sure everybody could talk about that, and I'm sure you've heard that before. What I find difficult and challenging as an extrovert, somebody with an extroverted personality who NEEDS people to feel energized is...I go bananas at home...and just the feeling of isolation. And just wanting to be around more people with more energy and to get ideas flowing and no one to brainstorm with or to discuss your day with. I mean, I live alone and end up talking to my cat, you know? (laughs)
>
> ME: They're good listeners! I have one!
>
> CELADORA: Yeah, right! Oh do you? You know, so I find that extremely, extremely challenging, which is why I belong to so many groups, and why I try to get out as much as I can. (ME: Right, right.) And why I do as much networking as I do.

In this excerpt, Celadora expressed the difficulty dealing with the social isolation that often accompanies self-employment. Reviewing the new careers literature, seclusion is seldom mentioned as a factor; the focus is usually on the more "positive" aspects, like "flexibility and freedom" that, as Celadora noted, most self-employed people can and do talk about. For Celadora, loneliness is now a major issue in her working life, and a significant change from her days of organizational employment. One might argue that,

on the contrary, self-employed individuals must interact with other people constantly, in order to find and keep clients. However, the desired interactions that Celadora refers to are not necessarily classed as business transactions or marketing activities (like networking), but rather, as she puts it: "to get ideas flowing and…to brainstorm with or to discuss your day with."

In contrast to Celadora's description, the "new careers" literature adopts an instrumentalist position with regard to social interactions. That is, individuals are encouraged to depend less on organizations through long term relationships, instead opting for short-term transactional exchanges, based largely on financial terms (Rousseau, 1996). The assumption is that this new type of interaction, while transient, is based on mutual respect and equitable power positions. The new careers view also privileges relationships that are directly linked to commercial activity, almost to the exclusion of any other kind. Hence, there is little mention of the peer relationships *within* organizations that are lost when one pursues self-employment.

While Celadora did express relief about no longer having to deal with the "organizational politics" she endured in the past, this point is overshadowed by her concern regarding the extremely limited human contact she now has in her daily work life. To address this dearth, she admits to joining as many interest groups and attending as many networking functions as possible. I view this as a *pragmatic* strategy—that is, Celadora's networking serves both practical and social functions. On the one hand, networking can generate business and help modulate the flow of work, allowing her to remain self-employed. On the other, it also keeps her mind stimulated and engaged, and, at the most basic level, it feeds Celadora's social needs.

This is clearly a material change in Celadora's working conditions and routines, which in turn affects her experience of work (coaching). However, these changes also hold symbolic significance—they point to the lack of consideration and value placed on peer relationships, as corporations shift increasingly towards a contingent labor model. Apparently, cost-effectiveness trumps opportunities for social interaction and feelings of community in the "new world of work."

These observations of self-employment are consistent with the labor process perspective which holds that employment relationships are becoming "more like a series of encounters than an enduring relationship" (Fenton & Dermott, 2006: 205). What's more, in the new world of work, this transition in the way we relate to others is treated not as problematic, but as both liberating and seamless. For those individuals who find it difficult adjusting to this unfamiliar way of relating to others, such as Celadora, it can create a great deal of anxiety. So along with the stress produced from social isolation, particularly when one is accustomed to a highly interactive work environment, is the pressure to adopt this revised way of thinking about the nature of work relationships. For the younger generation just entering the labor force, such issues may be taken-for-granted truths, but for those workers who have spent the majority of their lives working for only one or a handful of employers, the mental adjustment to the new work order and its changing employment relations can be daunting.

"Nobody's giving you a paycheck"

For a small number of my informants, self-employment was not a new way of working. Before entering the world of coaching, these individuals had operated their own businesses, for instance, as therapists or consultants. But even for those with plenty

of experience with self-employment prior to becoming a coach, there were unique challenges posed by the intersection of this new career path and working for oneself. Becky, a former graphic designer who has run her own business for the last 20-odd years, shares her thoughts on self-employment, especially when she first embarked on her coaching career, about five years prior to our interview:

> BECKY: Well, in the beginning, the challenges...it's different now. In, in the beginning the challenges were FINDING CLIENTS. (ME: Right.) Big time, finding clients. I think the challenge right now is...
>
> ME: So, just to clarify, you said: "in the beginning", that's when you were mainly focusing on personal coaching yourself, and the lawyers too...
>
> BECKY: Yeah, but even the lawyers, you know, just finding...like, how do—where do you find your clients?
>
> ME: ...so, pre-connecting with this company? Ok.

The "company" to which I refer is a business that Becky told me about earlier in our interview. About a year ago, she "hooked up" with this company, which presents itself as a network of business coaches. It refers potential clients who are interested in coaching services to Becky, and provides her with specialized training in particular coaching techniques and business modules. In exchange, Becky pays a portion of her client fees to this company. Initially, she thought this rate was too high, but now reminds herself this money pays for "necessary marketing and administrative expenses." She explains more about her working relationship with this company, as she continues telling me about her struggles of being self-employed:

> BECKY: Finding clients I would say was the biggest challenge. And then I think since is working with the company, it's more...it's more juggling, you know, administrative requirements, and...ongoing training. We had four hours of training this week, that's a lot. And every--we have at least two every week. And they're HUGE on training, which is great. (ME: Right, right.) 'Cuz, you know, it's just more and more skills.

ME: Yeah. Who provides the training for that?

BECKY: They do. They, they have a president of coaching, or they're—they have consult—their consulting division will also come in or we'll have an outside person or..yeah. Yeah, so it's like administrative time, training time. And then I think the other one that's, that's been constant is...it's that moment when you say: "It's going to be X amount of money." And you don't know, you know...how it's going to land. (ME: Right.) And are they going to, you know...and so you're, and you're relying on YOU. You know...you're....nobody's giving you a paycheck. (ME: Right.) Unless you get it! (laughs) (ME: Right, right.) And that's a little, that's little...nerve-wracking. Yeah.

ME: Right! I think that umm...some of the, some of the coaches, who I've spoken to have NOT been self-employed, you know before they got into coaching, and so it has been a major transition... (BECKY: A major transition, yeah...) And, you know, I noticed that in the meetings that we have, that there's a lot of...there's a lot of focus on marketing, (BECKY: Mm hmm.) and you know, price-setting, and you know, how can you get out there, how do you network, that kind of stuff. And, it must be very daunting if you haven't had much experience doing that, if you've been, you know, employed or an employee in the past, and all of a sudden you have to take on all these other functions of being self-employed. So, that's...that's a great ADVANTAGE to have that.

BECKY: It helped (clears throat). It helped. I mean, it didn't solve everything, cuz like when I was doing the graphic design, I had a few bigger clients, and they would just keep feeding me work so that idea was keep work, right? (ME: Right, right.) And so I'd have to get out and get new work, or work would come to me, somehow, and I had a couple places where they were feeding me work. (ME: Right, right.) But with the coaching...it's HARD. It's really hard to get the right leads, people don't GET what it is, so they're not willing to pay for what it costs...

With respect to the typology, I interpret Becky's decision to connect with a company as a *pragmatic* move. Given her desire to continue coaching, but struggle with the day to day "business of being self-employed," Becky was able to sustain—and even improve—her income through this modification. As independent as she is, perhaps outsourcing marketing and administration tasks to an outside firm was not her ideal arrangement, but it was a compromise she was willing to make in order to engage in coaching work.

I had presumed that having a history of self-employment would make things much easier for those who went into coaching, but Becky informed me this wasn't the case—at least for her—for a number of reasons. First, working as a graphic designer did not require Becky to define what that was to prospective clients. True, she might have had to clarify the particular services she offers or any specialties, but most people (and thus, the organizations they represent) have a general awareness and understanding of what a graphic designer does, and would be able to determine when they need one's services. Second, she was fortunate to have a "few bigger clients" that provided a steady stream of work (and thus, income), and so she could spend most of her time on graphic design, and less on marketing and soliciting new clients. As argued previously, coaches must dedicate extra time, energy, and resources to marketing and "educating the client" relative to self-employed individuals working in more established services, like graphic design. This investment is required even more so of coaches who work with individual clients. Third, Becky laments the fact that she must not only explain what coaching is, but also justify its value and the fees she charges. Again, this would not be such a pressing (nor emotionally-laden) issue for more widely recognized professions, which usually have accepted market rates and pricing structures that can be easily researched. In this sense, the benefits from Becky's past experience of self-employment were trumped by the fact that she had joined a nascent and largely unknown profession, which required her to perform all this additional—and for the most part, unexpected—labor.

Despite the work challenges she still experiences, Becky is recognized by her peers as a success story—in fact, a couple of months after our interview, she received an award from a local organization promoting women in business. She attributed her recent

accomplishments to connecting with the coaching company with the referral service, as it attends to virtually all of her training and marketing concerns. Becky understands that she is fortunate; most coaches do not have this kind of assistance, in terms of securing clients and building skills. Regardless, at the end of the day, as a self-employed individual, she reminds me: "you're relying on YOU."

I now present the case of a particular group, career coaches, whose experiences of the economic crisis highlight some key challenges and merit special attention.

Voices of the Jobless: Confessions from Career Coaching

> **No Collar:** The new, exponentially emerging class rising up in America consisting of often over-qualified but unemployed persons.
> (Urban Dictionary, 2012)

Career coaches seem to be particularly well positioned to help people transition to the "new world of work." Whether one is a recent college graduate, trying to land their dream job, a mid-career executive who is looking to pursue a new line of work, or an older worker, keen to redefine retirement, the career coaches I interviewed have assisted individuals at all stages of working life. Common services that career coaches offer clients include career guidance, training, and support in job searching, networking and interviewing skills, and branding oneself in a marketable way. Career coaches typically have backgrounds in HR, training, consulting, and more often than not, they themselves have been through the similar career journeys, asking tough questions regarding work and fulfillment, dreams and goals. As a result, they bring their own stories and experiences to their coaching practice.

The recent proliferation of career coaching is not just due to market demand for such services, but its growth can also be attributed to the fact that this line of work offers

an alternative to organizational employment, as the vast majority of those working in the coaching industry are self-employed. Many career coaches would have, in the past, performed similar tasks within an organizational setting. However, thanks to corporate restructuring and the outsourcing of HR functions, they find themselves carrying out their duties on a contractual basis, for both individuals and firms.

In light of the wave of layoffs in the late 2000s and record numbers of under- and unemployed, it can be argued that there is growing need for such career services. Individuals who find themselves suddenly out of work may require assistance with re-evaluating not only their own skills and career goals, but also with setting realistic expectations regarding the changing labor market opportunities and demand for skills. In days past, employing organizations would often provide support for the victims of downsizing, but such assistance is becoming increasingly scarce. In fact, organizational employees have somehow learned to live with the reality that tomorrow they could be looking for work, and so they are just grateful to have a job today.

In the midst of recession-like conditions, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the added expense of coaching services—even if needed—at a time when the majority of Americans have very limited (or no) income. This poses a dilemma for career coaches, who are keenly aware that scores of people out there urgently require their services, but are prevented from seeking them out due to financial constraints. In the following sections, I explore some of these issues in more depth, and the strategies that career coaches have developed in response to this predicament.

"I don't really want to know who I am…I want a job."

One of my initial interviews for this project was with career coach Liz. I was quite taken aback by her candor; even early on in my research, I got the impression—during coaching meetings, informal chats, and recorded interviews—that individuals were attempting to "market" coaching to me, much as they would to a prospective client. My conversation with Liz was different. I sensed some frustration on her part with the coaching profession and vivid awareness of larger issues of age, class, and income, which could not be divorced from her coaching work nor the experience of it.

Liz talked at length about changes she has witnessed in clients' priorities and the subsequent impact on demand for her coaching services, wrought by the current U.S. economic and political conditions:

> ME: And especially...you know, with the downturn in the market, have you felt an effect with that?
>
> LIZ: Yes, I've had more work! (laughs)
>
> ME: Oh wow! Oh, well that's...I mean, yeah! It's funny how things benefit—you know, some areas benefit.
>
> LIZ: It's interesting...but the type of work that I've had has changed. (ME: Ok.) People by and large only want résumés, and any coaching they get, they get by the way. (ME: Right, right.) Because what they—the only thing that they're willing to invest money in is: "Can you help me get some job interviews?" (ME: Right, right.) "I don't really want to know who I am and what I need in life, I want a job." Or: "I want to get out of this horrible job where I'm going to get laid off sooner or later, I can feel it, they're talking about it." So there's a level of desperation, and so that's a challenge. And another challenge—I just thought of another challenge that I'll mention too... (ME: Ok!) So I do a lot of résumés for people and that's where I make my money, individual clients, but I always give people courtesy discounts because to write a really good résumé takes so many hours that the résumés would cost over $300 and people can't afford that. So I charge between $175 and $225, and that's actually a very low rate. And students, their résumés are only $100. (ME: Right.) Résumés are easy though...

> ME: Right, right. So, you're doing a lot of résumé work now, so the nature of like maybe the services that you're offering, it's maybe shifted since this...but you were doing more coaching work before then? Right.
>
> LIZ: Much more coaching, yeah. In 2007, I was not doing as many résumés because people weren't looking for jobs as much. I was doing coaching, I was doing more assessment activities, and that sort of thing. And now I'd say, it's a two-to-one coaching—or excuse me, résumé is two and coach is one.

With so many people out of work and looking for jobs, it is not entirely surprising that Liz (and other career coaches) might actually see more demand for her services. However, the increase in business comes not from coaching, but from writing résumés—a service with a tangible product attached to it. While Liz might prefer to be coaching, it is help producing and polishing the safe, familiar résumé that clients are willing to pay for with what little money they do have. People are simply not seeking career coaching; many don't know what it is, and even for those that do, they are not in a financial position to try it out. But given the chance to experience it firsthand, Liz informs me: "they love to be coached."

Thus, Liz illustrates *pragmatic* coaching in action. She chose to go into coaching because she loves working with people and knows firsthand, from what she described above, that there is a definite need for this type of intervention. Unfortunately, in order to make a decent income, she must somehow compromise by offering other services, like résumé-writing. If Liz were to follow a purely *proficient* approach, she would refuse to do anything other than coaching, and thus hold out until she finds clients who are willing and able to pay for these services. For Liz, like many coaches, this is simply a luxury she cannot afford when she has her own bills to pay.

Liz's account reveals a number of heavy expectations with which she must contend. First, she should possess a variety of skills that are currently in demand; second,

she must be flexible enough to adapt to market conditions and willing to accept any kind of work, in any form; and third, the fact that she cannot make a living at coaching alone should not in any way dampen her enthusiasm or affect the quality of her coaching, when given the opportunity to practice these skills. The strategy she has chosen therefore helps to determine her material working conditions, which subsequently impact her identity construction efforts. That is, Liz must not only present herself as a career coach, but as a multi-skilled individual who can market several services to potential clients. It may be more accurate to say that Liz's primary work identity is a self-employed professional who coaches, rather than a coach who happens to be self-employed.

"They want to talk about what happened to them"

The priority for jobless workers in the present economy is to make an income. Considerations like progression in pay or responsibility, permanent full time positions, and desirable working conditions and hours have become secondary to just finding work—any kind of work, period. As career coach Liz explained previously, the individuals who come to her are not interested in examining questions about "passions" or "life purpose"; they simply want jobs. I found it quite telling when Liz mentioned this comment in our interview, as it signaled to me that some preliminary impressions about coaching do indeed exist. To elaborate, the belief is that coaches help clients explore underlying existential issues, which will ultimately point them in the right career direction. But her clients seem to have little patience for this exercise in self-discovery—at least right now—when the priority is paying bills and putting food on the table.

However, once Liz begins talking with clients, gathering background information in order to establish goals for finding work and to develop their résumés, she notices that

they really want to talk. In fact, Liz struggles to keep the conversation within the allotted time period, as these individuals usually have much to say:

> ME: And, do you think that it's...how should I put this...so doing résumés for people, do you think you're getting in people who might not use coaching services at all?
>
> LIZ: Oh they love coaching. They love to be coached, they just don't—they can't afford—they have to decide where to put their money.
>
> ME: Right, ok. So it's a choice of... And the résumé represents some...something that's more tangible?
>
> LIZ: Exactly! I offer 30 minute complimentary session, which is never 30 minutes, as you can probably guess. (ME: Right! I can imagine.) I'm lucky if it's 45 but because I enjoy this so much, I don't say no. I enjoy getting to know people. However, what happens in the 30 minute complimentary session, which can be a coaching session or a résumé review, and people choose a résumé review. They want to talk about—they want to talk. They want to talk about what happened to them, what their story is, the frustration, their concerns. They want coaching. (ME: Right, right.) And they get coaching, they get a little bit. And we talk, when we talk about their résumés, coaching gets in there. I have to be careful of the time with them, but...people love to be coached.

When Liz says her clients want to discuss "what happened to them," there is without fail a story behind why they are seeing her, or why they are looking for work, or how they came to be in their present circumstances. But while they do not recognize talking about these issues as coaching, Liz certainly does. In this sense, I agree that her clients *do* want coaching and, I would further argue, they *need* coaching. Recalling from Chapter Five, both informants and coaching materials used the terms "nonjudgmental" and "supportive" to describe the role as coach in relation to the client. The individuals who come to Liz to have their résumés overhauled are also looking for a non-judgmental and supportive audience, to tell their stories of being laid off, of delaying retirement after losing life savings, of dreading that any day their job might be outsourced. They need coaching because it offers a safe environment to vent these frustrations against today's

harsh and often unfair labor conditions. In short, coaches provide an essential service: these individuals want to be heard, and a coach is there to listen when no one else will.

"But I don't have any money to pay you"

In a perfect world, all potential coaching clients would have access to resources, specifically the necessary time, money, and cultural knowledge or capital to understand what coaching is and why it is necessary. This, unfortunately, is not the case.

Although the ability to pay for coaching was not explicitly named as a factor when informants responded to the question "Who is your ideal client?" it did surface at some point in most conversations. Perhaps some individuals thought the subject was too crass to discuss in the context of working with people, but it certainly did arise indirectly. In fact, when money issues were mentioned, it was often with some contempt—small business coach Danielle commented that she didn't want to work with people who "just want to make a buck." But regardless if they would like to provide their coaching services for free, the reality is that coaches must still make a living, and thus, they need to have a target market both willing *and* able to pay their fees.

Having the means to purchase such services is a factor that dictates who can afford to be a client, and who cannot. This line of reasoning was expressed in vivid terms by Rose, a semi-retired non-profit executive who draws upon her industry experience to coach others working in the non-profit sector. When we talked, Rose had recently organized a "mastermind group" of six other self-employed individuals in various occupations. Every three to four weeks, the group holds a teleconference to share stories, ideas, and advice on a range of topics related to the challenges of being in business for

oneself. Rose recounted for me a frustrating "catch-22" to surface in the course of these mastermind exchanges:

> ME: And, so what kinds of issues are coming up on this...on the calls?
>
> ROSE: For most people, and several of them are career coaches, I think at least three of them, and they're saying that there are people who want to be coached, but they don't have the money because they've lost their jobs. And so, there's this... (ME: Yeah, it's a catch-22.) Yeah, EXACTLY! And it's, you know, it's making them kind of crazy...that there are people who call them and really want coaching, and if they can't do it for free, (ME: Yeah.) then, you know, these people are saying: "But I don't have any money to pay you." And so, and so we talk about that a lot and how to handle that and...you know, how to either...do some bartering, although that's not, you know, the big, the big focus, but how to find clients, or the majority of clients who can pay you, (ME: Right, right.) to do the work you do. So, I mean that, you know, that's a lot of it.

According to Rose, the career coach (and coaches working in other niches, too) is faced with a dilemma: the individuals who need their services most are the ones who may be least able to afford them. So what does one do? Rose mentioned bartering as a strategy, but the ideal scenario is to find paying clients. However, given the current dire economic conditions, this may not be a feasible solution.

The above tale demonstrates a case where, if a *proficient* coaching approach is followed (i.e. providing the services to those in need), then the coach risks not earning any money because clients cannot pay. A possible *pragmatic* strategy would be, as Rose suggests, to arrange a bartering agreement. That is, the coach would offer their services in exchange for an "equivalent" amount of goods or services which the other party can provide. But because the arrangement is not "apples for apples," the value of what is being exchanged must be negotiated so that a "fair" trade is agreed upon.

In different conversations with alliance members, I learned that bartering was sometimes used between two self-employed or small-business owners—for instance,

three coaching sessions would be traded for three massages, or three hours of marketing work. Regardless of the strategy that is followed, Rose's story reveals that these kinds of issues are the subject of serious discussion, debate, and concern for numerous self-employed professionals.

"I don't have the heart"

Returning to career coach Liz, during our interview, she went into greater depth about what happens in practice, and how she handles the issue of working with clientele who are often unable to pay for coaching:

> LIZ: …Unfortunately it's not something that comes cheap, even when somebody has the lower rates that I do. (ME: Right, right.) It's still expensive. And my rates really are very low, I mean good coaches charge $100, $120 an hour, and I...I just know that would rule out so many of the people that I'm interested in that I don't have the heart.
>
> ME: Right, yeah. I guess it's a trade off, you know wanting to serve a certain group of people, but also you know needing to make an income.
>
> LIZ: And actually, it's a very broad range of people who want that. People who have high school diplomas, people who are in school, people who have college, bachelor's and master's degrees. I had one woman with a PhD, and they still can't afford more than $40/hour because of the economy or the demands of their families. (ME: Right.) 'Cuz I tried to charge more and I couldn't find clients.

Liz finds it difficult to deny those who really need her assistance; she doesn't "have the heart" to charge the hourly rates that "good coaches" do. Of course, it is difficult to make this kind of comparison, since Liz did not indicate if these "good coaches" were working in the same geographic area or coaching niche, which may factor into what they can reasonably charge. As well, Liz did not mention the source for these figures; they could be from her own research or conversations with other coaches, or may have been quoted to her by coaching training programs. In any case, the source is important for determining the possible intention behind the numbers. An even more

compelling take-away from this conversation is the notion that a coach who charges "$100, $120 an hour" engages in a *profitable* coaching strategy, and is perceived by Liz as a "good coach." However, in order to follow this approach, she implies you would need to be "hard-hearted," which is something Liz is unable to do, since it " would rule out so many of the people that [she's] interested in."

Consequently, Liz must grapple with the tension between the desire to help those with their career issues—her *proficient* orientation, the very reason she got into coaching in the first place—and the desire to acknowledge the value of her services by asking for a competitive fee. But even when Liz tried to charge what she thought her work was worth, she confessed that she "couldn't find clients." So, Liz is forced to make a decision, and inevitably, it lands in the client's favor. Such individual strategies—like the one Liz has designed in order to serve the clients she wants to, while still attempting to make a decent income—are rarely talked about in the coaching literature. It certainly was not addressed in the coaching training weekend I observed, although in fairness, we were informed that "business issues" would not be the focus until the third and final module. However, we were still "urged" to start thinking of ourselves as self-employed and that we were starting a coaching business from the first day of training.

The fact that Liz has cut her prices to accommodate the people who she would like to assist has an impact on the kind of identity work she must perform. Since Liz is comparing her practices and prices with those individuals (real or ideal) she considers to be "good coaches" who are able to charge more, she may believe that she is not "as good" as, by her definition, the "good" coaches. One function of identity working is to help maintain a positive self-identity and to project this to others. Liz must somehow

justify that she is a "good coach," despite not being able to charge what she believes other "good coaches" do. This is somehow a contradiction—that she considers her services to be of high quality, and yet cannot charge what she believes a "good" coach should be able to—and thus the need for more identity work to reconcile this discrepancy.

More Coping Strategies

In some cases, the coaches I interviewed had developed individual strategies in order to still offer coaching to individuals who were ready and willing, but unable to afford it. For instance, Hope, who left a career in academia to pursue her own coaching and training business, now enjoys coaching academic staff, faculty, and students. However, she is aware that graduate students, while they are in need of coaching, may struggle to pay for it. In such cases, Hope offers a sliding scale because, she tells me: "…I'm very cognizant of the financial constraints of doctoral students."

Career coach Liz also relayed to me some of the ways she copes with the uncertainty of work as a self-employed professional. She explained that she has had to make certain work choices and arrangements in an attempt to gain financial stability:

> LIZ: I also do a lot of training because it's a way of making sure I have a steady income. (ME: Right.) Because individual coaching clients don't have a lot of money--at least not the ones I see. (ME: Right.) And I tend to like to work with people who can't afford it. (ME: Right, right!) So, in order to keep money coming in, my business has an organizational component where I do training and writing. And then it has an individual coaching component.

By offering a number of services (training, coaching, etc.) to different client groups (individuals, organizations), Liz has been able to keep herself financially afloat. She is fortunate to be in position to provide multiple services, having accumulated the necessary skills, knowledge base, and employment experience to support this particular

strategy. Not all coaches, of course, have the rich work history that Liz has gained over the last 30-odd years, and one is left to wonder what personal ways of coping have been developed by other coaches confronted by uneven and unpredictable demand.

It was Daisy, a family and celebration coach, who was brave enough to utter the obvious: "I cannot afford to work for free." But she believed that by finding alternative sources of income—such as funding from various social and community development programs—she could realize her dream to work with people from all walks of life:

> DAISY: ...And I'd love to work with whatever income level of mother I can work with if, as long as I'm not doing this for free, to find grant money...so don't want to work just with mothers that are...have an income of $60,000 or $70,000 a year, but I'd love to work with...with everybody.

Like many of the informants I spoke with, Daisy was driven to the profession by her *proficient* coaching orientation—that is, her desire to coach clients to the best of her ability, and to do this by developing her coaching skills, learning new techniques, actively listening, and showing genuine compassion with regard to their issues. However, her time and energy have been preoccupied with concerns like finding alternative sources of income, so that she can realize her ambition of serving everyone—not just those individuals who can afford coaching. Daisy has therefore transitioned to a *pragmatic* approach, and from my observations, this seems to be the case among countless individuals who chose this field because they are passionate about and truly believe in the coaching process. At least, this is my impression from the way they spoke about coaching, because, as I learned during my weekend training workshop, that is the way a good coach is supposed to talk about the profession. To the bystander, it may become difficult to decipher between who is just "talking the coach talk" and who truly means it. But because of the many hours I spent getting to know my informants, talking

and laughing with them, listening to their stories, and becoming a part of their coaching community, I attest with confidence my wholehearted belief in the sincerity of their espoused intentions. It turned out that the "reality" of being a coach was far different from what they expected or were prepared for.

Closing Thoughts

In this chapter I attempted to show that identity working goes beyond the talk of coaching and of being a coach; it impacts the decisions and actions that result from these words, and then influences the future narratives that are produced. Put differently, identity working concerns the interplay between speech and action, since they constantly interact and shape one another. This chapter focused on the connections between identity working and the material realities, using a typology to categorize coaching behaviors as being proficient, profitable, and pragmatic in orientation. The main finding was revealing the different coping strategies used by coaches in order to sustain a positive identity as a self-employed coach. While most coaches that I interviewed purported to become a coach because of their passion for it (a proficient orientation), there were many instances where they had to compromise their coaching work in order to make a living (a pragmatic strategy). For example, strategies such as offering different services like résumés, lowering prices, or bartering were identified as ways that coaches had to modify their actions in order to sustain a living and perform some coaching, even if not full time or on the terms that had originally hoped.

While there is an obvious dearth of data examples for the *profitable* orientation, Luke's story stands out as an interesting exception. But even if the profitable perspective was uncommon among my informants, it should be noted that Luke, as the owner of a

coaching training center, is in a position of influence when it comes to attracting and informing those who are considering coaching as a career option. Thus, when career coach Liz cited"$100 or $120/hour" as the rate that "good coaches" charge, these numbers may have been provided to her by someone like Luke. Furthermore, different coaching specializations hold varying income potential—as Luke mentioned, business and executive coaches can generally expect to earn more than life coaches—but this distinction may be lost on the individual coach who is struggling to make a living, while assuming that other coaches are not. In Chapter Seven, I will discuss in greater detail how, through identity controlling and regulating, negative accounts of coaching may be censored and silenced, in order to adhere to the norm of positivity and to uphold coaching as an effective service for potential clients and attractive career for new recruits.

In this chapter, a chief point is that the coach's material conditions, shaped by the larger social context (i.e. economic recession) impact the nature of the identity work that must be performed. For instance, one's decisions and strategies to sustain a business (and thus, an identity) as a coach are impacted by the practical conditions in which the work is performed (i.e. income level, availability of clients), including self-employment. These work decisions influence the existing material conditions, which are then fed into the identity working process, and the cycle continues. As illustrated through the data, one's identity as a self-employed professional (i.e. ability to generate work and an income) often takes precedence over their identity as a coach. That is, they must rely on other ways to make money apart from coaching. Eventually, coaching may become a luxury or an elite hobby in which one can *afford* to engage—just as long as the bills are covered by

some other means (ex: résumés, grants, training, etc.). Please see Table 5 below for a summary of the findings.

Table 5: Coaching Orientations and Economic Crisis Strategies

Strategy → / ↓ Factor	"Proficient" Orientation	"Profitable" Orientation	"Pragmatic" Orientation
Underlying Goals	Meet the definition of "coach" as determined by IFC or certified training program.	Operate a successful coaching business that meets predetermined profit goals/targets.	Balance the demands of offering quality coaching services while earning a stable, living wage.
Primary Knowledge & Skills Required	Coaching techniques & skills ex: active listening, interviewing interpersonal, empathy/emotional,	Total small business management ex: sales, marketing, networking, communication/IT, HR, accounting	Prioritizing, negotiation, compromise, diplomacy, other "marketable" skills (in addition to coaching & small business mgmt)
Self-Concept	"I'm a coach above all else and passionate about what I do."	"I'm a small business owner, and my business is coaching."	"I'm a coach, and doing whatever I need to do to make a living."
Type of Response to Economic Conditions	*Passive/Inactive*: Put more energy into "coaching self." May blame lack of clients on personal deficiency.	*Proactive:* Use current economic situation to argue necessity of coaching. Crisis now used as marketing tool.	*Reactive:* Recognize realities of economic crisis. Change offerings, prices, services, etc. in order to "get by."
Hypothetical Interpretations of Economic Crisis	"I have to believe in abundance; there are plenty of potential clients out there. I need to use coaching skills on my own mindset to focus on future possibilities."	"The economic crisis is an opportunity to enlist new clients. People need to reskill to be competitive in a much tighter labor market. Coaching can help them do that."	"People really need my coaching services but can't afford them. So I'll lower my prices, bundle services, write resumes, and/or supplement my income by marketing any other skills I have."

CHAPTER 7

REGULATING THE UNREGULATED: IDENTITY WORKING AS A SOCIAL ORGANIZING PROCESS

Introduction: The Social Nature of Identity Working

In Chapter Five, I explored how the profession's narrative tools and resources are deployed in the process of identity construction. In Chapter Six, my investigation ventured beyond the words/text of identity working, to study its symbolic and material outcomes which, in turn, direct further efforts for creating and maintaining an identity. In this chapter, I wish to emphasize the social nature of identity working. My interest is driven by the question: *how do members of a professional community, the majority of who are self-employed and thus geographically dispersed, manage to craft and sustain an identity that is legitimate and condoned in the eyes of the profession?* Referring to my initial research-orienting questions, as presented in Chapter One, I therefore focus on addressing the social aspects of the following:

> How is identity work(ing) accomplished among self-employed professionals? How do individuals make sense of this process?
>
> What strategies, tools, resources, and practices are drawn upon for "doing identity"?

Due to the ethnomethodological nature of these questions, which really requires the observation of behavior, the interview would not be the ideal method for generating this data.[10] Thus, in order to accomplish this objective, I draw upon two particular "cases" from my fieldwork. In the first episode, which highlights the redefinition of

[10] Interviews might produce acceptable data for an ethnomethodological analysis, if the research pertains specifically to the interview context, i.e. the social performance of an interview, or the "doing of an interview."

workplaces and negotiation of changing work relationships, I was an active participant in the identity working process. In the second account, as an observer, I had an opportunity to witness how the "desired" professional identity is regulated and enforced in a virtual setting. Each case offers exclusive insights into the identity working process—insights which are not captured so vividly through the interview method.

Co-constructing the Coach: Identity as a Social Accomplishment

In this study, I have stated my conceptualization of identity as not a "thing" that is "had," but rather, as a "process" that is "done." Furthermore, this process is *social*—we perform identity work for an audience, real or imagined. And even if the crafting of an identity seems like a solitary endeavor, pursued by an individual, the tools, resources, and strategies deployed in the doing of identity have been crafted by other humans. Thus, it becomes difficult to deny the inherently social nature of identity work.

The interviews for this research project were an opportunity for informants to actively engage in identity working, and I helped influence the way they would perform their identities, through my questions, responses, and even my presence. One limitation of interview-only data, however, is that participants have a chance to practice and polish their answers to common coaching questions. Contradictions or "slippages," which signal the doing of identity work, may therefore be more difficult to come by. In fact, I often felt that the responses I received from informants had been rehearsed and repeated many times, especially since they were quite accustomed to explaining what coaching is and what a coach does to the uninitiated.

To avoid drawing exclusively on interview material, I incorporated various forms of participant observation in my fieldwork, including a series of six coaching sessions as

a paying client, during the autumn of 2010. Demonstrating their keen marketing skills, several informants had suggested that I "could use some coaching," and offered their services to me—sometimes with a discount—usually near the end of our interview. It was Sascha's invitation that I finally decided to accept, primarily because, of all my interviewees, I knew her least well. In an effort to illustrate some of the social aspects of identity working, in the next section, I tell the story of a particular episode which occurred during one of my coaching sessions with Sascha.

Sascha's Story: "I'll bring you the water"

In June 2010, I "cold called" Sascha for an interview for my research, after seeing her coaching flyer posted on a public notice board. Our interview was held in her home office, in the basement of her two-storey house. The stairs led down to a large open room, with white walls, a tiled floor covered with a couple throw rugs, and soft lighting. There was a comfy beige couch lining the opposite wall, and a desk against the adjacent one. The furniture was positioned this way so that Sascha could be seated at her desk, and simply turn her chair 90 degrees to face the couch, where clients usually sat.

Like other informants, Sascha mentioned that she thought I could really benefit from being coached and, to entice me further, offered me a discounted set of sessions. I was reluctant at first, aware of the possible conflict of interests between being a researcher and a paying coaching client, but eventually I accepted. My reasoning was this: becoming a client would be an excellent supplement to my fieldwork because unlike hearing about the coach's version of what they do, as I had many times during my interviews, this presented a chance to see and experience firsthand what happens during an actual coaching session. And truth be told, I also felt somewhat obligated to give back

to the industry which had furnished me with so much data for this project. Consequently, becoming a client was a means of showing my appreciation and support for the coaching community.

So, a couple of months after our interview, I returned to this space, Sascha's house, for my first coaching session.

> Sascha greeted me at the door warmly, as did her dog and cat. Since it was a very humid September day, I was parched and asked for a glass of water. As I started to follow her into the kitchen, Sascha suddenly stopped, turned to me, and said: "Why don't you head downstairs to the office, and I'll bring you the water." A little embarrassed at my presumptuousness, I agreed with an "of course" and went downstairs.
>
> I took my perch on the couch, settled back, and took in my surroundings. It was then that I noticed it: one of the double closets on the wall across from me was open, revealing an alcove with a washer and dryer, and a basket full of tangled laundry sitting on top. Feeling a sense of panic, I wondered what to do: Should I get up and close the doors? Should I leave them? After all, would I be overstepping my bounds by doing so? As I was going through my options, I heard Sascha coming down the stairs. She walked towards me, smiling, and handed me the glass of water. I thanked her. She took her seat, and we began our conversation; this time, though, she was the one asking the questions and I was the one "opening up."
>
> We came to the end of our session (50 minutes), and I had all but forgotten about the laundry "peep show." We got up from our seats, and as Sascha turned towards the stairs, she glimpsed the gaping closet doors and let out a little gasp. "Oh my…I'm sorry about that!" she muttered, rushing over to the doors to shut them. "Not at all! Please, don't worry about it!" I reassured her. She smiled at me, but I could see she was blushing, still somewhat mortified.
> (Fieldnotes, September 2010)

There are many threads to untangle and discuss in the above excerpt. I'll begin by stating that the first time I came to Sascha's house was as graduate student, when she had graciously agreed to be a participant for my dissertation research. During the second visit, which I recall here, our roles had changed. Sascha was now acting as a career and life coach, and I was a new client. Recalling from Somers' (1994) work that identity is

relational, temporal, and spatial, even though the first two had obviously shifted (i.e. relationally, due to our new respective roles; and temporally, marked by the passage of months), the physical space that we occupied had not—Sascha still lived in the same home and we used the same basement office. My gesture of following Sascha into the kitchen for a glass of water and her reaction to politely disallow this, while taken on its own, might seem insignificant or even unremarkable. But this occurrence stayed with me, demanding more attention. With some pondering, I came to see this incident as Sascha's effort to mark her house as a symbolic space consistent with her identity as a coach—and mine, as a client. That is, the physical space we shared was now a workplace, not a home. I eventually realized this point by asking myself a simple question: If we had met in a non-home office, would I have followed Sascha into a staff room or back area to get a glass of water? No, probably not. Instead, I would have stayed put in her office or a designated waiting area, because *that is what a client does*. My role, and thus expected behavior, would have been more evident to me because of the physical surroundings.

From Sascha's point of view, in order to reinforce her identity as a coach, she may have felt the need to define the space as a workplace, not a home, and therefore the kitchen, with its artifacts of domestic life (ex: food, dirty dishes, school calendar, kids' drawings stuck to the fridge, photos of family, bills, etc.) was off limits to me and her other clients. I imagine my naïve assumption I could enter the kitchen (i.e. private space) reminded Sascha of the dual purposes of her house, and it was necessary she emphasize that its professional function was the one currently in play. In identity working terms, my gesture can be perceived as a challenge or disruption to Sascha's performance as a self-

employed professional, triggering feelings of doubt and anxiety, resulting in greater efforts to restore order to the desired version of reality: a coach and a client, engaging in a coaching session in a professional work environment.

While I can only speculate what Sascha was feeling during this encounter—although I did have clues when she quickly apologized and blushed for the laundry scene indiscretion—I do believe I can relate because of my own emotional state during the scenario. I, too, was gripped by tension which stemmed from the disruption to the desired symbolic order that Sascha likely experienced, firstly with the glass of water, and once again with the exposed laundry alcove at the end of our session. In the moment, I panicked and felt anxious, but did not have a chance to "unpack" exactly why this was the case.

After much reflection, I came to understand myself as an active participant in the identity construction process; to be sure, I was "playing a role" (i.e. the captive audience) in Sascha's "performance" as a professional coach. Keeping with the theater metaphor, my anxiousness was caused by catching a glimpse of the "backstage"—that is, I recognized the surroundings as a home, complete with kitchen and laundry room, rather than as the intended "set": a workplace. This "unscripted scene" interrupted the smooth performance of a coaching session "going right" (see: Emerson, 1970), and I was compelled to restore order, but uncertain about the correct way to do so. If I were to shut the laundry closet doors, I would be helping Sascha "save face", but going "out of character" since it went beyond my role as client. If I left them open, I would be staying in character, but at the risk of seeing Sascha become embarrassed by her not-quite-

convincing identity performance. Alas, this was my dilemma. In the end, there was not enough time to "improvise," and it troubled me to witness Sascha's disappointment.

When broken down in this way, it is evident I was engaging in identity work, alongside Sascha. This encounter underscores identity construction as an inherently active social process, while also making visible its temporal, spatial, and in particular, its relational aspects (Somers, 1994)—much more so, I believe, than the interview method of data production. By drawing upon my own thoughts and emotions as the interaction developed in "real time," I am able to better appreciate and consequently communicate what identity working looks like from an insider's point of view.

With regard to the physical setting, Sascha's situation is not atypical, since many coaches do convert their homes into workspaces. In fact, I carried out about one-quarter of the research interviews at informants' homes, being the most convenient location since that is where they conduct their coaching work. The meeting described above with Sascha, however, was a coaching session, not an interview—which, admittedly, I had pitched to prospective informants as a "casual conversation"—and thus commanded greater formality and a higher degree of professionalism. Sascha had set this tone for our session, and I was eager to respect her wishes and to follow her lead.

Efforts to project a professional identity are further complicated when common gender roles are taken into account. That is, women may have an especially challenging time when working from the home, since the domestic duties that women have typically and traditionally performed (and for the most part, still do) are not recognized as carrying an economic value. It may seem extra pertinent, then, for women to separate the boundaries between work and home; between professional and domestic environments

(Bourne, 2006). Hence, this gender-specific burden is additional to the labor necessary to construct a credible professional identity.

On this occasion, I was an active participant in Sascha's identity construction efforts. I now wish to tell a tale regarding the social doing of identity that I witnessed as a bystander. Given that my role and active involvement in the identity working process has changed, my emphasis in this story is on *identity regulating* and *controlling*—but still being attentive to their intrinsically social features.

Coaching Resistance: Regulating and Controlling Identity

At this juncture, it is crucial to emphasize identity control (or controlling) and regulation (or regulating) are inherently *social* processes. It may be tempting to address these concepts in a reified manner, as though it is "the organization" responsible for controlling and regulating its members' identities. Rather, it is both the *human decisions* determined within an organizational context (i.e. rules, procedures, rituals, etc.), and the *human actions* required to enforce, uphold, monitor, and perhaps defy such decisions, which are at play.

When workers are self-employed, as in the case of most personal coaches, it is reasonable to expect that they would be responsible for constructing and maintaining their professional identities—just as they would look after their other business-related duties, like setting pricing, marketing their services, filing taxes, and so on. However, through the story that follows, I attempt to uncover the mechanisms and networks which help to organize, coordinate, and control the identities of the geographically-dispersed members of this professional community.

But first, I should preface the field story with some background information. When constructing this document, selecting which accounts to include and which to leave out, I was asked by a reader why I referred to the stories of only a few individuals regarding the challenges of coaching. The question pushed me to think about this choice, and the immediate answer is there were only a handful of informants who shared the "downside" of coaching with me. This, in itself, was a "finding"; but I wanted to reflect further on this point. Could it be that only a few of the coaches were struggling, while the vast majority were thriving? Were the individuals who did disclose such stories generally more cynical or negative? Was there something else about these informants that separated them from those who talked only about the joys of coaching?

The "not-so-positive" stories about coaching grabbed my attention precisely because there was an honesty and candidness about them. Such remarks were not simply the standard responses about the wonders of coaching that I had read on websites and in books, then heard reiterated during interviews and workshops. No, these comments were different; they came across as less rehearsed than the more upbeat ones. In contrast, when informants shared these stories, it was usually with more apprehension, less certainty; the active processing of these thoughts was betrayed through informants' facial expressions, gestures, and tones. These subtleties of interaction would be lost had I opted to give a survey instead of doing interviews. In fact, these responses might have been considered outliers and would have been further silenced in favor of the dominant, more affirmative coaching narratives. But as a researcher, I am in the unique position to tell a new story; I have the opportunity to foreground certain accounts or perspectives that may not be statistically representative of my sample, but which I deem to be important

counter-narratives. Furthermore, I have the chance to question why more of these stories were not told and to explore possible explanations.

Reflecting on these issues led me back to my data, but also to seek out other sources of information to help make sense of this phenomenon. In my search, I was directed to an online discussion board about coaching, and a particular discussion thread shed new light on the situation, which I pore over next.

Ned's Story: "It seems that no one wants to hear the negatives"

An important aspect of my fieldwork has been to stay abreast of current issues and developments in the coaching world. As such, I continuously checked out coaching websites, reviewed news articles and research studies, and when possible, participated in webinars and attended presentations. In January 2011, I joined a business coaching group through a professional social networking website, and have since been following their weekly discussions. One such discussion about the future of the business coaching profession, posted by a founding member of the group, stirred my attention. I believe it is worth presenting here at length, in order to capture the full progression and flow of the conversation:

> TOM: There has been a lot of talk recently around the development and changes happening in the Business Coaching industry, with new technologies being readily accessible and more and more people becoming Business Coaches there has been a massive shift in recent years. Was very interested to hear your thoughts on were [sic] you think the Business Coaching industry will be 10 years from now?
>
> NED: In talking with various coaches, they see business coaching not moving forward too much because of the economy (United States).

Ned's seemingly innocuous observation (at least, as I perceived it at the time) regarding the slowing down of the business coaching industry "because of the economy,"

quickly elicited a number of responses from other members of the group. Consider, for instance, the following exchange between group members Sandra and Ned:

> SANDRA: I find myself having to jump into this conversation because I believe and have seen the opposite to be true. Primarily for the fact that during challenging economic times entrepreneurs and small business owners find they can no longer shot [sic] from hip and be effective. They need to not only sharpen their pencils but their strategy and and [sic] ability to utilize support skills as well. That's where Business Coaches makes such a huge difference in the bottom line for their clients. I will add to the equation that Business Coaches who bring to the table not only theory but real world experience as successful Entrepreneurs make a huge difference as well.
>
> NED: Sandra, I am only stating my opinion as to what I have been seeing & what other coaches I know told me. Also, many prospective clients told me that they have been waiting to see how taxes were going to effect [sic] them as well as they were waiting for their business to pick up more before they would put money out for coaching.
>
> SANDRA: I totally respect that! But...one thing to keep in mind the more we "wait" to see what might happen - time gets wasted in making things actually happen...of course my opinion as well though a philosophy that is seeing results. If we wait for our government...we are in big trouble in free commerce.
>
> NED: Sandra, I respect and understand what you are saying. The comments I stated are primarily from small and mid-size business owners to business coaches accordingly. It may be possible that since these individuals represent a small number of business owners/business coaches, we are not getting a true reading of what is actually out there.

Even when disagreeing with one another, the conversation between Sandra and Ned remains polite and cordial at all times. Phrases like “I respect and understand what you are saying” demonstrate active listening skills, which are also reminiscent of the type of language coaches use during interactions with clients. While Ned attempts to defend his original response regarding the poor economy as “only stating [his] opinion” which also happens to be supported by “many prospective clients,” Sandra views the current recession as the primary reason that business coaching services are in even greater

demand—or at least should be, for any savvy business owner. Other discussants chimed in to support Sandra:

> TOM: I have to say I agree with Sandra on this point. I would even go as far as to say that business owners and entrepreneurs are becoming more receptive to business coaching. They now realise that in order to grow they may need to accept help. From a business coaches point of view, when talking to prospects about business coaching it's important to outline the benefits that having a coach will bring. eg more money, more time and a beter [sic] team. Business owners will be interested in these factors no mater [sic] what state the economy is in!
>
> WILL: Coaching has never been stronger there is no doubt with that ..... There have also never been more coaches out there as there are now... The answer differentiation, the answer marketing, the answer niche, the answer on going learning.... Nothing to do with economy more like that target market is moving at the lightening speed and we have to keep up. There will always be some resistance before it may have been the prospect trying to get his head around what coaching is about. Now it's about whether you can do the job and they relay the perception that you are one step ahead of the change technology whether you like it or not because the connection between business owners is changing at the rate of knots.
>
> HENRY: Ned, I'm observing the same reactions from SME. And then I tell them that there are 3 types of people: "Those, who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what's happening. To which group do you belong?" provokes and opens perspective - actually already coaching - and sells (sometimes :-))

The arguments alluded to above are typical of the business case for coaching, and thus, the "profitable coaching" agenda. The logic goes: we exist in an increasingly turbulent business environment, and to be successful, business owners must keep pace with the "lightning speed" of change. In the end, the onus comes back to the individual; to engage in coaching means one is the type of person to "make things happen"—and it is therefore the responsible thing to do—fitting with the enterprising self discourse. Not once, however, does anyone voice support for Ned's opinion or acknowledge the challenging economic situation as a viable threat to business coaching demand.

The conversation then becomes more centered on Ned, regarding his attitude and his personal take on the future of coaching. Jack, another member of the group, offers Ned some advice on how to reframe his thinking. Nonetheless, Ned continues to stand by his position, even endeavoring to speak out about a harmful tendency he has witnessed among members of the professional coaching community:

> JACK: Hi Ned, I think you are getting a true reading, but are interpreting it wrong. I sell coaching into the same client pofile [sic] as you do and every one of the clients that I've signed this year has had the same resistance. (4 in the last month and likely 4 more in May). Long ago I stopped believing in objections and started trying to understand their resistance from the first conversation on. If you have benefits and there is no resistance then you have a deal. Of course, that doesn't happen cleanly too often so you have to understand their resistance and address it. P.S. a lot of prospects resist having a coach because they percieve [sic] it to be a weakness on their part. It boils down to what they think others will think. Try: "bring me in to work on_____ and this is the results you'll get." It navigates through the resistance fairly well. The same type of approach works on cash flow issues.
>
> NED: Jack, how am I getting a wrong reading/interpretation when prospective and previous clients tell me they are not seeing an unpside [sic], right now, in their business. Many other coaches I know and speak with weekly tell me the same—they are not increasing their business because their clients & prospective clients are not seeing their business increase due to economics. One coach I know, coaches lawyers—he went from 70 people who attended his presentations (in-person) to 20 since 2008 & he promotes constantly across the United States. At the same time, his individual coaching dropped from 30 weekly to 10.
>
> Another coach told me that if it were not for her teaching at a nearby University where she lives in New England, her income would include only 5 clients. She also promotes constantly. She attends & is on the board of some organizations there. I can go on with the various people I know who are coaches and live in various areas of the country. Some of these coaches, like myself, have been told that we are waiting to see the economy pick more before we can move forward and hire a coach. If this is misinterpreting or misreading my clients, then tell me how to get these &/or other prospective clients to say "YES". This is especially in the area of coaching introverts to help them move forward in their lives.

Again, Ned supports his “opinion” with the stories of other coaches from “various areas of the country” who find themselves in the same position. He provides figures to

exhibit the very real and dramatic drop in business that he and his fellow coaches are experiencing. Through his words and his tone, I can detect Ned's building irritation; his patience is wearing thin. As the discussion continues, I discover that I am not alone in picking up these cues:

> JACK: Hi Ned, I can sense your frustration. I was trying to point out the difference between resistance and objections. Resistance causes objections. Prospects can feel resistance and not even know why. They will respond with an objection. 'I can't afford it'—is the all purpose, multifunctional, gold standard objection. When I stopped accepting it, my sales process started improving and I've been busy ever since. (If I let it stop me I wouldn't sign at least half of my clients,). That's all I'm saying.
>
> NED: Jack, what you sense is my opinion & how other coaches & I have experienced clients who tell us their sob stories & this is with at least 10 coaches who I know. They experience the same as what I am going through. Apparently, I have to toe the line & "act" as I have loads of clients & not be allowed to say what I and many other coaches are experiencing. Also, it seems that no one wants to hear the negatives.
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> I do have clients, but not as many as I would like. Many may think the things I say are just excuses, but if others are also having the same experiences, should I make things up to satisfy the group and everything will be positive & I am really not experiencing any negative things, and the other coaches I know are just telling me stories. I see that these other coaches are having difficulty as they do not even have any seminar events booked. Some of them even cancelled their events because too few people are not registering for them.
>
> Years ago, I shifted my approach and began to attract clients. In the last few years (2008 to now), I am not able to get as many clients back as I had before. Previously, I was working with 28 clients, now it is 5. Again, Other coaches, who I know, have also dropped significantly in numbers. This is not my imagination. If you are told by a prospective client that they cannot hire you & you use every objection resistance tactic, and they are still not able to hire you, what would you do. I have repeatedly emailed them & called them. I was told by most prospects, to stop contacting them, & when they are ready they will contact you? These comments are not helping. Thanks.

In this segment of the conversation, Ned goes beyond just sharing details of his and other coaches' witnessed decline in business. He now voices real concern about what he views as a troubling expectation to "make things up to satisfy the group." In

other words, Ned articulates a pressure to conform to the dominant narrative of positivity that circulates in professional coaching circles, such as this online discussion group. Not only that, Ned declares he is also expected to "perform" the role of a successful business coach in front of fellow coaches, as well as clients. These sentiments are captured in his comment: "Apparently, I have to toe the line & "act" as I have loads of clients & not be allowed to say what I and many other coaches are experiencing."

Furthermore, Ned indicates that he is already well-versed in the "objection resistance tactics" to which Jack refers. He also brings up, in a roundabout way, the issue of when employing such tactics with prospective clients crosses the line into coercion, or even harassment. Standard within most training programs, coaches are generally expected to be empathetic to clients' feelings and respond in a sensitive manner—a mark of the proficient coaching orientation. But the scenario described seems to be an exception where coaches can disregard any signs of uneasiness or discomfort from the client. It raises the question: do coaches have a moral obligation to recognize when an individual really cannot afford coaching services, and to desist from subjecting them to further sales techniques? Or, put more bluntly, when exactly does "no mean no"? From my perspective, this case in point poses a serious challenge to the conviction I heard time and time again, in conversations and interviews, that "coaches have no agenda."

This online exchange provides a compelling example of the process of identity regulating and controlling as it unfolds. Ned, who stated his outlook about the economy's effect on the demand for coaching services, is admonished for expressing this view, because it runs counter to acceptable coaching discourse, for a number of reasons. First, by introducing a structural force (the economy) into the conversation, this goes

against the neo-liberal principles of individuality and personal responsibility upon which the coaching philosophy is founded. Second, by bringing up "negative things" in the discussion thread—i.e. anecdotal evidence of several coaches' diminishing client bases—Ned is not seeking out the "positives,"[11] which coaches are explicitly trained to do. Grounded in the field of positive psychology, the coaching ethos separates itself from the more "negative" aspects of psychotherapy, like diagnoses and disorders, to focus almost exclusively on the "positive" world of opportunities and change.

With regard to Somers's (1994) narrative constitution of identity, Ned is employing the metanarratives of economics and structural conditions, which, in this context, are not endorsed by the profession as a legitimate factor in the demand for coaching. His use of such metanarratives evokes, as Somers (1994:619) puts it, one of the "epic dramas of our time"; that is, the tension between Individual vs. Society, or what social scientists refer to as Agency vs. Structure.

Consequently, members of the discussion group quickly intervene to correct this breach in constructing the "ideal" coach identity. This coordinated effort is, from an ethnomethodological perspective, an attempt to restore order to "doing coaching right." Recalling that public narratives are defined as: "those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand" (Somers 1994: 619), his fellow discussants urge Ned to replace his present speech with the established, legitimate public narrative of coaching. Through the development of this discussion thread, it is possible to see how one

[11] It is important to note that "positive" and "negative" are included here in quotations to recognize the inherent value judgment attached to these terms. One must reflect on who it is making the judgment (ex. the coaching governing bodies, the individual coach, etc.), and against what criteria such a judgment is being made.

individual's view can become delegitimized by the dominant group, and how attempts to silence these concerns and re-educate the "deviant" member are played out in practice. Furthermore, this interactive process of identity controlling/regulating would not have been accessible to me, had I chosen to rely solely on interview data.

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To conclude Ned's story, a number of individuals joined the discussion thread to offer assistance with how he might recognize and overcome his own "resistance." In other words, they attempted to "coach" Ned out of his business "funk":

> REGGIE: Ned, I sympathize with your frustration. I was where you are at not long ago. Until I took my own coaching advice and looked within myself I could not get out of your funk. Such a drastic change in clients has to have more causes than just one.
>
> GLORIA: Great conversation here! Ned, I am learning so much from reading the advice of others here, especially Jack's advice. Since his comments and mindset are new to me, let me share the evolution of thought from reading his comments and others.
>
> You and your colleagues are seeing a drop in clients. I hear that. You are hearing comments from your prospects about why they can't buy. What our prospects tell us is not always the truth. It's a surface belief that can be covering up a deeper reason that they may not want to look at. The objection can be a smoke screen to keep from looking at the truth. If they get you to go away, they don't have to do the work.
>
> What you are hearing from our colleagues here is about an improvement on your sales skills. What I will add is to COACH your prospects on their objections. That is what Jack is saying in different words. How many times have your introverts said something that you realized led to a deeper level belief and when you coached you got beneath it to a different fear or thought?
>
> I hear your resistance to the possibility to their [sic] being plenty of work. What would [sic] might you be making up about yourself if you allow that to be true? What is the gift in this thread of discussion and in your frustration if you consider that the answer is not as black and white as you believe now?
>
> WHAT IF... and I'm asking myself this, what if there is plenty of work and it's more about your current beleifs [sic] that is holding you back? What if you didn't

> take your prospects objections as the real truth and asked more questions in coach mode? I hope this is helpful and that you hear the respect and kindness of the group as they urge you forward. Happy to talk through my ideas with you offline as writing is not as easy as talking!

In a fascinating twist, fellow discussion group member Gloria takes the opportunity to coach Ned through his own "resistance to the possibility to [there] being plenty of work." By employing popular coaching techniques, such as pointed, open-ended questions (ex: What might you be making up about yourself if you allow that to be true?), Gloria attempts to expose Ned to the notion his resistance might be due to fear or self-limiting "surface beliefs," and the economic downturn is merely his "objection" to securing more clients. In short, Gloria enlightens Ned with the knowledge that he has made a choice to "allow" the economic conditions "to be true," and the answer is not as "black and white" as he believes.

My interpretation of events, however, is quite different from Gloria's. I do not think that Ned ever indicated the situation was clear cut, but rather, he persisted with a particular viewpoint (i.e. acknowledging the material reality) in the face of others' advice and comments intended to dismiss it as a genuine concern. Once again, the responsibility for losing business falls squarely on Ned's shoulders—be it his lack of sales expertise, inadequate coaching skills, or choice to be ruled by fear. What I find incredible is that within this professional coaching community, material conditions (and recall, in a time of record rates of unemployment and general economic decline) simply do not exist in the realm of possibility as a reason for Ned's and other coaches' struggles.

Closing Thoughts

In this chapter, I have presented two different tales from the field, both emphasizing the social nature of identity working. In Sascha's story, I played an active

role in the described scene, and consequently, in her identity construction process as a coach. But this incident not only conveys the sociality of identity working, it also depicts the changing nature of work relationships. Fortunately, it was possible to study this transformation due to my prior involvement with Sascha as a graduate student researcher; in the present scenario, I was now interacting with her as a paying client.

In order for Sascha to give a convincing identity performance as a professional coach, I had to accept not only her self-presentation (i.e. her words, actions, appearance, etc.), but also her physical surroundings as a legitimate workplace. However, I failed to do this by instead recognizing it as her home, and hence, I disrupted her identity performance. This unintentional breach had to be addressed and repaired immediately, which Sascha did quite deftly, to get us back on track with the proper "script." This example allows us to recognize the relational quality of identity; that is, whether or not the identity performance is deemed "successful" depends in part upon how the actors relate to one another.

That said, I do not think it is sufficient to state that I merely participated in Sascha's identity working process; I would go one step further to claim that I also became subject to, and implicated in, the new relations of work. My misstep highlighted to me Sascha's new role was that of a service-provider, and I had now become her client, which definitely affected my interactions with her from that point on. For instance, I began to feel somewhat self-conscious and more guarded about what I might say during our sessions. I actually experienced anxiety over my own performance as a client—would I be doing it "right"? Would I be saying too much? Too little? Ironically, I fell into my own sort of identity (working) crisis. During one of our later coaching sessions,

while talking about some personal issues, I began to cry, but then immediately felt I was being "unprofessional," since my earlier interaction with her had been as a researcher. Originally, I had agreed to partake in a set of six coaching sessions to show my support for Sascha's career and as "payback" for her generosity towards my research. But I soon realized that I had gotten myself into a specific kind of relationship, with different terms, than the one we shared previously as researcher-informant. This relationship felt more transactional, more formal, and being aware of this, it made me more confused about my own behavior and how I should act during the sessions. The very reason why I had accepted Sascha's invitation was because I thought it would be interesting to be coached by her on career issues, as we had interacted well during the interview and I felt the seeds of a trusting friendship had been planted. But when Sascha subtly reminded me, at the doorway of her kitchen, that I was presently not a friend but a client, it made me apprehensive about opening up, thereby affecting the quality of our sessions. In short, I wasn't sure how to deal with the terms of this new transactional arrangement, and instead of being fully present in our coaching conversations, I had become preoccupied with my own identity performance for this new role.

I imagine my experience is not unique, and I am not alone in my discomfort with my new relationship with Sascha; I heard similar sentiments expressed by coaches who had to get accustomed to a different way of relating to others. To them, networking was no longer a means for making new friends or meeting interesting people; it was now strictly a necessary business activity, the goal of which is to find and enlist new clients. What's more, this instrumentalist, transactional view of relationships is particularly antithetical to the coaching ethos (at least as promoted in coaching training, and

specifically within the more "personal" coaching realms), which purports to be about making human connections, not business deals. It is little wonder, then, that the informants who had gotten into coaching precisely because they shared this philosophy about the nature of human relations had a particularly difficult time with the "business of coaching," as they were now urged to view every person with whom they interacted as a potential client or lead.

Ned's story also highlights the social and relational aspects of identity, but in a distinct way. Through the account of his online discussion group conversation, it becomes clear that, even when self-employed, one's work identity is still subject to the regulating forces of professional norms and practices, in order for members of the coaching community to project a unified, consistent image. Identity controlling still occurs, but instead of at staff meetings or pizza Fridays or around the water cooler within the traditional organizational workplace, it now happens through online discussions like the one illustrated, as well as teleconference workshops, mentor coaching, social networking, and the like. Just as the appearance and constitution of the "organization" have changed, so have its control mechanisms to manage professional identity.

CHAPTER 8

GOING FORWARD: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction: Autoethnographic Reflections

Writing the final chapter of this document, I find myself reflecting on the many ways that the issues in this research project have touched my own life. For instance, when I first was informed that I had been awarded a research fellowship from the Institute of Coaching, I was communicating back and forth with the Administrator, trying to figure out the logistics of how I would receive the funds. I remember laughing at the irony of the situation, as I read her email with the proposed solution: "We need to set you up as an independent contractor."

I have also experienced some of the same anxieties of self-employment discussed by my informants. For example, being an extroverted person who craves human interaction, like many of the coaches I met, I, too, have suffered through social isolation while writing up my research and attempting to complete my degree. Many people had warned me that the dissertation process is a solitary one, and while I don't agree with this statement entirely, I do understand what is meant by it. As well, my job as a graduate teaching associate at UMass has been particularly stressful, not because of the classroom work itself, but in terms of job and income insecurity, not knowing if I will have a teaching contract from one term to the next. I fully grasp how the "business" of being self-employed can detract from one's focus on—and ultimately the quality of—the work one is *meant* to be doing. Hence, my own history with these matters has given me a deeper appreciation of and empathy for the stories my informants have selflessly shared

with me. I know how difficult it can be to talk about such concerns, and am honored that they have opened up and welcomed me into their lives.

I therefore recognize how far reaching and relatable, and potentially influential this research could be. I have chosen to write about topics that concern or will touch the lives of most of us: identity and the world of work—specifically, self-employment. The stakes are much higher than this dissertation as an academic exercise, because I am writing about *the actual lives of real people*. I feel a great deal of responsibility to them to get their stories out there because they are important and need to be heard. But since there is only so much that can be accomplished through one document, the work and the writing will continue for many years to come.

To complete the task at hand, I will provide a summary of the key points presented in the data analysis. I then discuss theoretical contributions and implications for the coaching profession and the study of work that can be gleaned from this project.

Summary of Findings

This investigation considered identity working of self-employed professionals within the emerging field of personal coaching, and was directed by a number of research-orienting questions. Although the insights presented in the previous chapters addressed the research concerns in a rather holistic fashion, here, I will illustrate how these findings relate back to each question more explicitly.

> **How is identity work(ing) accomplished among self-employed professionals? How do individuals make sense of this process? What strategies, tools, resources, and practices are drawn upon for "doing identity"?**

In Chapter Five, I explored the various narrative tools, resources, and strategies that are employed by coaches, this project's self-employed professional population of

interest. This narrative material to assist with identity work is available to individual coaches by the wider professional community, including governing and accreditation bodies (like the ICF), as well as research institutions, training programs, and coaching websites, books, articles, and the like. It was noted, however, that the greater social conditions must also be taken into consideration when analyzing identity work and the deployment of these resources.

Since the "doing" of identity work, in the ethnomethodological sense, is rendered most "visible" in the presence of contradictions, conflicts, and challenges, I sought these out in the data. One of the primary contradictions is the paradox between the coaching community's ongoing efforts to professionalize, and the public claim that the coach is not an expert. Conflicts include the discursive positioning of coaching as somehow "superior to" therapy, as well as the need to balance coaching with other work roles, which self-employed individuals must frequently assume to generate a decent, stable income. Finally, due to the precariousness of the coaching profession, coaches are constantly confronted with the challenge of explaining what coaching is, vis-à-vis other services and occupations, even as its definition and professional boundaries are evolving and unclear to its own members.

Each of the above scenarios can increase feelings of uncertainty and insecurity within the individual coach, thus calling for great identity work efforts. What's more, the individual coach is left with the responsibility of reconciling these disruptions to the identity performance. That is, they must put in extra energy and resources into identity construction, which could be spent on other endeavors—like the *actual* coaching of

clients. This largely uncompensated, unrecognized labor—with respect to crafting and publicizing the profession's identity—must be taken up by its individual members.

I also argued that identity working goes beyond the talk of coaching and of being a coach; it impacts the decisions and actions that result from these words, which in turn influences the future identity narratives that are produced. Put differently, identity working includes speech and action, which constantly interact and shape one another. Chapter Six focused on the material and symbolic realities of this identity work, using a typology to categorize coaching orientations as proficient, profitable, and pragmatic. One highlight was revealing the different coping mechanisms relied upon by coaches to sustain a positive identity as a self-employed coach. While most of my informants purported to have become a coach because of their passion for and belief in the coaching process (a proficient orientation), there were many instances where they had to compromise their coaching work in order to make a living (a pragmatic strategy). For example, strategies such as offering a variety of additional services, like résumé writing and training, lowering prices, and bartering were all identified as ways that coaches modified their work practices so they might sustain a living wage, while also afford them the ability to perform *some* coaching, even if not on a full time basis, or with the terms they preferred or had originally expected.

The concern of Chapter Seven was the social and negotiated nature of identity working, and specifically, what this looks like when the profession in question is largely organized by self-employment. In other words, professional members are not "contained within" a single work organization, but instead are spread out geographically. The main conclusions were two-fold. First, due to the relational quality of identity, not only is the

self-employed individual affected by the changing trends in work arrangements, but those with whom they interact. To successfully navigate the world of self-employment, the underlying assumption is that every person encountered should be treated as a potential client, which fundamentally alters the kinds of interactions and relationships that are (and can be) developed. For instance, drawing upon my own experience as a coaching client, I believed the relationship terms with my coach had changed from a friendlier, more informal partnership to a more transactional, business-based one. While some of this shift could be attributed to our newly revised roles—before as researcher and informant, now as client and coach—the fact remains that my own feelings of uncertainty within the situation required identity working in order to give a "passing" performance as a "good" coaching client.

The second finding builds on the premise that identity controlling and regulating are particularly important for an emerging field such as coaching, as it attempts to establish itself as a legitimate profession. Due to the lack of regulation and clarity regarding required skills and certification, it is prone to imposters. Thus, members interactively engage in identity working to inform, control, and sometimes silence members who do not follow the authorized norms and practices of the profession. In the story of Ned, it was exposed that an online discussion board, supposedly intended as a medium to exchange ideas and give and support from fellow coaches, was transformed, through human action, into a mechanism of identity regulation and control. Thus, Chapter Seven emphasized that the "doing" of identity is a social, negotiated process, and the "tools" used for identity working, controlling and regulating are taking different forms, such as social media, to accommodate the reorganization of work.

What are some alternative/unheard identity stories of being a self-employed professional? When individuals create, modify, and interpret their life and work experiences in one way over another, what are the benefits of doing so? What are the dangers?

Both the academic and popular literatures on "new careers" tend to emphasize the potential benefits of self-employment, including increased flexibility, autonomy, and discretion over work assignments. My fieldwork produced a number of stories of self-employment that ran counter to the dominant rhetoric—indeed, I was particularly attentive to revealing these alternative interpretations of working for oneself. In Chapter Six, I shared a few of these lesser-heard narratives about the downside of being a self-employed professional. Perhaps most notably, informants mentioned the uncomfortable adjustment to day-to-day social isolation, the fixation with marketing and networking tasks to secure clients, and the distaste for increasing instrumentality within work-related interactions, when comparing current conditions of working for oneself with the previous context of organizational employment.

However, alternative accounts of self-employment, like the ones above, were somewhat difficult to come by, and virtually non-existent when coaching was discussed more directly. But rather than perceive this peculiarity as indicative of flawed research design or inadequate interviewing techniques, I consider this to be critical data. From this observation, I deduced two apparent dangers associated with the lack of accurate feedback to the wider coaching community, regarding individual experiences of working as a coach. The first threat is that it perpetuates the message that "everything is rosy" for individual coaches; that is, the current level of support is adequate, and no additional assistance is needed. Unfortunately, this unrealistic, overly-optimistic impression may be used for the recruitment of new members to the profession—a strategy in which bodies

like the ICF have been aggressively engaging over the last few years. And consequently, the vicious cycle of struggling coaches→lack of support→more struggling coaches continues.[12]

The second—and what I believe more insidious—damaging effect related to the communication break-down between the governing professional bodies and its members is the risk that the few coaches who do speak up about the difficulties will be viewed as "squeaky wheels" and dismissed as deviations from the norm. Further, those struggling to make a living as a coach may in turn be blamed for their own predicament, due to a lack of skill, commitment, drive, or any other attitude, behavior, or factor that can be placed squarely on the coach's shoulders. This thread is explored in greater depth through Ned's story, presented below.

How do the micro-processes of identity work(ing) relate to the current historical, economic, political and socio-cultural conditions? What linkages can be traced between self-employed professionals' experience and the broader social context?

Chapter Six dealt most pointedly with the above set of research-orienting questions. Going beyond just the verbal constructions of identity that unfolded within the interview setting, I also deliberated upon informants' decisions and actions related to their coaching work, and how these were connected to efforts to create and sustain an identity as a self-employed professional. Reviewing the data, I found that the most vivid illustration of the linkages between micro-processes of identity working and the macro social context was in the accounts from career coaches. This particular niche was confronted by a double-edged sword, created by the bleak economic conditions. On the one hand, the potential market was enormous, since jobless workers who could benefit

[12] I will pursue this thread further in the upcoming section "Implications for Coaching."

from career coaching was at a record high. But on the other, these individuals did not have the disposable income to pay for these mostly unfamiliar (and thus risky) services.

I devised a typology of coaching orientations—proficient, profitable, and pragmatic—in order to make sense of how individuals dealt with and managed these practical limitations produced by current economic conditions, in order to generate an income. The typology is intended to emphasize how individual strategies, actions, and decisions with regard to one's coaching work are shaped by not only their self-concepts and identity as a coach, but by macro concerns, like the existing economic and social structures in which one's life and work are embedded. These decision and actions regarding coaching work in turn influence the type of identity work that is needed to sustain a positive self-concept as a self-employed coach. Through the informants' stories, I attempted to uncover how the micro-processes of identity and macro-structures of the economy intermingle and mutually constitute one another, but also acknowledge that other research frequently presents and treats them as distinct and separate concerns, out of analytical convenience.

Another fascinating linkage between the micro and macro aspects of the identity construction process, and more specifically of identity control and regulation, appears in Ned's story in Chapter Seven. To review, Ned was admonished by fellow online discussants for his "negative" remarks about the economic conditions, which was seen as going against the prevailing norms of positivity and individual responsibility in the coaching world. Their open disapproval of Ned's comments, and persuasion to reframe his thinking, demonstrate the social, interactive nature of identity working. Symbolically, this episode revealed that the economy is not recognized as a legitimate reason within the

greater coaching community for losing customers or a lack of business. Hence, if one is struggling to make ends meet, then the blame should be assigned to the individual coach—which is consistent with the individualistic flavor of the coaching ethos—and may help to explain the observed reluctance to disclose stories of frustration and despair among my informants.

Theoretical Contributions

Through this research study, I have identified some of the struggles of being a coach, specifically, and the experience of self-employment, more generally, as shared by informants. By foregrounding the wider social and economic context, I wished to emphasize how these conditions must be not be taken for granted when interpreting the coaches' comments and stories. The intent was to show how identity and its construction cannot be divorced from contextual elements; indeed, they are continuously and actively shaping one another.

This project offers a number of theoretical contributions to the identity and careers literatures. With respect to our knowledge about identity, it follows in the tradition of other ethnomethodological research (Down, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; Down & Warren, 2008; Watson, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) that recognizes identity working as a process which unfolds within social interaction, and its analysis therefore relies upon contextual data produced from observation. A key insight from this research is the significance of macro and structural conditions in shaping the micro-processes of identity work, most remarkably, the existing economic conditions at the time that the fieldwork was carried out, and the changing nature of employment relations due to the rise in self-employment.

As well, the preceding analysis illustrated an expanded notion of "identity working"—one that goes beyond mental or cognitive processes, as is the case in some functionalist studies (Ibarra, 1999, 2003; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010)—to consider how speech, decisions, and actions intermingle in the construction of identity. This broader conceptualization is useful for illustrating the connections between symbolic and material worlds, which both shape one's identity and sense of self.

I believe it is the typology of profitable, pragmatic, and proficient coaching orientations introduced in this research which holds the most promise for analyzing how identity is constructed in other contexts of self-employment. Although developed from fieldwork specific to the coaching profession, many of the structural and working conditions facing today's self-employed professionals are similar. Coaching, as an emerging profession, arguably places an extra burden on its members with the expectation they will perform identity work for the greater community on top of their own individual identity efforts. However, even within the more "established" professions (i.e. law, medicine, therapy) or service industries (i.e. auto repair, hairdressing, barbering, house decorating) the experience of work, as self-employment increases, is changing. Simply put, these occupations are not immune to the imperative that all workers should be enterprising, self-sufficient, and business-focused—qualities consistent with the *profitable* orientation.

To illustrate the timeliness and relevance of studying the challenges of self-employment, these very issues were only just addressed in the *New York Times* article (Gottlieb, 2012) "What Brand is Your Therapist?" In the piece, the author, Lori Gottlieb, discusses her recent transition from journalist to therapist, and recounts her struggle to

book clients. She later sought out a "branding consultant" and shares the advice she received regarding how to boost her practice (and thus, income). In addition to adopting a catchy brand for herself and marketing her services in a way that appeals to prospective clients looking for short-term solutions, rather than long-term personal change, the consultant advised her to start coaching. Gottlieb "held out" against these pressures for as long as possible since, as she put it: "Branding was the antithesis of what we did [as therapists]." In other words, following a *proficient* strategy, Gottlieb clung steadfastly to her desire to practice therapy the way she had been trained, respecting its "strict concepts of authenticity, privacy and therapist-patient boundaries." Eventually, after months of tolerating a sporadically-scheduled work diary and not knowing where else to turn, she caved into the consultant's earlier recommendation and started coaching clients in one-off sessions. The change itself was rather painless, since it did not require further credentials or training, just some modification to her website. Feeling a sense of guilt about possibly "selling out," Gottlieb expresses how she had to grapple with the tension of wanting to practice therapy "the right way," and wanting to earn an income. In short, she relaxed her expectations and succumbed to a *pragmatic* orientation.

Reading about Gottlieb's experience as a therapist, I felt a striking sense of déjà-vu; her story reminded me of numerous ones shared months earlier by my coaching informants. I was surprised to learn that therapy, one of coaching's closest occupational rivals, was undergoing its own sort of identity-crisis. I had presumed that members of a more established profession would enjoy greater clarity and access to better resources, such as general cultural knowledge, which would facilitate the doing of identity. What I hadn't considered were the possible challenges associated with *changing* existing, long-

held ideas about the profession and how this might impact individual identity working, because, as the branding consultant put it: "the real issue was that psychotherapy had an image problem." So in addition to the everyday business of being self-employed, Gottlieb confronted her own set of challenges with regard to constructing a professional identity for herself, while contributing to the image overhaul of psychotherapy. She therefore shared more in common with my coach informants than I would have believed.

Reflecting back on my data, the fact that coaching is a new profession may actually provide some advantages to identity working. For one, there may be more creative scope for individual members to construct the profession in a way that is aligned with individual preferences. I had viewed coaching as an interesting context in which to study the lived experience of self-employment, with findings that could be generalized to other occupations where self-employment was growing. However, because of its nascent status as a profession, I believed its identity working demands were unique to coaching, with little application beyond its community. I am now revising these assumptions; while it is true that each profession may have its own particular set of issues and challenges with identity construction, what they may increasingly share is that, in the context of growing self-employment, individual members are now expected to perform identity working for the profession, perhaps with limited institutional support, along with meeting the other responsibilities of being self-employed.

Next, I narrow my focus from the more general context of self-employment to the coaching profession specifically, to consider the possible implications this research carries for this growing field.

Implications for the Coaching Profession

In addition to theoretical insights, this research project also identifies implications for the coaching profession. Because this research was partially supported by an external grant and fellowship from the Institute of Coaching, it was understood that I would be expected to demonstrate how the findings might inform practice. I would like to share some of these conclusions now.

In the Executive Summary of the 2008 ICF Global Coaching Survey, the researchers identified future opportunities and challenges for the coaching industry and profession. Among the category of "challenges", the report states (ICF, 2008b: 16):

> Due to the trend towards newer coaches entering the profession, it is important for them to be fully prepared so that they can be successful in developing their individual practices. In order for the overall perception of the coaching industry to be associated with long-term sustainability, these newer coaches will need to be provided with the necessary tools required for marketing and for building their coaching practices.

The data produced in this study speak directly to these practical concerns expressed by the ICF. My analysis indicates that the ICF has good reason to be worried about such issues, because many of the newly-minted coaches with whom I spoke are having difficulty securing the tools and support to foster their individual practices. However, this is not experienced evenly among all coaches; I learned that particular coaching niches may be associated with greater challenges. For instance, those who specialize in less business-focused areas—such as life, health and wellness, career, and relationship coaching—are more likely to serve individual clients, who must pay for services out of pocket. A recurring theme in my interviews is that coaches are burdened with "educating the client," because the majority of investments in coaching research are

for studies that target certain audiences (ex. corporate or executive clients), or are carried out within particular settings (ex. business organizations).

To illustrate how this "unevenness" appears in the everyday lives of practicing coaches, I will share a number of examples from the field. I discovered that a number of my informants who previously called themselves "life coaches" have moved away from that label, and instead are now calling themselves "personal organizing coaches" or "career coaches." They were discovering that the title "life coach" was too nebulous, as it was not attached to a clear-cut area of concern or defined specialty. As well, life coaching has been mocked in reality TV programs and pop culture as something "flaky" or "new agey," and understandably, the individuals I interviewed were eager to dissociate themselves with any connection to these less-than-flattering images. These coaches have had to develop individual strategies (most often, of the pragmatic kind) to deal with "structural forces" (like the negative press of reality TV), and these efforts have been largely unexamined. Through this project, I uncovered some of this "additional" work—above and beyond actual coaching—for which the coaches are responsible. Furthermore, I believe that because I have carried out this investigation in an academically rigorous and systematic way, and have also received preliminary institutional recognition through a research grant, these factors will afford a degree of legitimacy and much-needed attention to the conclusions, and will hopefully lead to some additional support for the coaches who find themselves struggling.

In an effort to identify some of the difficulties experienced by individual coaches, I would now like to share comments from Celadora, a former life coach who has shifted her self-employment to life legacy letter writing—sometimes referred to as "ethical

wills." She was rather blunt in her opinion of the coaching profession, and was afforded such candidness since she was no longer as directly attached to the community. When we spoke, she identified several shortcomings with her training program, which she came to realize after-the-fact, as she set out to practice as a newly qualified coach. Here is what she had to say:

> CELADORA: ...I found that it was very challenging in terms of marketing what we do as coaches, and...I realized that what they didn't teach us in coaching training was how to start a business. *(laughs)* And, we paid a lot of money for this training, and I thought: "Geez!" (ME: Yeah.) "Why didn't they include how to get a business up and going?" You had to pay extra for that. So I found myself becoming somewhat disillusioned with the whole process and finding it much more challenging than I ever anticipated. (ME: Right.) And, I think a large part of that was that we weren't in a major metropolitan area where...or very umm... avant garde area where, you know, people already knew what this was. A lot of it was educating people about what coaching was. And I was getting kind of discouraged about that. And I was also finding that there were a LOT of coaches in this area already. (ME: Really?) Yeah.

Celadora's comments divulge a number of limitations she experienced in her coaching training program, which she believes left her unprepared for the challenges of setting up a thriving coaching business. First, she points out that not enough people in the region where she was based had been exposed to the idea of personal coaching, and so a large part of Celadora's work as a coach was to do (uncompensated) PR for the budding profession. This was further complicated by her lack of training in essential business skills, and the tools and resources required to promote her services successfully.

Celadora's account diverges somewhat from those informants who are still actively coaching, as she has been able to step outside that world and reflect on her time within it. Although she acknowledges deficiencies in the skills, knowledge, and training to run a business, unlike others with whom I spoke, Celadora does not necessarily perceive these as *personal* flaws. In fact, she places partial responsibility on the training

school (in particular, and perhaps the coaching industry, more generally) for l ill-equipped for this entrepreneurial undertaking, when she states "what they didn't teach us in coaching training was how to start a business." Moreover, Celadora acknowledges that "they" (i.e. the training organization) were aware of these needs, but rather slyly offered them as an expensive supplement to the basic training, after-the-fact. In other words, the training organization seized a money-making opportunity with regard to business training for newly trained coaches, and because of this practice, Celadora grew "somewhat disillusioned with the whole process."

Adding that she found coaching to be "much more challenging than [she] ever anticipated," Celadora implies the training could have been done differently—more specifically, in ways that would better assist and prepare the participants. Her comments suggest the need for: first, greater transparency about what one can expect when starting a coaching business; second, better access to coaching industry data, such as niche growth rates, regional demand, and saturation levels; and third, realistic information about the investment, in terms of both time and money, required to be successful as a self-employed coach. All in all, she provided a rather scathing assessment of the training program, which does not reflect well on the coaching profession and its treatment of new members to the community.

The ICF (2008b) has also mandated that much more research is needed in order to build the business case for coaching. Thus, the coaching literature is becoming populated with studies that examine the "ROI" of coaching, and its impact on desirable outcomes such as performance, commitment, and job satisfaction. Much of this research is conducted within organizational and corporate settings, where the coaching clients

occupy leadership positions and the executive suite. While such research is crucial for establishing a solid base of knowledge about coaching and building greater legitimacy for the profession, there is a substantial proportion of practicing coaches who do not benefit directly from these efforts. As mentioned earlier, those individuals who offer coaching in the more "personal" areas—such as life, health and wellness, relationship, and to some extent career— are not able to cite and draw upon these research findings, and thus, these domains risk lagging behind business and executive coaching with regard to professional legitimacy. The current study, which departs from and challenges the current research contexts, dominant assumptions, and existing ideas about how coaching is done, was designed to address this void in the literature and to expand the knowledge base on the actual, lived experience of coaches. By putting forward this empirical evidence, my hope is that some of the inequalities within the coaching profession will be addressed, so that every practicing coach has access to the same level of resources, in terms of research opportunities, marketing efforts, and general support, to establish and sustain successful practices.

Through this research project, I was eager to understand these issues as they are experienced by the individuals who occupy the coaching profession. Undoubtedly, efforts have been made to survey the industry in order to paint the "big picture" (see AMA, 2008; ICF 2008a, 2008b, 2012; Sherpa Coaching, 2008). But while this information is vital for understanding the breadth and scope of the coaching profession, it misses out on the diverse individual experiences that make up the totality. In short, the experience of being a coach is very different depending on who you are, where you live,

how you work, and the services you offer. This investigation attempted to get at these nuances, conveying them in all their complexity.

With regard to the research issue of identity work, the decision and actions taken by the profession's governing bodies, such as the ICF, indeed have an impact (and until now, largely undocumented) on individual coaches. For instance, there is currently a debate the role of the coach and whether or not a coach can be considered "expert" in some domain. This is a contentious issue, since the established professions are normally associated with a specialist or expert body of knowledge, but coaching philosophy has previously rejected the expert model, in an attempt to distinguish it from the fields of therapy or management consulting. The ICF are in the process of reconsidering this position and trying to broaden the definition of coaching to make space for the provision of specialist knowledge and skills. Such changes will affect those who are coaching in their day to day work; individual coaches may experience confusion as they market their services and define their relationships with clients.

On-the-ground identity work performed by individual coaches is largely invisible and thus neglected by the powerful thought leaders and decision makers within the coaching profession. This project is one mechanism through which these stories can be organized, shared, and heard. Ultimately, I hope that some of these findings will be instrumental in informing and shaping policy and regulation, and in turn, can alert the ICF, training institutions, and key players within the coaching community to possible issues, concerns, and areas for future investigation.

Implications for Work and Employment

In their 2008 *Academy of Management Annals* chapter, entitled "New Work, Old Assumptions," Ashford, George and Blatt provide a thorough review of the research to date on the "new world of work" and discuss the opportunities and challenges of continuing this line of investigation. The authors close the chapter with these thoughts (2008: 83):

> Much has been written about whether nonstandard work is marginalizing or liberating. The research reviewed above suggests a more complicated reality, whereby even the most 'boundaryless' independent contractors face economic pressures and worry about future income (Evans, Kunda, & Barley, 2004). It is time for research to focus on how to manage the complexities of personal responsibility for career, how the agency (e.g. the capacity to do otherwise; Giddens, 1984) inherent in 'free agency' is best realized, and how individuals can buffer themselves against the insecurities associated with the new world of work. The latter issue is relevant for nonstandard and standard workers alike.

Through this investigation, my aim was to reveal this "more complicated reality" which scholars before me have, in my opinion, successfully accomplished. More specifically, this project identified the need for additional research into the institutional support, in terms of socio-emotional and career counseling services, financial and material resources, and enterpreneurial skills, that is available to individuals and necessary to make boundaryless and other "new career" types successful (Zeitz, Blau, & Fertig, 2009). By analyzing one particular institution—the professional community of coaching—and the type of assistance offered to its members in order to craft a viable professional identity, I discovered that its intervention often *creates* more anxiety and greater demands for identity working on the part of individual coach. Because of coaching's precarious status as a profession, coaches are expected to perform *not only* individual identity work to establish themselves as legitimate professionals, *but also*

professional identity work to establish coaching as a credible service. The latter is necessary due to the historical lack of general knowledge among the public about what coaching is, but increasingly, due to negative images and false information produced by pop culture parodies of this rapidly growing occupation. Thus, far from being a source of support, the coaching industry's professional organizations and bodies—perhaps unintentionally, but nevertheless—add to the everyday work and overall burden of what it means to be a self-employed coach.

I believe that these insights can be generalized beyond the world of coaching to other work contexts that promote the various models of "new careers." That is, since self-employment is growing among white-collar service professionals and this growth is predicted to continue, the issues identified in this study may characterize the future conditions and expectations for countless workers.

Revisiting (and Re-envisioning?) The "New World of Work"

I would like to conclude by revisiting the opening vignette of Chapter One, taken from *Time Magazine's* May 2009 cover:

> Throw away the briefcase: you're not going to the **office**. You can kiss your **benefits** goodbye too. And your **new boss** won't look like your old one. There's no longer a ladder, and you may **never get to retire**, but there's a world of **opportunity** if you figure out a new path. **Ten lessons** for succeeding in the **new American workplace.**
>
> *Time Magazine*, 2009, emphasis in original

As I read the above excerpt now, as this project draws to a close, its tone seems less exciting, more ominous than it once did. As well, a phrase stands out to me that had not before: "if you figure out a new path." The assumption is laid bare: the onus is on the individual worker to "figure out" what needs to be done; any guidance and assistance in

navigating new career paths (perhaps with the exception of such *Time* features), should not be expected. This idea is precisely what I witnessed among my informants—workers trying to "figure out" the new world of work and their place in it. What's more, the "if" is a subtle but clear warning of possible failure; that is, the "world of opportunity" will only be available to those who manage to "figure out" the new path.

I like to imagine that *Time* has decided to produce a follow-up to this cover story, more than three years on, and I've been asked to contribute some stories to the new issue. Reflecting on the findings of this study, what might those titles be? What have I learned? What sort of advice would I offer today's worker regarding the "new American workplace"? The immediate ideas that come to mind include things like: "What's your Tag-line?"; "Making Your Identity (Work) Work for You"; "Getting Aggressive with Passive Income Streams." In other words, I can only think of revised titles that carry the same old message: more pieces of advice, more coping methods, more "how-tos" for dealing with all the burdens placed on today's worker. The bigger challenge, I believe, lies in questioning the structure of the current world of work, and reimagining it in ways that actually benefit the individual worker. And while I don't have any solutions (yet), I am committed to taking up this challenge. Thus, we must continue to rethink, redefine, and re-envision the "new" "new world of work."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT MINI-BIOS

(All informants and participants, in alphabetical order)

ABIGAIL[13]
(Female Interviewee, mid 60s[14]*, Local Coaching Organization Member)*

Abigail was employed for years as a careers counselor at a liberal arts college, and was first introduced to coaching by the director in the careers center where she worked. The center was eventually downsized and, not yet ready to retire, Abigail began career coaching and training independently on a full time basis. She has a special focus on Baby Boomers who, like herself, are making career transitions at this stage in their lives.

ARTURO
(Male Interviewee, mid 30s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Arturo, a spiritual and life coach, had recently moved into the area when I first met him. In addition to coaching, he employs a variety of modalities in his work, which includes healing through music, breathwork, and living mindfully. When I interviewed Arturo in 2010, he recently launched a spiritual healing center, which offered workshops, ongoing classes, and guest speakers. In May 2011, Arturo sent an email to members of the local coaching organization, announcing that the center was for sale.

BECKY
(Female Interviewee, 50, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Before Becky got into business coaching, she was self-employed as a graphic designer for 20 years. Initially, her coaching niche had been lawyers, but in 2009 she connected with a company that markets coaching services to organizations internationally. Becky now works closely with this company—they send her potential clients, take care of marketing, and offer her training, and in return, she pays them a percentage of her intake. A couple weeks after our interview, Becky was named "Business Woman of the Year" by a local organization promoting women in business.

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[13]All names have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality. During interviews, informants chose their own pseudonyms. In the case of the online discussants, I assigned their aliases.

[14]Age at time of interview. An exact number indicates the informant specified their age; otherwise it is an estimated age range, based on my interactions and conversations with the individual.

BYRD
(Female Interviewee, 50)

I knew Byrd through personal contacts when I approached her to participate in my research project. She came to coaching via her work as a clinical therapist focusing on trauma, with a view to getting away from the negativity and violence of this work, which was having an impact on her personally. Byrd can be described as a "portfolio worker" since she lists training, facilitation, dance and movement therapy, and counseling among the other services she offers. In early 2011, she returned to organizational employment as a counselor at an educational institution.

CELADORA
(Female Interviewee, 66, Local Coaching Organization Member)

When I met Celadora through the local coaching organization, she was transitioning from career and life coaching, to life legacy letter writing services (sometimes referred to as ethical wills). She had worked in organizational employment in HR, career counseling, and training roles, but entered coaching full time when she was laid off from her position. During our interview, Celadora shared insights into the coaching world; having moved on from the profession, she was perhaps able to view it with a more critical eye than some other informants.

DAISY
(Female Interviewee, 60, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Daisy was one of the first people I connected with when I joined the local coaching organization. She specializes in what she calls "Life Celebration Coaching", where the focus is working with families (and primarily mothers) to create healthy celebratory rituals and practices. Though she does not have formal certification (which I sensed was a possible source of discomfort), Daisy has done extensive reading and self study, and participated in many trainings and workshops to become very knowledgeable and confident in her area of focus.

DANA
(Female Interviewee, mid 40s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Dana spent time doing a variety of work, including an early stint right after university in government lobbying, before eventually finding her footing as a coach. She has always been interested in her own personal growth and self-development, and discovered this was something she could help others pursue through coaching. Dana also offers personal organizing and decluttering services, which she believes is a good complement to her coaching work.

DANIELLE
(Female Interviewee, mid 40s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Danielle joined the local coaching organization about a year into my fieldwork, and has since become a very active member, assuming a leadership role. She had worked previously in both organizational employment and as a consultant on business and marketing issues. As she became more interested in the coaching aspect of her work, she undertook training and became certified. Danielle is now only self-employed, and after seeing a growing demand, has narrowed her niche to work mainly with other coaches, particularly on their business and marketing strategies.

DAVID
(Male Interviewee, early 60s)

David is a "Performance Coach" who was referred to me by another informant. Since he lives on the West Coast, we conducted our interview by phone. David has had quite an unconventional path into coaching—he was previously a professional race car driver. However, through his work with other drivers to prepare them for competition, David found he could transfer these coaching principles, skills, and techniques to other high performance contexts, like leadership and business.

GLORIA
(Female Online Discussant)

Gloria is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

HENRY
(Male Online Discussant)

Henry is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

HOPE
(Female Interviewee, 35)

I met Hope when she attended a couple of the local coaching organization public presentations. She set out with career aspirations in academia, and soon noticed she was regularly coaching her colleagues and students informally on diversity issues. After some careful consideration, Hope decided to switch her field of study to pursue a PhD in Social Justice Education. She now runs her own business, which offers consulting, coaching, training, and facilitation services around diversity and inclusion concerns.

JACK
(Male Online Discussant)

Jack is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

JAMES
(Male Interviewee, mid 40s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Although I had never encountered James at any of the meetings of the local coaching organization, I had heard about him through the other members. Self-employed for about eight years, James is a Sales and Marketing Coach who specializes in Guerilla Marketing techniques. He had worked in his family business before getting into pursuing a career in coaching. Our interview was relatively brief and conducted over the phone, as he was driving to a meeting.

JEFF
(Male Interviewee, late 50s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Jeff has had a rich and varied career path, starting out as an engineer in the oil industry, and later, as a banking executive. Deciding that he preferred the "people side" of work, he moved into organizational development after receiving an MBA at prestigious business school. Jeff has been self-employed for the last 15 years, as both owner of a coaching business, and as one half of a consulting partnership. Jeff specializes in business, organizational, and executive coaching, as well as career transition coaching, where he draws upon his own work experience to assist clients with their career goals.

JONAH
(Male Interviewee, early 50s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

When I interviewed Jonah, he had recently moved away from coaching as full time employment, to coaching as part time and occasional work to supplement his position as a high school teacher. With a background in law, Jonah used this expert knowledge and contextual appreciation to focus his coaching niche on lawyers. As well, Jonah has been a coach trainer and mentor for a major coaching certification program, where he instructs via phone and through webinars.

KATHY
(Female Interviewee, early 70s)

Kathy was referred to me by another informant who had worked with her in an organizational setting. She holds a doctorate in counseling psychology, with a focus on organizational development and leadership. For years, she held a directorship position in the careers center of a liberal arts college, but always had multiple "sidecar" interests—for instance, writing, consulting, and coaching on career issues. Recognizing the growing trend toward self-employment and drawing upon her own experience, Kathy penned a how-to book on the world of free agency in 2001. She is now retired from the college, but still offers coaching part-time on matters of self-employment.

LIZ
(Female Interviewee,59, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Liz holds a Masters degree in Education, and has worked with people in a developmental capacity for most of her career. She has been employed in a variety of positions (i.e. manager, trainer, counselor) within different organizational contexts (i.e. public, private and non-profit). Wanting to assist people with their career issues, Liz set up a part-time coaching and counseling business, while still employed. However, after being laid off in 2007, Liz became entirely self-employed, adding contractual training to her coaching services.

LORETTA
(Female Interviewee, mid 50s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

I met Loretta in the monthly meetings of the local coaching organization. Trained and previously employed as a nurse-practitioner, Loretta brings this specialized knowledge to her role as a Health and Wellness Coach, which she has been doing on and off for the last eight years. She sometimes teaches nursing courses at an educational institution to supplement her coaching income.

LUKE
(Male Interviewee, late 40s)

I was referred to Luke by an informant who had attended his coaching training school. Luke was an executive in a manufacturing firm when he was first introduced to coaching, as a client. He became fascinated with the coaching process and decided to undergo the training himself. Luke quickly realized the growth potential of coaching, however, and consequently ventured into the business side, establishing a licensed training school and executive coaching service center about five years ago.

MARY
(Female Interviewee, 50)

I met Mary as a fellow university student, and later learned that she earns a living from coaching, among a multitude of other services, like training, facilitation, counseling. Mary has a background in clinical psychology, and for years practiced as a therapist, but then moved into self-employment about 10 years ago. She focuses mainly in the areas of leadership, organizational, life, and relationship coaching.

MAUREEN
(Female Interviewee, mid 60s, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Maureen, a Writing, Career, and Life Coach, started out as psychotherapist and licensed social worker. Through various workshops and her own investigation, Maureen became interested in the coaching philosophy and approach, striving to incorporate it into her clinical practice. She eventually became certified as a coach, and transitioned to this as her sole employment. Having also lectured for a social work degree program, Maureen recognized the struggles that students were experiencing with their writing projects, and chose to serve this demand through her coaching work.

NED
(Male Online Discussant)
Ned is a small business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions. He is an executive coach, establishing his own business in 1999, which targets lawyers, and also works part-time as a certified professional mediator. Before getting into coaching, Ned had a private practice as a psychologist. I met Ned when I joined the online discussion group, and exchanged a few emails with him after the particular discussion included in Chapter Seven.

REGGIE
(Male Online Discussant)

Reggie is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

ROSALYN
(Female Interviewee, 29, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Rosalyn was one of the youngest coaches I interviewed, and had only been in business as a coach for three months, at the time of our interview. We met when she attended one of the local alliance meetings. She had previously worked in marketing and sales, and recruitment, but felt frustrated that her employer was ignoring her ideas, and quickly decided she wanted to do her own thing. Rosalyn has written a book and regularly blogs about careers, entrepreneurship, and personal branding.

ROSE
(Female Interviewee, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Rose's decision to pursue coaching coincided with a cross-country relocation, to be closer to her grandchildren. Previously, she enjoyed a career in the non-profit sector, and had worked as an executive with several organizations over a 20 year period. She brings her this expertise to her coaching work, focusing on individuals in the non-profit sector. I met Rose through the local alliance.

SASCHA
(Female Interviewee, Local Coaching Organization Member)

Sascha is one of the only informants I approached without knowing through the coaching organization or another informant. She worked as a clinical psychologist and family therapist for about 10 years, before becoming a coach. Sascha had first been exposed to coaching through a required continuous education workshop as a therapist. However, she decided to pursue certification, as she found coaching to be a better fit with her personal philosophy and approach to assisting clients than her therapy training. When I first met and interviewed Sascha, she was coaching from a home office, but has now relocated to rented space in an office building.

SANDRA
(Female Online Discussant)

Sandra is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

TOM
(Male Online Discussant)

Tom is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

WILL
(Male Online Discussant)

Will is a business coach who is a member of the online business coaching social networking group, and participates in their discussions.

APPENDIX B

COACHING SPECIALIZATIONS OF INTERVIEW INFORMANTS

Informant	Coaching Specializations																				Other Services				
	Art & Music	Branding	Business	Careers	Celebration	Diversity	EQ (Emotional Intelligence)	Executives	Family	Health & Wellness	Lawyers	Leadership	Life	Marketing	Non-Profits	Performance	Relationships	Sales	Spirituality	Writing	Legacy Letters	Organizing	Résumés	Therapy	Training
Abigail				✓																			✓		✓
Arturo	✓																		✓						
Becky			✓								✓			✓				✓							
Byrd	✓								✓			✓					✓							✓	
Celadora				✓									✓								✓				
Daisy					✓				✓				✓												
Dana													✓									✓			
Danielle		✓	✓											✓											
David								✓				✓				✓									
Hope				✓		✓						✓													
James														✓				✓							
Jeff			✓					✓					✓												
Jonah											✓														✓
Kathy			✓	✓		✓		✓				✓											✓		✓
Liz				✓																			✓		✓
Loretta										✓			✓												
Luke							✓	✓				✓													✓
Mary	✓								✓			✓					✓							✓	
Maureen				✓									✓							✓				✓	
Rosalyn		✓		✓																					
Rose								✓				✓			✓										
Sascha				✓					✓				✓												

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR RECORDED INTERVIEW

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Topic	Dissertation Research on Personal Coaching
Researcher	Sinéad G. Ruane, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Telephone	413-687-9205
Email	sgruane@som.umass.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The person in charge of this research will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without penalty. You can stop your participation at any time and your refusal will not impact current or future relationships with any university. To do so, simply tell the Researcher you wish to stop participation. The Researcher will provide you with a copy of this consent form for your records.

Purpose of the Study

- Is to explore the coaching profession and those who engage in coaching.

Participation in the Study

- If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by the Researcher regarding your life as a coach and your coaching experiences. You may refrain from answering any of the individual interview questions at any time.

Estimated Time Commitment

- Each interview may take anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes. This is largely dependent on the responses that you, as a participant, wish to provide.

Risks of Being in the Study

- This interview may involve risks that are currently unforeseeable. If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now, or contact the Researcher (details listed above) at any time in the future.

Confidentiality and Privacy Protections

- The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

- The records of this study will be stored securely and kept confidential. All publications will exclude any information that will make it possible to identify you as a participant. Throughout the study, the Researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

Contacts and Questions

- If you have any questions about the study please ask them now. If you have questions later, want additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation from the study, please contact the Researcher conducting the study. Her name, phone number, and e-mail address are at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, complaints, concerns, or questions in general about the research process, contact **Tony Butterfield**, Chair of the Isenberg School of Management Human Subjects Review Committee, at **413-545-5678** or by email: **dabutter@mgmt.umass.edu**.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above form and have sufficient information to make a decision about taking part in this study. I, _____, give my consent voluntarily to participate in this research study .
(Please print name)

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Revised January 2010

A research study's interview protocol should be closely linked to its primary research questions. I therefore endeavored to establish a strong and clear connection between the kind and flow of questions asked—that is, the topics pursued through interviewing—and the project's research-orienting questions—the areas to which this investigation is intended to contribute.

In particular, for this study, the interview procedure entails:

a. Probing questions which can get to matters of work and self-employment

b. Using observational data (meetings, presentations, etc.), as "entry points" for asking questions about the business concerns discussed by coaches (i.e. marketing, how to build a business, retaining clients, setting prices, etc.)

The individual interviews will formalize data production, which has already been taking place through participant observation, informal conversations, and interactions, in a more structured setting. The interviews will help to establish informants' personal stories about how they got into the field of coaching, focusing on the following areas:

Professional and personal background – narrative form
Some content about coaching and the profession
Individual understanding of one's identity as coach – what they do

The interviews will be semi-structured in order to steer the conversation to certain topics, but I do intend to shift from asking fairly direct and open questions, to more

probing and clarifying questions. Here are some of the types of questions I will use to structure the conversation initially:

1. How long have you been coaching?
2. What kinds of services or areas of coaching do you offer?
3. What is your client profile? (ex. individuals, organizations, groups, etc.)
4. What were you doing (professionally) before you became a coach?
5. What kind of knowledge/skills do you bring to your coaching?
6. Tell me about how you got into coaching.
7. How would you describe yourself as a coach?
8. What is your coaching philosophy?
9. What do you like about being a coach?
10. Are there things you miss/do not enjoy about coaching?
11. What are your future plans for your coaching practice?

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