

Seeking Purity, Avoiding Pollution: Strategies for Moral Career Building

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Abstract. This study builds theory on how people construct moral careers. Analyzing interviews with 102 journalists, we show how people build moral careers by seeking jobs that allow them to fulfill both the institution's moral obligations and their own material aims. We theorize a process model that traces three common moral claiming strategies that people use over time: conventional, supplemental, and reoriented. Using these strategies, people accept or alter purity and pollution rules, identify appropriate jobs, and orient themselves to specific audiences for validation of their moral claims. People's careers are punctuated by reckonings that cause them to reconsider how their strategies fulfill their moral and material aims. Experiences of gender and racial discrimination, access to alternate occupational identities, and timing of entry into the occupation also shape people's movement between strategies. Over time, people combine these moral claiming strategies in different ways such that varying moral careers emerge within the same occupation. Overall, our study shows how people can build moral careers by actively revising purity and pollution rules while holding fast to institutional moral obligations. By theorizing careers as an ongoing series of moral claiming strategies, this research contributes novel ideas about how morals weave through and organize relationships between people, careers, and institutions.

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How do people construct careers they regard as moral? Pursuing morality in one's work is an age-old yet persistent problem (e.g., Plato, see Moore et al. 2007); autobiographies from fields as diverse as finance, politics, and music attest to people's deep desires to build moral careers (Lewis 1989, Richards and Fox 2010, Power 2019, Obama 2020). Scholars have long recognized morality as a central aim for people making their way in work institutions and organizations (e.g., Weber 1958, Durkheim 1973). The early careers scholar, Everett Hughes, noted that "work ... is, in all human societies, an object of moral rule ..." (Hughes 1951, p. 327) and theorized morality as core to people's careers in institutions and organizations. Yet, a broad body of work on organizations, institutions, and morality reveals that the pursuit of morality is not straightforward (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013); people and collectives must negotiate moral aims alongside other, sometimes competing, aims, including status, authority, and material concerns (Zelizer 1978, Abbott 1983, Jackall 1988, Anteby 2010, Huising 2015). The consequent ubiquity of moral dilemmas and need for moral judgments in organizations and institutions (e.g., Anteby 2008, Pratt

et al. 2019) suggests that moral challenges are likely to shape people's career building as well.

The rich literature on careers traces the challenges of building careers in and around institutions (for reviews, see Barley 1989, Dokko et al. 2019). This work reveals that knitting personal aims (e.g., Schein 1996, Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas 2011) together with institutionally endorsed scripts, roles, obligations, and demands (e.g., Van Maanen and Schein 1979, Barley 1986), can be highly demanding and requires active work (e.g., Ibarra 1999, O'Mahony and Bechky 2006). Though this research is wide-ranging in scope, scholars' early observations of the critical role of morals in careers (e.g., Hughes 1951) has largely receded from focus (e.g., Hall and Chandler 2005). Thus, particular questions about moral careers, such as the guidance people receive from institutions and organizations about which jobs are deemed moral, how they navigate moral quandaries as they advance in their careers, and how they marry moral aims with their other personal aims remain important and pressing questions for organizational scholars.

We develop theory about how people construct moral careers through a qualitative study of journalists' careers. Building on the definition of morals as the

behaviors, actions, and associations that a given community deems as right or wrong (Manning and Anteby 2016), we define moral career building as the process by which people construct a sequence of jobs and roles that they view as right in relation to their work institutions. To guide our theorizing about the role and dynamics of morality in people's career building, we turned to research on people's pursuit of moral aims in institutions. This work shows that communities both offer members and require their adherence to a set of moral values and principles (Abbott 1988, Jackall 1988, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). However, the moral and social order are often intertwined in ways that can require people and collectives to make trade-offs between moral and other, more material aims (Zelizer 1978, Anteby 2010, Beunza 2019). To understand how people navigate their moral and social order as they build careers, we draw particularly on Douglas's (1966) ideas about purity and pollution: a complex, socially negotiated architecture of rules that guide people's behavior by separating tasks, activities, and groups into more and less pure and polluted.

We find that people build moral careers by using what we call *moral claiming strategies* to knit together moral and material aims in the jobs they seek and take. We build a process model that traces three specific moral claiming strategies (conventional, supplemental, and reoriented), each composed of distinct purity and pollution rules that define appropriate jobs and audiences to which people turn for moral validation. People's moral career building is punctuated by reckonings: transformational, individual experiences by which they came to view their current moral claiming strategy as unable to allow them to meet their moral and material aims while building a career in their institutional landscape. Crucially, these reckonings cause people to move between moral claiming strategies as they seek to meet moral and material aims. We show how some individual characteristics, including cohort, gender, race, and access to alternate identities, loosen people's attachment to certain strategies, and identify some emergent patterns of strategies used in moral careers. Together, these findings advance theory on careers by revealing how morals weave together individual choices, institutions, and careers and introducing the function of reckonings to people's building of moral careers. We also advance theory on morals and work institutions by showing how people actively revise purity and pollution rules while holding fast to institutional moral obligations that act as persistent guides for their careers.

Morals in People's Careers People's Career Construction in Institutions

The study of careers—the “patterned series of adjustments made by the individual to the ‘network of

institutions, formal organizations, and informal relationships’ in which the work of the occupation is performed” (Becker 1952, p. 470)—is rooted in the mid-20th century Chicago School of Sociology (Barley 1989). As this definition suggests, institution members' careers are constructed through a sequence of moves across a system of related positions within organizations along a series of different stages (Hughes 1958, Barley 1989). These careers are, in turn, embedded in other aspects of the institutional environment, such as occupations, families, and community associations.

Early writers on work, institutions, and careers viewed morality—the behaviors, choices, associations, and relationships that a given community defines as right (Durkheim 1973, Manning and Anteby 2016)—as an essential component of the relationship between people, careers, and institutions (Moore et al. 2007). Hughes (1958) theorizes morals as critical to people's movement into offices and roles and analyzes how the division of labor separated people into occupations with distinct personalities and sets of morals. For instance, he notes that “the division of labor among lawyers is... a moral division of labor” (p. 71). Weber (1958) also viewed morals as important to careers; he theorized the callings that some experience in explicitly moral terms, positioning them as “the divine inspiration to do morally responsible work” (Hall and Chandler 2005, p. 160). Despite this early scholarly recognition of the importance of morals, the study of morals in careers has receded: a recent interdisciplinary review of career studies did not find morals to be a theme of research (Dokko et al. 2019).

While recent careers scholarship has not explicitly studied morality, it does offer important insights that provide theoretical grounding for this study: first, people bring a range of personal aims to their careers; second, institutions provide members with career guidance; third, people engage in active work to marry personal aims to institutional prescriptions; and fourth, people's career actions can alter institutions.

Personal Aims for Careers. An important driver of people's career construction rests in their personal aims for their careers. One stream of literature examines how people's career building is shaped by the pursuit of personal aims and aspirations, such as the desire for security, autonomy, technical competence, and dedication to a cause (Schein 1996). Desires to enact cherished values (Obodaru 2017); fulfill other life roles (Ladge et al. 2012); earn a good income (Nelsen and Barley 1997, Leana and Meuris 2015); and achieve material aims, such as career advancement, wage security, and financial success (London 1983, Cooper 2014, Bowles et al. 2019), are also important motivators for people's careers. For some, experiences of callings also offer important guidance (Bellah et al. 1996,

Wrzesniewski et al. 1997, Dobrow Riza and Heller 2015). Despite Weber's (1958) initial definition of callings in moral terms, over time, callings have come to be defined in more personal ways (Hall and Chandler 2005) that are less institutionally embedded, for instance, as the "consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain" (Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas 2011, p. 1003). These different personal motivations can vary in their importance to people and be more or less important in different contexts.

Institutions Shaping Careers. Careers are not purely individual pursuits, but are pursued in relation to the social order of the institutions in which they unfold. An institutionally embedded perspective on career-building examines how institutions offer members means for building careers, including scripts for how these careers can unfold (Hughes 1958, Barley, 1989, Dokko et al. 2019). These scripts provide members with shared understandings, including interpretive schemes, resources, and norms, regarding how their careers should unfold as they advance through roles over time (Barley 1989). These scripts can be magnetic in their draw, and people strive to construct careers that follow these scripts; deviations, such as staying for too long in a particular job, can be challenging for people (Faulkner 1973).

In addition to information about appropriate sequences of roles the scripts that institutions offer members are infused with specific norms and values (e.g., Jones et al. 2012, Fayard et al. 2017). For example, professions have promotion models that people transform into scripts that guide their career decisions; in academia, these scripts are infused by the value the profession places on research versus management (e.g., local manager) (Dany et al. 2011). People adapt themselves to institutions, following scripts and internalizing the shared norms and rules of conduct that are imparted through socialization processes (Van Maanen 1973, Ashford and Nurmohamed 2012). However, these norms can sometimes require members to make difficult choices, including accepting financial, emotional, or physical sacrifices (Bunderson and Thompson 2009, Michel 2011). For example, Becker's (1963) study of dance musicians reveals how artists navigated tensions between the pursuit of artistic aims and commercial aims and the implications for their careers.

Claiming membership and building successful careers in institutions requires gaining acceptance and validation from other institutional members (Lepisto et al. 2015). For example, in the mid-20th century, Hall (1948) described three socially recognized career paths for physicians that varied based on their orientation to different audiences: their patients, fellow doctors, and hospitals. The process of gaining validation is vividly illustrated in a recent study of comedians' careers,

which found that new comics' claims on occupation membership are affirmed by a "clique of comedy buddies" (Reilly 2017, p. 152; see also Becker 1963).

Yet career progress along institutional pathways and acceptance and validation from other institutional members is not equally easy for all to achieve; scholarship on diversity and inclusion reminds us that those who do not fit a role's demographic prototype tend to occupy peripheral social positions and experience unique career-building challenges (Ashcraft 2013, Rivera 2015). In male-dominated professions, such as law and consulting, women struggle to be recognized as valid members and to build strong ties and experience discrimination (e.g., Ibarra 1992, Padavic et al. 2019). In white-dominated fields, such as journalism, racial minorities are not easily accepted by key audiences, including colleagues and the public (Cha and Roberts 2019). Research suggests that those who differ demographically from the prototypical member often develop advancement strategies that differ from prescribed career-building practices to cope with these challenges (Thomas and Gabarro 1999, Bowles 2012, Smith et al. 2019).

Individual Adaptations Within Institutions. Neither pursuing personal aims nor adapting to institutional scripts is straightforward; rather, people work actively to merge these in their careers by modifying their selves, jobs, and institutions. For example, people personalize institutional role identities, adapting their selves over time (Ibarra 1999, Pratt et al. 2006, Petriglieri et al. 2018). People also revise or craft aspects of their job to pursue career aims, for instance, by altering the task, relational, and cognitive boundaries of their work (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003, Berg et al. 2010), or stretch to take on new kinds of work to facilitate advancement (O'Mahony and Bechky 2006). People may also modify available institutional career scripts, as traced delicately in a study of public sector research scientists who sometimes built careers to suit their specific personal aims (Duberley et al. 2006).

Careers Shaping Institutions. As such agentic career actions by individuals accumulate, institutions can evolve and transform (Kraatz and Moore 2002, Jones and Dunn 2007). This is richly examined in Nigam and Dokko's (2019) study of the emergence of the health research profession, which explains how people's engagement in career resourcing or the generation of assets (stature, knowledge, material, and community) can aggregate to important institutional-level outcomes, including the emergence of a new profession.

Moral Dynamics in Institutions Surrounding Work
With this view of careers as negotiated by the individual in relation to personal aims, institutional scripts, and audiences, we turn to research on morals and

institutions (Hitlin and Vaisey 2013) to further guide our theorizing about the role and dynamics of morality in people's career building. This work reveals that people's pursuit of moral aims in institutions are shaped by first, an architecture of purity and pollution rules that undergird the moral and social order (Douglas 1966); second, the specific moral obligations offered by work institutions (Abbott 1988); and third, the negotiations or trade-offs they make as they simultaneously pursue other, sometimes conflicting, aims (Zelizer 1978, Beunza 2019). Taken together, this work suggests that people's moral career building is likely to be informed by their institutional contexts, particularly purity and pollution rules and moral obligations, but that they can also act agentially, changing their context to pursue moral aims.

Purity, Pollution, and Morality in Social Systems.

Douglas' (1966) theory of the dynamics of purity and pollution in social systems provides a crucial lens on how communities and institutions guide people's behavior. Drawing from analyses of a diverse set of communities, including Brahmins in India and the Nuer in Sudan, Douglas (1966) argues that an architecture of purity and pollution rules—agreed-upon prescriptions for behavior, social interaction, and treatment of objects—maintain the social order and also relate to a moral order in complex ways. Purity rules refer to shared ideas about the categories of behaviors, objects, and associations that are socially desirable; pollution rules refer to those that are “out of place.” For example, shoes are “not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining table” (Douglas 1966, p. 37). Purity and pollution are sometimes, but not always, opposites; the absence of purity does not always necessitate pollution. Some objects and actions are deemed pure, and a different set may be defined as polluted. For example, scientists often designate one set of institutional associations—universities—as pure and a different set—industry—as polluting (Swedlow 2007). Douglas (1966) argues that shared beliefs about purity and pollution help maintain a social order by directing people toward socially sanctioned paths and away from undesirable ones. For example, members of Tamil Brahmin castes traditionally maintained their claim on higher social status by following strict purity and pollution rules regarding interactions between themselves and other castes, including not eating or socializing with members of other castes.

Purity and morality are related but distinct concepts, and both are important to upholding the social order. Some pollution rules correspond clearly to the group's social order and touch its moral code less obviously. For instance, in some Hindu communities, a lower status caste member who follows pollution

rules and maintains the social order by keeping separate from higher status caste members may be seen as fulfilling a moral duty according to some religious texts, and one who disrupts the social order may be seen as both polluting and immoral. Other pollution rules relate more clearly to the group's moral code. In governments, formal ethical rules, such as the U.S. House of Representatives' Standards of Official Conduct, act as guidelines that help elected officials and their staff keep separate public duties from private lives; to mix these is potentially corrupting and, hence, polluting (Bratsis 2003). By following their community's set of purity and pollution rules over time, people both contribute to the maintenance of the social order and assure themselves a continued claim on morality.

Morality and Purity in Work Institutions. Work institutions, including organizations and occupations, guide members' moral pursuits by offering members moral obligations (e.g., Abbott 1988, Jackall 1988). In occupations and professions, moral obligations are encoded within the occupation's mandate: its socially conferred right to perform tasks and define its proper conduct, including its values, beliefs, and ways of thinking (Hughes 1958, Nelsen and Barley 1997, Fayard et al. 2017). For instance, many professions claim a moral obligation to serve society (Goode 1957): lawyers claim to serve justice (Abbott 1983), journalists claim to objectively report the truth to the public (Christin 2018, Chong 2019). Work institutions also associate purity and pollution with certain tasks and work; Hughes (1962) describes how some occupations are designated “dirty” because of their physical, social, or moral taint (e.g., sex work, Ruebottom and Toubiana 2021; see also Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). As with social systems more broadly, morality, purity, and social order are distinct but related in work institutions. For instance, professionals pursue status by designating abstract technical expertise as more “pure” than work involving public engagement, which ironically can be construed as more directly fulfilling the profession's moral obligation regarding public service (Abbott 1983). Thus, pro bono legal work may directly fulfill the profession's moral code but may be designated as less “pure” and lower status (p. 871).

Negotiating Morality and Purity Alongside Other Aims.

A difficulty inherent in pursuing morality and purity in work institutions pertains to the need to simultaneously pursue other, sometimes conflicting institutional aims, such as status, legitimacy, survival, growth, or profit. Simultaneously pursuing these different aims can lead to unanticipated outcomes, difficult trade-offs, or strategic mobilization of one in service of another. Regarding the pursuit of morality, for example, Beunza's (2019) study of financial trading shows how banks' adoption of

complex economic models in the pursuit of profit induced moral disengagement among traders. Regarding the pursuit of purity, for example, Anteby (2010) describes how academic centers dealing in cadavers maintained their legitimacy by distinguishing themselves from commercial providers using geographic separation, humanizing work practices, and avoiding polluting practices. Other work points similarly to strategic separations from polluting associations in service of moral claims (e.g., public interest scientists, Moore 1996). Though moral and material aims are often positioned as opposing, moral claims can be used strategically to advance material aims, such as profit and growth. Zelizer's (1978) study of the life insurance industry reveals how the relationship between the moral and the material may become more aligned over time. Though the public initially viewed life insurance as profane, believing that its purchase "threatened the sanctity of life by pricing it," her analysis shows that the industry transformed these negative associations by presenting life insurance as a way of protecting one's family such that purchasing life insurance came to be viewed as a moral act (Zelizer 1978, p. 605).

These complex intertwinements between moral and other aims occur at the individual level as well; studies reveal how people engage skillfully with the moral and social order and designations of purity and pollution as they make their way in institutions. Regarding the pursuit of morality, a study of EMTs revealed how those who volunteered in this role used their moral authority as volunteers to assert control over their patients (Nelsen and Barley 1997). Among firefighters, leaps of faith are made possible in part by the use of shared moral codes to "distinguish... between good and bad firefighters" (Pratt et al. 2019, p. 415). Regarding the pursuit of purity and pollution, Huisig (2015) found that professionals in research laboratories deliberately take on low-status "scut" work to maintain authority over other groups. Other studies suggest that when morality is misaligned with conduct rules, people can break these rules, hanging on to morality as an end in itself (Manning and Anteby 2016). For instance, Heimer and Staffen (1998), in their study of neo-natal intensive care units, observed that, when parents find themselves in unanticipated situations, they break the medical community's rules and expectations in service of acting in a morally responsible fashion.

Given that purity and pollution rules, moral obligations, and the need to navigate these alongside other aims matter so deeply to how people engage with their work and work toward complex institutional and individual aims, it seems plain that morals must matter for how they build their careers in institutions as well. To better understand this process, we embarked on a qualitative, inductive study

of how journalists construct careers that they regard as moral.

Methods

Research Context: The Occupation of Journalism in the United States

Journalism emerged in the United States in the 1700s and has evolved since then (Daly 2012). The stability and quality of employment in journalism has ebbed and flowed over the years. Employment in the 19th and early 20th centuries was precarious: jobs were hard to come by, easy to lose, and paid so little that journalists typically required another source of income (Gollmitzer 2019). In the latter part of the 20th century, a "golden age" in the news business emerged, and the occupation's moral obligations—centered on reporting objective facts to the public—crystallized during this time period (Chong 2019). Growth in the number and reach of newspapers and radio and television news outlets alongside the growth of unions, associations, and training programs (Gollmitzer 2019) enabled the emergence of somewhat predictable careers, wherein members progressed from college news outlets to small, local outlets to larger news organizations and, for some, editorial roles (e.g., Raghavendran 2018).

The emergence of the internet in the early 2000s altered the conventional news industry (see Daly 2012). The internet opened the doors of reporting and commentary to the public such that people not employed by traditional news outlets could offer their own analysis and reporting through blogs, new digital-only news outlets, and social media applications. Print circulation declined, and page views and digital circulation rose (Pew Research Center 2018); measuring online traffic has become a priority at many outlets (e.g., Christin 2018). The internet also altered business models: in addition to reducing print circulation, it also enabled direct-person selling (e.g., Craigslist), decimating newspapers' revenues from classifieds (Daly 2012). Though some traditional outlets have instituted new forms of paid-access models, encouraging people to purchase access has been difficult (e.g., Weisberg 2014). These transformations in journalism's institutional environment prompted widespread layoffs and reductions in the number of traditional jobs but have also created new kinds of jobs. Forty-five percent of newspaper jobs and 27% of radio broadcasting jobs disappeared between 2008 and 2017 (Pew Research Center 2019), but digital-only newsroom jobs increased by 79% during that period (Greenhouse 2018). Although salaries range widely, average income in the occupation is stagnant and relatively modest; when we began data collection, in 2015, U.S. journalists' average income was \$50,970 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015).

Data

Sample Design. The first author began the study by interviewing 11 people employed in different capacities in journalism about their careers. These interviews revealed that journalism had a national job market and, further, that journalists' career experiences differed somewhat by whether they defined themselves as generalists who covered a variety of topics or specialists with a specific area of expertise. Building on these insights, a national U.S. sample that included both generalists and specialists was constructed by including an invitation to the study in the newsletters of two associations: a professional society of journalists and a professional society of environmental journalists. The sample was further expanded through snowball sampling, asking participants to suggest one or two people whose insights might be useful. Through these avenues, the first author and a graduate research assistant interviewed an additional 85 journalists. To bolster the representation of racial minorities, we also advertised the study through a society for journalists who were members of marginalized demographic groups; through this, we added an additional eight participants. Altogether, we gathered interviews with 104 journalists. Two participants were later dropped from the analyses: one who was more than 80 years old and another who never worked in the United States. This left 102 participants in the sample.

Interview Procedures. Interviews followed a life history approach commonly used in careers research (e.g., Gerson 1985), beginning with questions about participants' postsecondary education and continuing through each of their jobs (see appendix). Although life history interviews are necessarily retrospective and people may not recall or report all reasons for particular decisions they made, their power lies in revealing the similar meanings and categorization schemes that undergird people's lived experiences (Lamont and Swidler 2014). For this study, interview data permitted mapping of people's career paths over time as well as insight into the sense they made of their choices, experiences, and outcomes. The interviews concluded with survey-type questions about demographic information (e.g., race), education, and the previous year's income. When possible, interviews were conducted in person; because of the geographically dispersed nature of the sample, most interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted between about 40 and 70 minutes and were recorded and professionally transcribed.

Participant Characteristics. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 68 with an average age of 44. Thirty-nine were men, 63 were women. Fifteen were racial minorities. Fifty-seven participants were general assignment

reporters; 45 were science and environment reporters. Participants reported their annual incomes ranging from \$600 to more than \$100,000; 53 reported incomes in the range of \$20,000 to \$59,000. Table 1 describes participants' demographic characteristics.

Analysis

We analyzed the data according to commonly used inductive techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994, Charmaz 2006). The first author began the data analysis by writing memos and field notes while conducting interviews, tracking themes, and relating these to relevant theory. This process highlighted the importance of participants' ideas about purity and pollution in relation to their careers. Together, we read through transcripts; recoded the data, beginning with a line-by-line process in a software program; and compared patterns across participants. To further refine the analysis, we checked our emerging theory through conversations with participants, other journalists, and people who had left journalism (Miles and Huberman 1994). In what follows, we describe the specific analyses that we employed as we developed the process theory presented in this paper. Although our analysis process was not linear and involved many returns to the data as we examined new insights, it did unfold in the following general steps.

First, we noticed that a prominent theme across interviews was a desire to build a career that allowed people to satisfy the occupation's moral obligations, which they internalized as moral aims for their careers, while also earning a secure income that was sufficient for a relatively modest lifestyle, access to health benefits, and savings for retirement; we coded these as

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Total journalists	102
General assignment reporters	57
Science and environment reporters	45
Age range	22–68
Cohort	
Pre-2000	54
Post-2000	48
Gender	
Men	39
Women	63
Race	
White	87
Racial minority	15
Income	
Less than \$20,000	13
\$20,000 to \$39,000	29
\$40,000 to \$59,000	24
\$60,000 to \$80,000	11
\$80,000 to \$100,000	6
More than \$100,000	5

Note. Fourteen participants did not provide their income information.

material aims. Although journalists noted many different personal aims (e.g., work–life balance, geographic location), material aims emerged as a consistent theme across participants, who often discussed these as in tension with their moral aims. Interviews suggested that people navigated these aims in relation to each job that they held, suggesting that building theory about their construction of moral careers required investigating the jobs people sought and held. To do so, we constructed a detailed career history for each participant. To build these histories, we relied on participants' responses to specific career questions (e.g., "Can you walk me through your work history to date?") as well as instances in which participants spontaneously discussed jobs in response to other questions (e.g., "How typical is your career?"). These histories identified a wide range of jobs held, including in newspapers or magazines, public radio, television broadcasters, online news outlets, or in reporting and editorial capacities for nonnews organizations. Participants' jobs varied between full time, part time, and freelance (i.e., paid by the article). Participants sometimes worked across different platforms simultaneously, for instance, working part time at a newspaper while contributing freelance to a radio program. Many also held side gigs: jobs outside journalism entirely. Table 2 shows the total number of jobs, average number of jobs per person, and other summary information for the jobs journalists held over their careers.

Second, through repeated returns to the data, we disentangled how journalists' moral and material aims related to the jobs they held or did not hold. Participants spoke frequently about the duty they felt to report the truth to the public; we conceptualized this as evidence of shared beliefs regarding the occupation's moral obligations. This analysis also revealed that journalists systematically designated certain jobs as pure and others as polluted, according to their beliefs about the job's relationship to the occupation's moral obligations. For example, participants consistently expressed desires for jobs that would allow them to keep their "soul" "clean." They used terms such as "telling the truth" and "trying to be fair" in reference to jobs they should seek. We coded such data as evidence of purity rules. Participants used terms such as "the dark side," "lack of ethics and standards," and "needed to cleanse my soul" in reference to jobs they should avoid. We coded such data as evidence of pollution rules.

Third, to understand how journalists identified appropriate jobs for building a moral career, we examined interview data for patterns of moral concerns, purity and pollution rules, and the jobs that journalists sought and accepted across participants and within participants over time. This analysis revealed that journalists approached jobs by using three distinct

Table 2. Number and Frequency of Jobs

Total number of jobs	528
Number of jobs per person:	5 (1–15)
Average (range)	
Job duration: Average (range)	3.94 years (1 day to 38 years)
By cohort	
Pre-2000	4.94 (1 day to 38 years)
Post-2000	2.13 (3 months to 13 years)
By gender	
Male	4.03 years (3 months to 27 years)
Female	3.88 years (1 day to 38 years)
By race	
White	4.17 years (1 day to 38 years)
Minority	2.56 years (1 month to 16 years)
By access to alternative occupational identity	
Generalist assignment reporters	3.59 years (1 day to 28 years)
Science and environmentalist reporters	4.41 years (2 months to 38 years)

types of moral claiming strategies: conventional, supplemental, and reoriented. These strategies comprise purity and pollution rules, which designated acceptable and unacceptable jobs and specific audiences to which participants turned for moral validation. We conceptualized these strategies based on our analysis of the data as a whole across participants; thus, although each strategy included several codes (e.g., purity rules, audience), each specific description of a job did not include all the codes. For example, participants might describe taking a freelance job using purity rules and the occupational audience but mention no pollution rules.

Examining career building over time revealed that people sometimes repeated the same strategy across multiple jobs; for instance, people could change jobs because of layoffs but not change their moral claiming strategy as they searched for their next job. Further, participants with different moral claiming strategies viewed the same job differently. For example, freelancing was sometimes positioned as a source of income while still seeking a "pure" newspaper job, which we coded as evidence of a supplemental moral claiming strategy; freelancing was also sometimes positioned as a way to better meet journalism's moral obligations than a "polluted" traditional newspaper job, which we coded as evidence of a reoriented moral claiming strategy.

Fourth, to understand why people adopt different moral claiming strategies, we examined all cases of change in strategies. In this phase, we made comparisons both within and across individuals. This analysis revealed that people do not move between strategies in a linear way (e.g., conventional to supplemental to reoriented); rather, we observed movement between each pair of strategies (e.g., from conventional to supplemental, reoriented to supplemental, etc.). We found

that a critical impetus to shift between strategies was an experience of a reckoning with one's ability to satisfy moral or material aims in the institutional landscape using the current strategy. Comparisons across cohorts, gender, race, and alternate occupational identities revealed that these individual characteristics could also shape movement between strategies. Finally, we also explored patterns in participants' use of moral strategies; although we did not observe specific common sequences of strategies, we observed variety in the set of moral claiming strategies that people used (e.g., some only used a conventional strategy, and others used all three).

Findings

Journalists sought to build careers that fulfilled both their occupation's moral obligations as well as an important personal material aim that centered on financial security. Journalists used three distinct moral claiming strategies to accomplish these objectives: conventional, supplemental, and reoriented. Each offered different ways of combining moral and material aims, involved engaging with purity and pollution rules regarding appropriate jobs, and varied in terms of the audience to which they turned for moral validation. Journalists abandoned strategies and adopted others as they experienced reckonings. Journalists' use of strategies were also shaped by their social position in the occupation. Looking across journalists' careers reveals some common sets of strategies upon which people drew.

Moral Careers: Tying Together Institutional Moral Obligations with Material Aims

Journalism offered participants a core moral obligation: to objectively report the complete, unbiased truth to the public. Participants viewed this moral obligation as essential to society's continued functioning. One explained, "Journalism—it's an important element of democracy. It's an important element in society. It's an important element in understanding our culture, understanding ourselves, understanding what's happening in our neighborhoods and others" (P2). Said another, "We have the power to ask questions and uncover information that most other people don't. And that information presumably helps people live their lives better. And at least helps democracy run more smoothly" (P87). Participants saw a journalism career as involving fulfilling this moral obligation. One explained, "You get into this business because you want to educate people and inform people. You want to tell them what's going on. You owe that to your audience. Your audience comes to you because they want to know the truth, and no matter the platform, no matter the outlet, you owe it to them not to

give them, pardon my French, a whole bunch of bullshit. You just want to give them the truth" (P74).

Another described how the news ought to be an unbiased "picture image": "Your job isn't to make the news. Your job is to be a camera and take a picture image of what the news is and what the community is at that time" (P78). Participants embraced these moral obligations as an important aim in their careers: "I think it's tuned to my belief system of, you know, having democratic... values of "rule by the people"... And the work that I do, yeah, I think it is important to myself to see that I'm producing these things and, you know, that people are reading it" (P40).

These moral obligations had been traditionally fulfilled through an institutionally endorsed career path: one would join a small news outlet as an editorial assistant or cub reporter, and after a few years and a promotion or two, move to a larger news outlet. Once a journalist found a handhold at a bigger publication, the career path split: some would go on to take on editorial roles ("do their shoe leather reporting first and then move up and up and up to be an editor" (P2)), and others would continue to be reporters, covering different beats over their careers, and leading "desks" at traditional news outlets. Journalists associated this career path with its ability to meet its moral obligations. Several described people who had won Pulitzer Prizes in these news outlets, pointing to the careers of figures such as Bob Woodward and Christiane Amanpour as models. One explained, "I saw, growing up, sort of the power of the press and articles that changed the world. And I remember reading *All the President's Men* in high school, and I met Ben Bradlee when I was 17, and I had a copy of the book, and I got him to autograph it. I was, like, 'I'm gonna be the next Woodward and Bernstein'" (P65).

In addition to fulfilling journalism's moral obligations, participants aimed to build careers that met a basic set of material needs, including a stable and sufficient income that would assure security in the present and the future. However, journalists found this aim challenging to achieve and found that jobs available to them, including many along the traditional career path, often did not offer such material security. One explained that she was seeking "additional challenges or responsibilities or also additional salary," but that her "raises were really minimal, like I—in the position that I was in, I wasn't seeing a lot of growth. ... I don't want to just be stagnant, and I also don't want to be poor" (P88). Reflecting the worries of many, another participant explained that finding jobs consistent with the occupation's moral obligations that also allowed them to fulfill material aims was a widespread challenge: "We all want to talk to interesting people and be writing about things that are important and interesting, and we want people to read it,

and we want to sort of be part of the national conversation. So you have all these people, these sort of well-meaning, really good journalists wandering around in the wilderness looking for a home. They're like, 'Where do I go?' You know, there's no... Do I just blog? Do I become a blogger? What do I do? There's no, nobody's paying me. Like, 'Hello? Anybody?'" (P65).

Thus, journalists' careers were shaped by both institutional and individual factors. Journalism offered its members a set of moral obligations and a traditional career path; journalists came to the occupation embracing these moral obligations while also seeking to fulfill a set of material aims.

Moral Claiming Strategies

As they built careers, journalists sought to couple these moral and material aims through the use of different moral claiming strategies: conventional, supplemental,

and reoriented. Each strategy involved purity and pollution rules, sets of jobs, and an audience for moral validation. Table 3 describes these strategies' core elements; Table 4 includes supplementary data on each strategy's purity and pollution rules and moral obligations.

Conventional Moral Claiming Strategy. This strategy involved a tightly coupled relationship between traditional jobs and the occupation's moral obligations. Journalists typically began their careers using this strategy, which involved accepting the occupation's purity and pollution rules. The purity rules designated a narrow set of traditional journalism jobs and personal financial sacrifices as pure. The pollution rules deemed all other possible jobs as potentially polluting. This strategy involved looking toward other occupational members for moral validation.

Table 3. Elements of Moral Claiming Strategies

	Conventional moral claiming strategy	Supplemental moral claiming strategy	Reoriented moral claiming strategy
Occupation's moral obligation: Tell the truth to the public	Accept	Accept	Accept
Approach to relationship between jobs and moral obligations	Accepting conventional purity rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs in traditional news outlets are pure Personal financial sacrifices signal moral purity Accepting conventional pollution rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All jobs outside traditional news outlets are polluting 	Broadening purity rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs in traditional news outlets are pure (e.g., reporter, editor) Related occupational work is pure (e.g., teaching) Seeking personal financial stability is acceptable Relaxing and narrowing pollution rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs not using journalistic skills are compartmentalizable (e.g., bartending) Jobs using journalism skills to communicate on behalf of nonnews organizations are polluting 	Rewriting purity rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting jobs that allow authorial control are pure (e.g., freelancing) Financial independence enables moral purity Rewriting pollution rules <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting jobs that restrict authorial control are polluting (e.g., reporter for traditional news outlets) Jobs that prioritize speed over investigative depth are polluting (e.g., reporter for traditional news outlets, blogger) Jobs that require financial sacrifice are polluting
Audience for validation of moral claim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupational community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupational community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public
Examples of jobs	Pure jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs at traditional news outlets Polluted jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All other jobs 	Pure jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs at traditional news outlets Complementary work (e.g., freelance, teaching, reporting work) Neither pure nor polluted jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compartmentalizable work (e.g., bartending) Polluted jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All other jobs outside the occupation that use occupational skills (e.g., PR) 	Pure jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs inside or outside occupation (e.g., founding news outlet, PR) Complementary work (e.g., freelance, teaching) Neither pure nor polluted jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compartmentalizable work (e.g., bartending) Polluted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional news outlets

Table 4. Comparison of the Elements of Moral Claiming Strategies with Illustrative Examples

Elements	Strategy 1: Conventional	Strategy 2: Supplemental	Strategy 3: Reoriented
Occupation's moral obligation: Tell the truth to the public	Accept: "So I really felt that it was important to find an outlet to present like, unbiased information to the public so that they can form their own opinions, but hear from the experts who are studying the issues. Just to raise awareness, I guess, of what is happening." (P51)	Accept: "The main reason I'm a journalist and I like what I do is because I really like learning about other people, things that are happening to other people and sharing their experiences, so kind of going to a place that not everyone can go and trying to sort of like bridge this gap, you know, like build understanding amongst leaders and the people that I meet with, and I—you know, if there's sort of an injustice being done or people are suffering then I feel that it's really important to write about that." (P43)	Accept: "Before, it was, like, credible information. Now it's crap. And I don't want any part of that. I'll be a writer, and I'll write a manuscript maybe for a book based on truth, but I'm not gonna participate in multimedia crap." (P99)
Purity rules	Jobs in traditional news outlets are pure: "I'm just a news guy at heart ... just about anybody and their brother can put up a blog and write what they perceive as news. I'm still a little old school in the sense that I really think that there is a time and a place and a reason and a message for what we do. I really believe in the institution of journalism, holding public officials accountable, informing citizens and, you know, seeking out truth, reporting it. I really buy into that." (P15) Personal financial sacrifices signal moral purity: "You don't get into this business for the money. If you do, you're somebody who's ego-driven and wants to be on TV and wants to be a star, or you're somebody who's so driven by wanting to be a journalist and get to a certain level that money is just incidental to that kind of drive." (P77)	Jobs in traditional news outlets are pure: "It makes me sad to see so many papers fail, to see magazines fold, and I realize that not everyone can succeed, but I—my biggest fear is that the publications that are left, that there aren't enough journalists out there doing the reporting and news covers that matter versus the stuff that just gets a lot of clicks." (P98) Related occupational work is pure: "I think of myself as a journalist, right? And so, for about two years I freelanced for really anyone who asked me ... I wrote for everyone from <i>Family Circle</i> to <i>Rolling Stone</i> . I never freelanced so intensely in my life ... I really needed to be a journalist." (P72) Seeking personal financial stability is acceptable: "I do plenty of online writing. And the pay varies wildly. But, you know, to me it doesn't make a difference, if I can write something that I'm interested in writing and someone is gonna pay me for it, then it doesn't matter to me whether it goes in print or online." (P22)	Reporting jobs that allow authorial control are pure: "My choice is either to take a full-time position which ... would probably pay the bills, or to take on more nonjournalism work which pays better, or we could leave and move somewhere cheaper. In which case, if that happens, I would absolutely just continue being a journalist and freelancing ... As a journalist, I can talk about anything I want to, and I could cover any topic I like, whether it's cultural or political or environmental or anything." (P46) Financial independence enables moral purity: "I get to pick the stories I want covered ... I think it's hard to start your own business, and I think it's hard to work for yourself ... and then you don't have that guarantee of a paycheck, so my income fluctuates every month, and you've gotta be really good with your money and your finances." (P80)

Table 4. (Continued)

Elements	Strategy 1: Conventional	Strategy 2: Supplemental	Strategy 3: Reoriented
Pollution rules	<p>All jobs outside traditional news outlets are polluting: “I’m the only one I know of who is in public radio ... The majority ended up in marketing or communications, and that breaks my heart ... We need more people keeping an eye on it and sorting out what’s true and what’s fiction.” (P79)</p>	<p>Jobs not using journalistic skills are compartmentalizable: “I went to [big insurance company], which is an insurance company, and on the side I got a camera ... I’d go out, take some photos, send it to the local paper.” (P90)</p> <p>Jobs using journalism skills to communicate on behalf of nonnews organizations are polluting: “I’m kind of obnoxiously old fashioned in terms of journalism focused in sort of down our noses and PR people. And I think that what we do is a higher calling. And I prefer to do news where I feel like my job is to try to give the truth than PR where I feel my job is to make my client look as good as possible. Those are two fundamentally contrary issues.” (P62)</p>	<p>Reporting jobs that restrict authorial control are polluting: “The business was changing more towards well, I wanna say more quantity and less quality journalism. And at that point I was thinking man, this is not the market—this is not the business that I wanna be in. You know, I wanted to write—essentially change the world, or at least change perceptions.” (P20)</p> <p>Jobs that prioritize speed over investigative depth are polluting “There’s no journalism left. I don’t know. Like, there’s no anything left. You’re just runnin’ around. It all became reality TV, like cheap—it all became cheap reality TV. Right? So—there are very few documentaries left that happen anywhere ... I mean all these people, these filmmakers—right?—who are in their 40s and 50s. They’re just in despair. Right? They’re, like, ‘I’m never gonna do a decent film again. All I’m gonna do is <i>Ice Road Truckers</i>.’” (P65)</p> <p>Jobs that require financial sacrifice are polluting: “I see a profession that has really been eroded and eradicated. And it’s just so hard to make a living doing it with any kind of integrity that I really don’t want any part of it.” (P45)</p>
Audience	<p>Occupational community: “It’s like sort of this club, at least the way I grew up. And you see your name in print and you have impact ... I felt like I was a reporter” (P67).</p>	<p>Occupational community: “I was very successful. I mean I was, I won five Emmy awards while I was working in television news and many, many other awards.” (P4)</p>	<p>Public: “The value of real media is local. I started and ran a newspaper for two years, an online newspaper. And by the time we shut it down, we had more than 20,000 unique visits a month, in a town of 28,000. So we reached literally every life form in town.” (P63)</p>

Conventional Purity Rules. In this strategy, only traditional news jobs in outlets such as newspapers, news magazines, and public radio stations, were ruled pure. Journalists reasoned that such workplaces would enable them to act in accordance with the occupation’s shared moral obligations. For example, one described a traditional newspaper as “that type of atmosphere, that type of newsroom where you’re just going full out for the news and not worrying about, you know, whose toes you’re stepping on and who might be offended and so forth. You know, the news is what matters the most” (P84). Another explained that he was searching for a

public broadcasting job because he believed such a job would allow him to uphold journalism’s moral obligations: “I’m a supporter for public broadcasting in the context of what work it does in journalism ... I would envision myself perhaps working for a public broadcaster and really contributing my skills and my journalistic knowledge to help the public” (P74).

A second rule directed at assuring purity involved the necessity of making personal financial sacrifices to access these jobs in traditional news outlets, in particular, accepting the low pay that many of these jobs typically offered. In many social settings, self-sacrifice

connotes moral worth (Hubert and Mauss 1981, Bunderson and Thompson 2009), and the pursuit of personal wealth can reduce one's moral standing (Lamont 1992). Journalists placed the pursuit of truth in direct opposition to personal financial gains, arguing that these were fundamentally incompatible. One explained that choosing journalism involved choosing low pay as being motivated by money could lead to "spinning." She said, "I'll always be a journalist at heart... this is gonna sound self-serving, and I don't mean it to. But like you're telling the truth. You're not spinning. You are trying to be fair in your work. You didn't choose your career to make money. That's why I took a pay cut to move to [paper]." (P64)

Another explained, "You know, all the old clichés about speaking truth to power are very important. And to have a sense of contributing to that is what you get instead of a big salary" (P1). Thus, journalists ruled that personal financial sacrifices were necessary to lever a claim on purity.

Conventional Pollution Rules. In this strategy, any jobs outside traditional news outlets—in digital news outlets and public relations (PR) as well as any other jobs at all—were ruled as polluting. Participants feared that using journalistic skills outside traditional news outlets could stain their moral claim. For example, many described digital outlets as motivated more by "clicks" than by quality reporting. One worried that, by working in digital news, journalists risked sacrificing "quality and ethics" because "they don't really have to uphold [the] standards" that had long governed the occupation:

A story that's two sentences long about a crash can be your blockbuster hit of the day for clicks—and it's not even something that would've been right for print... I still think that type of speed and platform shouldn't sacrifice quality and ethics, which sometimes it does. I think there's going to be a struggle for maintaining quality, particularly with the ease of creating your own news source, when one person can disrupt journalism in an area by being seen as the source when they don't really have to uphold standards or have the same sourcing or anything like that. (P84)

Another derided those who worked as reporters outside the auspices of traditional news outlets as "people calling themselves journalists—bloggers and people with no credentials... You can't just slap stuff up there. I mean, look at the stuff that becomes news for 24 hours and what is it? It's nothing. It's gossip" (P64). Thus, in the view of those who followed the conventional moral claiming strategy, these individuals were providing "nothing" and "gossip" and not meeting journalism's moral obligations.

Jobs in PR, which use similar skills, were feared to expose one to pressures to provide misleading

"storytelling" instead of reporting the whole, unbiased truth to the public. Said one,

There would be a million opportunities to me to make more money by writing, you know, a press release for—even for—you know, I write a lot about environment and energy, but I would never in a million years write a press release for Greenpeace or for, you know, NRDC. No matter how noble their efforts are, I don't wanna be caught doing that because I think that would be the end of my journalistic career... You know, we're nothing if we don't at least have the air of some sort of objectivity. You know? And as soon as I start writing on behalf of, you know, one side or another, I've lost that. That's the coin of the realm of journalism... (P73)

Thus, writing press releases, even for a "noble" organization risked "losing the coin of the realm"—one's claim to objectively report the truth. Many participants described PR work as "the dark side": "Public relations work and journalism are fundamentally opposed. You know, the journalism has, at least traditionally, is a practice that shines light upon things and on facts and, you know, information about how the government works, etc. And, you know, public relations is designed to potentially obfuscate" (P87).

Although alternative news settings and PR were especially tainted, journalists using this strategy also ruled out all nonjournalism jobs, reasoning that such jobs could dilute their commitment to journalism's moral obligations. One labeled former colleagues who had worked outside journalism as "not really particularly focused on journalism." In contrast, he explained that he was willing to endure living without income during long job searches in order to fulfill the occupation's moral obligations: "I look for those jobs on journalismjobs.com in my den in the hope that I'll find a position that I can look at and I can say, you know what, this gig really allowed me to help the common good" (P74).

Validation by the Occupational Community. The conventional moral claiming strategy involved turning to the occupational community for validation of moral claims. Journalists using this strategy referred to professional awards as well as colleagues, editors, and role models whom they saw as arbiters of moral standards. One, who had worked as a foreign correspondent, recalled how he and his colleagues applied "a lot of scrutiny" to the "kind of reporting someone did." He noted that "what trumped everything in how someone was treated... was whether someone could speak a language... [or] could learn the language and understood the cultural things." These reporters were validated by colleagues as journalists who clearly "knew the story" and so could report the whole truth to the public (P58). Another, recalling

working at a large paper, described being accepted into a “family” committed to journalism’s moral obligations: “They would say ‘we’re a family’ ... you’re working for a higher purpose. This is the public trust. This is a public service. This is not a job. You really buy into it, and you believe in it” (P64).

Supplemental Moral Claiming Strategy. This strategy involved a more loosely coupled relationship between traditional jobs and the occupation’s moral obligations and involved greater prioritization of personal financial aims. Journalists using this strategy broadened the purity rules and relaxed and narrowed pollution rules as they considered which jobs were appropriate to take. Journalists also decoupled personal financial sacrifices from purity, creating space to take morally pure jobs alongside those that provided financial stability. As in the conventional moral claiming strategy, journalists using this supplemental strategy looked to the occupational community for moral validation.

Broadening the Purity Rules. In this strategy, jobs in traditional news outlets continued to be ruled pure, but journalists also broadened their definition of pure jobs to include those outside traditional news outlets that also involved the direct or indirect practice of journalism. They reasoned that such complementary jobs would allow them to work in ways that upheld journalism’s moral obligations—telling the truth to the public—and so did not risk their moral claim.

In addition to traditional news jobs, journalists using this strategy also ruled freelance reporting as pure. Journalists positioned freelance work as a way to fulfill the occupation’s moral obligations while accumulating experience that might help further qualify them for a full-time job in a traditional news outlet. One, who felt strongly that there was “a public service in providing the news,” had written a series of freelance articles that culminated in a book on the impact of climate change. She hoped her book “could also open the door for me to go back to full-time work in some capacity, kind of that senior wise person role” (P60). Others too, viewed their freelance reporting as a legitimate “stopgap” on the way to a permanent full-time job in a news organization (P22).

Jobs related to the practice of journalism, such as teaching journalism at a college, were also ruled to be pure. One participant who taught in a writing program, tied this work directly to aims to fulfill the occupation’s moral obligation to report the “multifaceted” truth:

I think of myself as a journalist first, everything else second. University professor, second. Journalist first. Because the heart of what I love that I do is tell stories of science, as a journalist, in that kind of journalistic sense of understanding that the truth is multifaceted, and you’re going to try to examine those facets and

figure out where the story is and why it matters and then try to tell it in a way that makes people care about something and opens a door to people. To me, that’s the best of what I’ve done, right? I’ve made a difference as a teacher ... Everything that I do anchors in the fact that I’m a science journalist. (P72)

Another described teaching proper reporting practices as a way to uphold journalism’s moral obligations: “I’m deeply committed to passing on some of what I still think holds very much true for journalism” (P83). She felt that she was “giving back” to the occupation by focusing new reporters on the importance of “the essential basics of how to write and report” at a time when she was “seeing a lot of changes going through journalism, and some of the changes were not ones [she] necessarily agree[d] with.” In addition to freelance reporting and teaching, participants using this strategy also ruled other jobs that supported the occupation, such as the roles of copy editor or digital manager at news outlets, as pure.

Journalists using this strategy did not subscribe to the conventional rule that associated personal financial sacrifice with purity; indeed, many deliberately combined different pure jobs to maintain income stability. One told us, “They hired me to do 50% radio reporting but then also work on documentaries and other projects for television as well, so. A different and interesting mix. And all throughout, so the whole time I was also teaching as an adjunct because it pays a little bit in order to teach as an adjunct at the university, and I was teaching journalism” (P51).

Others similarly described combining different complementary jobs to generate sufficient income; by doing so, they aimed to fulfill the occupation’s moral obligations as well as their material aims.

Relaxing Pollution Rules. Journalists using this strategy relaxed the conventional moral claiming strategy’s pollution rules. Instead of ruling all nonjournalism work as polluting, journalists deemed jobs that did not involve the core skills of reporting and communicating with the public as nonpolluting. Jobs in this category were quite varied, such as “working at the call center doing sales” (P20), “work[ing] intensively at a part-time job I had bartending” (P67), working in construction (P6) or as a wilderness guide (P48). Journalists viewed these jobs as separable from their moral claims. One participant, who was searching for a newspaper job after a layoff, described how he ran a garage sale business to earn income: “I have a garage sale business where I go out on Saturday mornings and I buy things, um, that I sell on eBay and Amazon. And I try and go to garage sales held by old people ‘cause old people don’t tend to know how to look things up on a computer, so they’ll be selling things that are more valuable ... I actually make about 20,000 or 25,000 a year in income from that” (P21).

Thus, like the broadened set of pure jobs, these jobs provided some ongoing financial support during a continued search for a full-time job at a traditional news outlet but did not risk journalists' moral claims.

Narrowing the Pollution Rules. Journalists using this strategy continued to rule as polluting jobs that involved using journalism skills to communicate with the public on behalf of nonnews organizations. Thus, PR and communications roles for both profit and nonprofit organizations were ruled as polluting. One participant, who took on bartending and freelance work, explained that advocacy work could prevent one from returning to journalism: "I'm sure I can get a job in advocacy in some way ... but it's very hard to go into advocacy and then jump back into journalism" (P67). Another, who had been laid off from a full-time radio role and was freelancing, refused to work in "advertising agencies or advocacy nonprofits" because "a nonjournalism job, my heart kind of sinks" (P5).

Validation by the Occupational Community. Even though journalists using this strategy worked outside traditional news outlets, they still turned to the occupational community, which they identified as located in traditional news outlets, for validation of their moral claims. One, who freelanced for a national newspaper, desired validation in the form of a job at the outlet, saying, "I always wanted to work for them full time" but "it was always a very, a big disappointment in my life because I freelanced for them, but I never was hired" (P97). Another, who was running a chimney-sweeping company to make money, explained how finding a full-time journalism job validated his moral claims:

Am I a chimney sweeper that does journalism on the side or am I a journalist who does chimney sweeping on the side? That was an important distinction to me. And so, when I was finally able to go full time in journalism, that was a big thing for me. ... I'm proud to be a journalist. I think journalism is an honorable, even a noble pursuit in the promotion of the defense of democracy and freedom of speech. I know the day-to-day sausage making of it isn't always quite that uplifting but you always shoot for that anyway. (P62)

Reoriented Moral Claiming Strategy. This strategy involved decoupling and rewriting the link between traditional news jobs and the occupation's moral obligations so as to offer one greater moral and material control. Journalists using this strategy rewrote purity and pollution rules in ways that directly evaluated potential jobs based on their ability to fulfill the occupation's moral obligations, ruling as pure some jobs that fell outside journalism's traditional boundaries and

ruling as polluting some jobs in traditional news outlets. This new view of the landscape of jobs was accompanied by a focus on the public rather than the occupational community as a source of moral validation.

Rewriting Purity Rules. Journalists using this strategy rewrote purity rules to emphasize maintaining personal command over their reporting and financial independence; they regarded these as freeing one to engage in one's best, most thorough work and so uphold the occupation's moral obligations. These emphases led to a different set of jobs being ruled pure than in previous strategies: permanent freelance work, communications and PR roles in nonnews organizations, and creation of novel news outlets.

Some journalists using this strategy designated freelance work on topics underreported by traditional news outlets as pure and positioned freelancing as a means to assert personal command over the topic and content of their reporting. One, who wrote on environmental topics, explained, "I've been lucky because my highly unplanned career has ... reached this point where I can do that, I can make a living freelancing, writing about things that I think are important." Freelancing allowed her to report on stories she regarded as ignored by traditional news outlets but crucial for the public to know about: "I've done that particularly with stories about oil spills here that I think are really important to follow but that aren't big enough to interest many international publications" (P57).

Unlike the conventional and supplemental strategies, journalists using this strategy also ruled as pure communications and PR roles in nonnews organizations, such as think tanks and nonprofits. They argued that these nonjournalistic jobs better fulfilled the occupation's moral obligations because these jobs enabled them greater command over their work and more support for the in-depth reporting than jobs at many traditional outlets. One, who worked in a university communications role described how the university employed fact-checkers and "real" editors, which ensured the quality of her work: "Alumni magazines have really become a home for a lot of really good writing. They have these incredible alumni magazines with all these *New Yorker* writers. They pay decent. They have real editors, not some, like, 22-year-old goofball. An editor who reads your stuff and fact-checkers and copy editors ..." (P65).

Journalists using this strategy also ruled entrepreneurial news projects, such as the creation of novel roles or news organizations, as pure. They reasoned that these new outlets offered them near-perfect command over what they wrote. One, who had been fired from a newspaper for "refusing to blur the lines between editorial and advertising," described herself

as “frustrated” by traditional news outlets: “I was frustrated with the newspaper I’d been fired from. They went from a five-day-a-week broadsheet to a five-day-a-week broadsheet paid publication, to a three-day-a-week free tabloid. And there’s also a monthly tabloid that’s a little alternative in town. I was getting frustrated with how much news I knew wasn’t getting published, and I couldn’t even imagine what wasn’t getting reported on that I didn’t know” (P80).

She determined that the best way to satisfy journalism’s moral obligation was for her to create her own outlet: “And so, I launched [localnews.com], and that is what I’m owner and publisher of today, and it’s the only place you can get news about the city seven days a week.” Others created their own magazines, print newspapers, or online news resources in order to enable themselves to uphold journalism’s moral obligations. One described creating her own online video platform that allowed her to “go capture the story, to go to locations and capture unique humanistic stories” about international news issues (P81).

Journalists using this strategy also ruled the satisfaction of basic financial aims as pure, reasoning that income security better enabled them to focus on journalism’s moral obligations. A full-time freelancer explained how paying careful attention to her finances allowed her to continue to report important stories:

I’ve been to this little indigenous community six times since the oil spill happened, so that involves travelling in the Amazon. I usually cobble together multiple stories if I can for trips like that because most magazines don’t pay expenses, so if I’m going to make a trip like that out of my own pocket, I need to make sure that I cover the cost with multiple stories for different outlets. So basically, the challenge is at the beginning of every month to figure out how many words I’m going to need to write that month to pay the bills and kind of what I’m going to pitch to which magazines. (P57)

Similarly, the participant who worked in university communications noted how the reasonable wages and benefits offered in these jobs enabled people to do “real journalism”: “they have the money to pay people to have time to write and do real journalism” (P65).

Rewriting Pollution Rules. Journalists rewrote pollution rules to exclude jobs that compromised their command over their reporting, the rigor of the reporting, and their material aims. Doing so led to ruling out jobs in traditional news outlets, which journalists characterized as compromising their command over their reporting. They reasoned that journalists in these workplaces were highly vulnerable to pressure to selectively report or manipulate the facts and so contravene the occupation’s moral obligations. One

experienced reporter related, “Every place I’ve ever worked had an angle. Yeah? Like, [I] wrote this piece for a national newspaper about veterinarians, and it’s like the editor just hated veterinarians and ... I felt really pushed by the editor to make the article negative.” (P65).

Journalists also ruled out reporting jobs that compromised the rigor of their reporting by prioritizing speed over investigative depth; again, this led to ruling out many newspaper jobs as journalists saw newspapers as increasingly taking “shortcuts,” thereby reducing their “integrity”: “The sad thing for me is I do see journalism kind of going down in integrity and in respect and in—gosh, just in how they do things. I think a lot of newspapers and a lot of news organizations now take shortcuts that they would not have taken before. I think they’re seeing less investigative reporting in a lot of shops because they’ve either gotten too small or their budgets aren’t there, that they don’t either have the manpower or the financial resources to do that. So, sadly, I think that the quality has gone down” (P28).

Journalists also rewrote pollution rules to rule out jobs that required extensive personal financial sacrifices, reasoning that the sacrifices required by most traditional news outlets could be so “enormous” as to actually prevent them from doing their best work. One reflected, “The realities of the business climate force [newspapers] or lead them to make their employees do more and more with less and less and for less and less money. And that sends a very strong message to the reporter. You know, your work is not valued ... You’re not gonna get the best people to do their best work if you’re paying them so little that ... they have to live in some crappy apartment with five roommates” (P6).

Journalists interpreted the financial sacrifices demanded of them as a signal that their work was not valued by traditional employers. One noted that “the very low pay ... only \$200 a week” she was offered was “exploitation” (P5). Describing her job at a local news outlet, another noted, “I didn’t really feel as valued as I thought I should’ve been. And I was so underpaid that one car repair just completely bankrupted me.” She aimed to instead “do something more lucrative” and “better on [her] soul” (P25).

Validation by the Public. This strategy involved turning away from the occupational community and instead toward the public as the most important arbiter of moral claims, citing community awards, readership, and reader feedback as validation that they were satisfying journalism’s moral obligations. One, who had left corporate newspapers to found a community paper, explained, “You can make a bigger difference, actually, in a community. If you do your career the

right way, as journalism was intended to be, covering your community, making people feel important, you're righting the wrongs, covering the government, letting people know what goes on in their neighborhood" (P78). She felt that her practice of journalism as it "was intended to be" was validated by the public, explaining, "I have won every award the community has to offer. United Way Volunteer of the Year, Business Person of the Year, Citizen of the Year ... I mean just every award. I've got, like, seven boxes of awards, including one time I was chosen the best columnist in the state. And those are all really good, but it's so much more important to me when somebody comes in and they'll say 'I just love your paper. You're the only paper we get. I wouldn't know what's going on in the community.'"

Mechanisms and Characteristics That Shape Movement Between Moral Claiming Strategies

Journalists' careers were punctuated by changes in moral claiming strategies. People changed strategies as they encountered reckonings: crucial moments in which they reassessed the ability of their current strategy to fulfill both their moral and material aims given the institutional landscape in which they found themselves and which launched them into renewed searches for moral and/or material control. People whose individual characteristics consigned them to a peripheral social position also had looser attachment to the conventional moral strategy, shaping movement. We describe these mechanisms and characteristics in Table 5 and illustrate their relationships in Figure 1.

Reckonings. Reckonings were transformational moments in which journalists came to view their current moral claiming strategy as intolerable or unsustainable in meeting their moral and material aims. Although people regularly made some compromises in their satisfaction of these aims and could switch jobs many times using the same moral claiming strategy, reckonings differed because they represented breaking points that caused journalists to step back and see their current strategy and the institutional context in which they were trying to build their careers with new, more critical eyes. Reckonings could be triggered by acute events, such as layoffs, or could arise from accumulated frustrations with meeting moral or material aims. In either case, however, reckonings played a crucial role in journalists' moral career building by making visible a lack of fit between journalists' moral claiming strategies and their institutional landscape (e.g., the realities of job conditions and availability). In bringing this misfit to light, reckonings opened up a space for journalists to change their moral claiming strategy.

Reckonings could raise primarily moral or material concerns but often raised both. One journalist changed strategies when she experienced a reckoning that focused her on financial concerns. She described how she "hit a point in her life" at which she was frustrated with the costs and sacrifices required to pursue a traditional newspaper job: "Certainly I didn't go into it for money. But at some point in my life, I got really tired of not having any money ... a lot of places are operating on a shoestring now, and they will get just the bare minimum of people and practically work them to death" (P28). Another described realizing that the "standard of living" for journalists was being continuously lowered: "Every time they do these consolidations, it seems like they lower the standard of living. They paid me as a five-year veteran of the industry, they only offered me \$50,000, and that was to live in the metro area. That's barely worth it. It was literally money driving every day ... and paying \$100 a month just in tolls ... the gas money, everything just piled up to the point where ... It felt very frustrating because it seemed like the industry was just slowly bleeding away" (P33).

This reckoning sparked questions about the feasibility of fulfilling journalism's moral aims in traditional news jobs: "More and more newspapers are consolidating, cutting staff or becoming these aggregation type sites where it's all ripping off other people's content and adding your own spin to it as quickly as possible. That wasn't why I got into the journalism job" (P33). Realizing that their current strategy did not satisfy their moral or material aims led journalists to switch strategies.

Searching for Material Control: Moving to the Supplemental Moral Claiming Strategy. Journalists were drawn to the supplemental moral claiming strategy when they primarily sought greater material control as the set of jobs deemed pure within this strategy offered journalists control over their basic financial needs, including income security, health insurance, and retirement funds. One, who had initially pursued a conventional moral claiming strategy, explained how she dealt with a moment of reckoning after seeing "a lotta people losing their jobs very unexpectedly" by seeking material control: "I did see the writing on the wall, and I did say, 'Okay, I know [chuckles] I'm eventually going to, you know, be laid off or a buyout is gonna come to me. Do I want to be in control and say when I leave or do I want to, you know, be at their mercy in a very volatile industry?'" (P25). She went on to freelance and babysit for extra income. Others, too, entered the supplemental strategy because they "needed to pay [the] bills" (P35).

Searching for Moral and Material Control: Moving to the Reoriented Moral Claiming Strategy. Journalists were drawn to a reoriented moral claiming strategy

Table 5. Mechanisms and Individual Characteristics Shaping Movement Between Moral Claiming Strategies

	Data
Mechanisms for changing strategies	
Reckonings	<p>“I didn’t do the job to make money, probably make more money working at McDonald’s. I do this job to make a difference ... And while, you know, the moral issues are great and it’s like, you know, fighting the good cause and fighting the good fight, at the same time I’m getting towards the age where I’m, like, is it better to have your pride, or is it better to sell out and the thing that I see, I see a lot of excellent journalists that are, like, now in public information office. They’re making, like, 50, 80,000. Whereas people in PR still making 100,000. And it’s tough. It’s tough. It’s like—yeah, just looking at that—same time you don’t want to be last person on a sinking ship, on the <i>Titanic</i>.” (P90)</p> <p>“Nobody around me, especially me, ever thought that I’d be in danger of losing my job because I was such an integral part of the paper. What happened, like, is happening all over the place, is a new editor came to town and he didn’t know anybody, so he just looked around at who made the most money and whacked ‘em. ... There’s soon not going to be anybody that’s serving as a watchdog for politicians and other corrupt officials. All journalism is going to devolve into the paid type, the sponsored type. There will be no honesty left” (P21)</p>
Searching for material control: Moving to a supplemental claiming strategy	<p>“I came back and found a letter saying I had been laid off due to the economy. So, you know, I ended just saying, you know, this is the kick in the butt I needed to become a full-time freelancer and stop working for, you know, ridiculously low wages at a local newspaper, you know? Because I mean I got paid like \$11 an hour there. It was terrible.” (P37)</p> <p>“Realistically, if I can stay in the industry, it’s gonna be financial. And that’s a big question. Which is sad, but that’s the reality ... I had gotten hired at a certain wage. And then, because citing the recession, you know it was, well, you guys are gonna have to take pay cuts full—temporary ... they weren’t temporary.” (P7)</p>
Searching for moral control: Moving to a reoriented claiming strategy	<p>“I realized I had been rattling along the general assignment beat. I’d been a cop reporter, court reporter, educational reporter, city hall reporter. And I wanted to write about something that I cared about, and I wanted to have some control over what I wrote about, and I was really interested in science.” (P72)</p> <p>“I really didn’t like the [story] quota aspect of it. And it actually like really kinda dampened like the quality sometimes because I could have a really great cover story I was excited about and I was like really, I couldn’t even wait to write it. But then I had, you know, to scramble together five—or, I’m sorry, four other stories sometimes that were not as good or newsworthy and it just felt like such a grind that I wasn’t proud of some of the stories that I wrote.” (P97)</p>
Searching for moral renewal: Moving to a conventional claiming strategy	<p>“When I left journalism and was in PR, it was okay because I believed in the mission. I believed in what I was doing. ... I could never do PR for like a big, giant corporation. So I felt some sense of reward in PR, but the times the time in my life when I have not been journalism was like very sad for me. ... but only having been back in the [journalism] workplace for about a year, given my last job’s from agriculture, I’m kind of trying to like rebrand myself.” (P14)</p> <p>“My goal is to get back into journalism because I was in corporate communications for so long. ... My hope is that I’ll find the spot that really allows me to do the kind of work I think I can do and ask people the kind of questions I’d like to ask. ... since I was out and I want so badly to get in...” (P18)</p>
Individual characteristics loosening attachment to the conventional claiming strategy	
Cohort	<p>“So a lotta people that I know, have changed their focus ... some of them are doing completely different things. I spoke with one writer I worked with at the XX News recently. And he went into PR several years ago after being a journalist for many years. ... people have gone into different paths. ... But I do know that now a lot of the people that I worked with, colleagues or just people I went to college with that studied journalism, many of them are not doing this anymore. There are very few people that I know that are still working in a hard news environment.” (P34)</p> <p>“I’m seeing people who have really zigzagged rather than gone up one straight line ... I don’t see people who are really having those kinds of huge upward linear surges anymore like we used to years ago.” (P83).</p>
Gender and race	<p>“I worked at the [large newspaper] which is, I’d say, white male-centric, I felt a lot of—and I know I’m not alone in this—a lot of, you know, covert sexism there. So, in that way it’s different that you won’t be taken as seriously [as men] ... I was always perceived as like a little kid.” (P67)</p>

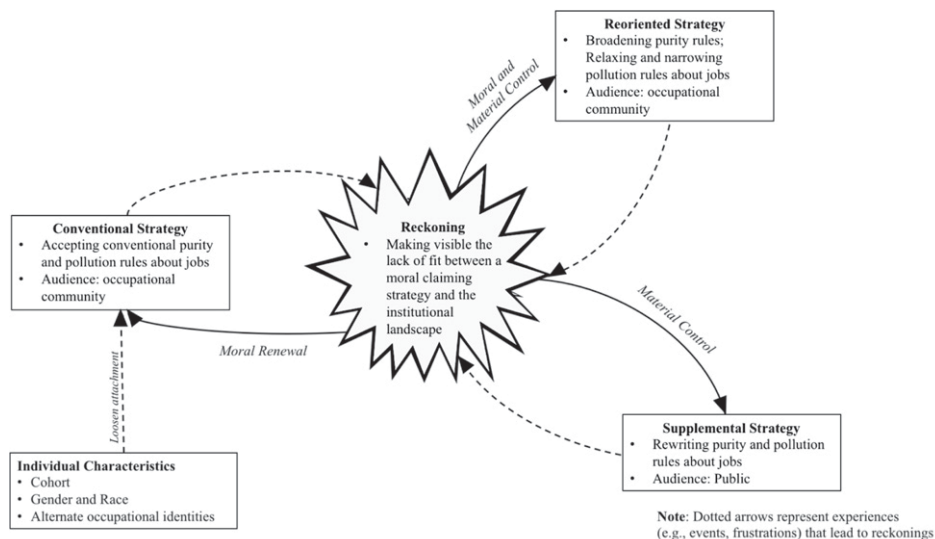
Table 5. (Continued)

	Data
Alternate occupational identities	<p>“I think sometimes they do look for the token person of color, which makes me frustrated because I want to be judged not just as an Asian American journalist, but just as a good journalist. Right? I think that sometimes my colleagues, especially when I was young, would think that I got a certain position because I was Asian, because I was a person of color. ... I criticized a fellow reporter on her coverage of education where I felt like she was making Asians look like the model minority, which frustrated me, because then she was a white reporter writing about Asian Americans, and I didn’t feel like she was doing it justice, and so I said something. And I felt like forever tainted by my misstep in speaking out about that.” (P98)</p> <p>“I think I have woven between back and forth between writing and outdoor guiding and writing and outdoor guiding and then sort of arrived at this place where I get to use both where I get to be outside and use the skills that I learned as a guide to do the kind of writing that I want to do ... So I started my second year as a freelancer now ... I really love what I’m doing and I want—this is ultimately my dream, is to work from home, to be able to live in a fairly rural place in the mountains. To work for myself and to write for national publications and travel for work.” (P48)</p> <p>“I was really committed to working in a project that were more environmentally focused. I really wanted to use some of my environmental interests and really build on that ... So anyway, what happened then was that I started my own business as a, essentially, as a science writer journalist ... The mainstream media wasn’t working very well. ... So anyway, what I’m saying is that I basically have started my own newsroom without having worked, you know, full time anywhere else in the newsroom, which is sort of funny.” (P38)</p>

when they sought both moral and material control. One journalist described becoming an independent documentary producer after realizing that traditional news jobs did not offer a clear way of fulfilling journalism’s moral obligation. He said, “One day, it was probably 2001, I decided that the stories ... were superficial and that there’s a limit to what I could do. Just as far as telling stories, there was a limit to what I could do. It wasn’t news ... I didn’t feel it was high-quality journalism” (P58). Another journalist described how she faced a reckoning and left a conventional job at a national

radio show when she realized that “it’s just so hard to make a living doing it with any kind of integrity.” Observing that “I think journalism has really failed lately,” she sought greater moral and material control: “It’s really, really a heartbreaking situation to me. And one of the reasons I’d left ... [I] was very committed, wanted to write stories and focus on stories about animals, which I thought were really neglected in mainstream news. ... I think it’s typical in that we are very frustrated with the amount of work we need to do and with the small amount of pay we receive” (P45).

Figure 1. Moving Between Moral Claiming Strategies



After adopting a reoriented moral claiming strategy, she worked as a freelancer while considering other nonjournalism jobs that would enable her to communicate about animals, such as producing a documentary film or working with a conservation organization.

Searching for Moral Renewal: Moving to the Conventional Moral Claiming Strategy. As people experimented with the supplemental and reoriented strategies, they sometimes encountered reckonings that caused them to feel the need for moral renewal. In these instances, individuals believed that the conventional moral claiming strategy and its strict purity and pollution rules could help them revive their claim on morality. One journalist, who had followed a reoriented moral career strategy and found work in a think tank, eventually felt that this job prevented him from upholding the moral obligation to tell “the entire truth”: “They’re always concerned with one side of the picture ... It really bothered me that there was something about not getting to the entire truth of what they were doing and what I was doing with that. For instance, I asked on a number of occasions, ‘Well, you know, we all love wild and scenic rivers and free-flowing rivers. But aren’t there some benefits of hydroelectric plants and other kinds of dams that we can acknowledge and accept?’ And they never gave me a clear answer on that, and I got very, very frustrated ... It gnawed at me” (P89).

He recommitted to the conventional moral claiming strategy, pursuing jobs only in traditional news outlets, out of a desire to reclaim morality: “I felt like I’d been working in public relations for a while. And I sort of had to cleanse my soul.” Another described her moment of reckoning after taking the reoriented moral claiming strategy and her subsequent search for moral renewal: “I realized, very quickly, that, despite the fact that [the PR job] was pretty well paid ... I also felt like I was a bit too curmudgeonly and ... just inherently skeptical about, you know, being the mouthpiece of another organization ... I decided to quit the [X] society and look for another journalist job. [News organization] happened to be hiring an environment reporter. And I interviewed and got the job.”

Returning to a traditional newsroom allowed her to fulfill her moral obligations as she worked with “this amazing editor, who really took news and hard investigative journalism seriously and did some really good work while I was there” (P87). In these ways, reckonings caused people to step back from their current moral claiming strategy and assess whether they needed greater control over the moral and financial aspects of their careers or needed moral renewal.

Individual Characteristics That Loosen Attachment to the Conventional Moral Claiming Strategy. Some individual characteristics placed journalists in social positions at the edges of the occupation. This position loosened their attachment to the conventional strategy even as they remained firmly attached to journalism’s moral obligations. In particular, people who entered the occupation in the early 2000s after the advent of the internet, women and racial minorities, and people who had access to alternate occupational identities seemed more loosely attached to the conventional moral claiming strategy.

Cohort. Participants who entered the field after the year 2000 had careers that were marked early on by the internet-induced instability in traditional newspaper jobs. These individuals typically started their careers aiming to follow the conventional moral claiming strategy but, overall, regarded adaptability in job expectations as necessary to pursuing a career in journalism. One explained, “A lot of people I went to journalism school with ... we’re not in the same position as earlier people in journalism. I mean, I think that’s a side effect of the economy. We’re just going to be figuring out whatever we possibly can and going with it. ... I think a lot of people have shifted out or into some form of writing that isn’t necessarily journalism. It’s still some form of communication” (P36). Another observed that leaving traditional news outlets was increasingly common: “From my perspective, I think there’s also more people who are harder to count, who are moving into more fluid forms of journalism—the video producers, the documentary producers, the bloggers, the storytellers, the story writer people, like all of that that I think is simply a different form of journalism and nobody knows really how to account for them yet in the industry” (P52).

Gender and Race. The discrimination that women and racial minorities often experienced in traditional news outlets tended to loosen their attachment to the conventional moral claiming strategy. One woman who had started her career reporting for a large newspaper that she initially believed to be the “right” place to be, experienced clear prejudice when she became pregnant: “I went to the managing editor of the [large newspaper] and, while I was pregnant with my second child and asked for a promotion to editor. I was still a writer at the time. And he said, ‘[XX], you know we can’t do that because you’re pregnant.’ And I was too speechless to invoke the federal law that he had just violated” (P71).

This experience of discrimination, coupled with her experience of pressures that compromised her command over her writing—“I didn’t like the way I was supposed to cover. I didn’t like the way we were

covering things, and they wouldn't listen to my ideas for how to do it differently"—compounded her feelings that she needed to "escape" traditional news outlets. She moved into the third, reoriented moral claiming strategy, deliberately cultivating a full-time career as a freelancer and teacher of science journalism, which she "was loving." Such experiences of discrimination intermingled with feelings of being treated as disposable, led women to question the true moral standing of traditional news outlets. One explained,

I think a lot of journalists need to start setting limits with their editors and with their companies, and I felt like I was constantly trying to do that at the public radio station... I saw some really, like, horrendous treatment of all kinds of employees, employees who got sick, male or female, or employees who had a baby and like, needed to breastfeed, or go home early, or come in late, and you'd think that in a place that's all about truth and justice and you know, earthy, crunchy public radio, they would be very understanding and sympathetic, and it was really not. Things are really tough. And it was like this attitude of we can replace you in 10 seconds with all kinds of journalists from around the world. (P82)

This questioning loosened women's attachment to the conventional career strategy; indeed, this individual quickly left public radio.

For racial minorities too, experiences of discrimination combined with professional experiences that made them question the purity of traditional news outlets caused them to exit from the conventional strategy. One African American woman began her career working for a TV station in Africa, but upon returning to the United States was hired for an internship role and ultimately "moved backwards" in her career from international to national to local stations. She could not see true opportunities in bigger stations: "People would tell me, 'Oh, why don't you work in Boston?' I say, 'When was the last time you saw a Black anchor on any of the Boston channels?' It's a very white girl, blonde, blue-eyed model look right now... I don't see a woman of color leading the 6 p.m. news" (P96). This discrimination dovetailed with a sense of disillusionment with how "mainstream American media" compromised journalists' abilities to truly serve the public: "I had seen those reporters, and they just seemed so numb. And I don't ever wanna be numb to someone's murder. I don't wanna be that person because I think that can affect how you interview [people]." Moving into the reoriented strategy, she "made moves to quit" and developed her own production company to focus on reporting the truth about Africa, which she felt to be underreported on by traditional news outlets. She hoped her program would "inspire Americans. It's really for an American

audience. White Americans, Black Americans, Korean Americans. I want to use my journalism to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes of Africa."

Alternate Occupational Identities. Journalists who identified with an alternate occupation, which also provided moral obligations, were also loosely attached to the conventional moral claiming strategy. In particular, some environmental and science reporters identified strongly as both journalists as well as environmentalists or scientists. One, who focused on extinction and animal rights, explained that she had left a job in a traditional news outlet in order to combine the moral obligations of journalism and science: "To me, journalism was really lacking in reporting about the natural world, and specifically about animal issues and wildlife issues. And one of the reasons I'd left in 2008... I was very committed to wanted to write stories and focus on stories about animals, which I thought were really neglected in mainstream news. So my greatest aspiration as a journalist probably has been my commitment to bringing attention to the way animals are treated in the world, domestically and internationally as much as possible to the public... using traditional news ethics" (P45).

Such alternate identities enabled them to question the conventional moral claiming strategy. For instance, although PR jobs were ruled polluted in the conventional strategy, when such a job was connected to environmental aims, journalists with this alternate identity might view the job as pure and fulfilling the moral obligation of both occupations. One explained how her "passion [for] food and environment and farming," along with her questioning of the personal sacrifice rule ("I discovered that it was really hard to survive really in New York at the rate of pay they were offering, and so I chose not go that route. I don't know what that says about my dedication"), shaped her "conscious decision" to find work aligned with her environmentalist identity (P56). She "jumped at the chance" to take a job at an environmental trade magazine, ruling this job pure because it offered her the opportunity to write about an important social issue. Indeed, she described it as "inspiring and sort of combining activism and then, if you will, authoritative publishing, authoritative writing... It's promoting good practices."

Patterns of Moral Claiming Strategies. Overall, building a moral career is, thus, a dynamic process, characterized by repetition and movement between strategies. Our analysis of journalists' entire careers suggests some common patterns in how people combined these moral claiming strategies over time. Nearly all participants began their careers by accepting the conventional moral claiming strategy. However, most journalists

experienced a reckoning that caused them to move to a different strategy. Although our data are not suited for quantitative comparisons, for descriptive purposes, we examined frequencies of strategy use. Of the 102 journalists, 93 (91%) used the conventional strategy at some point in their career, 63 (62%) used the supplemental strategy at some point, and the reoriented strategy was used by 38 (37%) journalists.

Journalists did not move between strategies linearly; rather, they iterated between strategies over time. We categorized journalists' careers according to the set of strategies they used. Some used only a conventional moral claiming strategy throughout their careers, building a conventional moral career ($n = 21$). Some participants' moral career building was dominated by searches for moral renewal and material control; they moved back and forth between the conventional and supplemental strategies during their careers, sequencing them in different ways ($n = 42$). Another group of participants used all three strategies during their careers in different sequences ($n = 18$); their moral career building involved searches for material control, moral and material control, and moral renewal. Others used just the conventional and the reoriented strategies during their careers in different sequences ($n = 12$); their

moral career building focused on searches for moral renewal and moral and material control. A small group of participants did not use the conventional moral claiming strategy and relied on the other two strategies ($n = 9$); their moral career building involved searches for material control and moral and material control. Table 6 provides some examples of people's jobs and careers in these groups.

We conducted an exploratory analysis of the frequency of moral career strategies used by decade (1970–2015). This analysis showed that the conventional moral career strategy was the most dominant strategy yet waned in importance (75% of all strategies used in the 1970s, declining to 56% in the 2010s), the supplemental moral career strategy represented a steady alternative over time (20% in the 1970s to the 2010s) although the reoriented moral career strategy grew in its use (5% in the 1970s to 21% in the 2010s). Table 7 provides further information on the sequences people's careers followed.

A Model of Moral Career Building

People build moral careers piece by piece, job by job, claim by claim. Figure 2 offers a multilevel process model of how people's building of moral careers is

Table 6. Frequencies and Patterns of Moral Claiming Strategies

Moral claiming strategy by job		Example jobs
Total number of jobs	528	
Conventional	332 (63%)	Reporter, editor, copyeditor
Supplemental	123 (23%)	Freelancing, call center, teaching
Reoriented	71 (13%)	Full-time freelancing, public relations, social media manager
<hr/>		
Moral claiming strategy by journalists		
Total journalists	102	
Conventional	93 (91%)	
Supplemental	63 (62%)	
Reoriented	38 (37%)	
<hr/>		
Patterns of moral claiming strategies by journalists example sequences of moral claiming strategies and jobs		
Total journalists	102	
Conventional only	21 (21%)	P8: Conventional (reporter for weekly newspaper, reporter for daily and nondaily newspapers, publisher of weekly newspaper, editor for weekly newspaper, education reporter for daily newspaper)
Conventional and supplemental only	42 (41%)	P49: Conventional (fellowship with large city newspaper), supplemental (fellowship with a university), supplemental (freelancing)
All three strategies	18 (18%)	P96: Conventional (broadcast journalist, internship program), supplemental (editorial desk assistant for nightly news broadcast), reoriented (freelancing and teaching elementary school)
Conventional and reoriented only	12 (12%)	P39: Conventional (environmental journalist), reoriented (nonprofit consultant), conventional (copyeditor for skincare company)
Never in conventional	9 (9%)	P93: Supplemental (freelancing), supplemental (grant writing), reoriented (freelancing)

Notes. Percentages represent the proportion from the total in the column. Two descriptions of jobs were missing audio data (belonging to the Post-2000, men, white, science categories) and could not be assigned a moral claiming strategy.

Table 7. Sequences of Moral Claiming Strategies

Sequence of strategies: Conventional = C Supplemental = S Reoriented = R	Number of participants	Set of moral claiming strategies used
All C	21	Conventional only
C-S	17	Conventional and supplemental
C-S-C	7	Conventional and supplemental
C-S-C-S	6	Conventional and supplemental
C-S-C-S-C	3	Conventional and supplemental
S-C	6	Conventional and supplemental
S-C-S	1	Conventional and supplemental
S-C-S-C-S	1	Conventional and supplemental
C-S-exit	1	Conventional and supplemental
C-S-R	3	All three strategies
C-S-R-C	2	All three strategies
C-R-C-S-R	2	All three strategies
C-S-R-S	1	All three strategies
S-C-S-C-R	1	All three strategies
C-S-R-C-R	1	All three strategies
C-S-R-S-R	1	All three strategies
S-C-S-C-R-C-R	1	All three strategies
S-R-S-C-S-C-S-C	1	All three strategies
C-R-S-C-S-C-S-C-R	1	All three strategies
C-R-S	1	All three strategies
R-S-C	1	All three strategies
C-S-R-S-C-exit	1	All three strategies
S-C-R-C-R-C-exit	1	All three strategies
C-R	6	Conventional and reoriented
C-R-C	4	Conventional and reoriented
C-R-C-R	1	Conventional and reoriented
C-R-C-exit	1	Conventional and reoriented
S-R	1	Never in conventional
R-S	1	Never in conventional
S only	1	Never in conventional
R only	6	Never in conventional

shaped by their desires to satisfy their occupation's moral obligations as well as their personal aims, which, in our context, centered on material concerns. People bring these aims together and identify appropriate jobs within their institutional landscape by employing different moral claiming strategies—conventional, supplemental, or reoriented—which include the rules they follow regarding which jobs are pure and which are polluted and the audiences they look toward for moral validation. People's career building is punctuated by reckonings that alert them to their ability to satisfy these institutional obligations and individual aims; they then shift to different strategies that promise greater moral and/or material control or moral renewal. Further, some individual characteristics, including cohort, gender and race, and access to alternate occupational identities, can place people at the edges of the institution and loosen their attachment to the conventional moral claiming strategy. As people make these choices, one job at a time, varying moral careers can emerge within institutions.

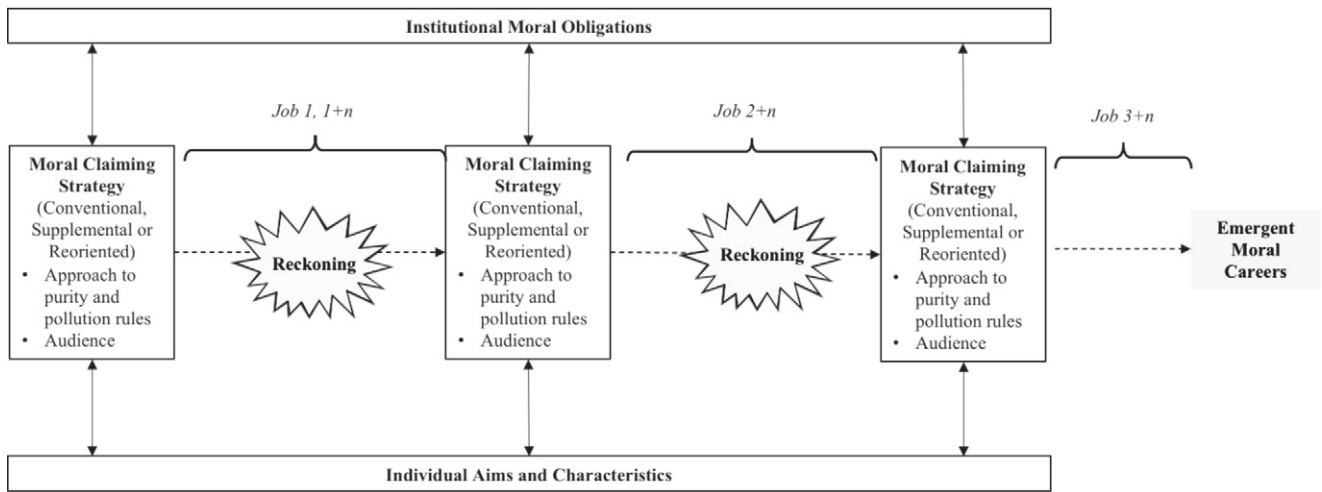
Discussion

Our analysis of how people build moral careers reveals how the career, a crucial element of the social order of institutions, is buttressed and maintained by moral obligations and an architecture of purity and pollution rules. Morals offer crucial direction for people's careers; we show how people build a moral career piece by piece, job by job, through the use of different moral claiming strategies. As they do so, people seek to fulfill material aims—basic financial needs—which can often be in tension with their moral commitments. Members of the same institution can vary in how they assemble moral claiming strategies over time and the set of jobs through which they move but still adhere to the same set of moral obligations. Taken together, our findings and theoretical model offer novel insights about how morals weave together people, careers, and institutions and help explain how people use their moral judgments as they build their careers.

Strategies for Moral Career Building

By applying a moral lens to career building, we advance theory on how people build careers in relation

Figure 2. A Multilevel Process of Moral Career Building



to institutions (Hughes 1958, Barley 1989). First, we discover an important career-building process: the use of moral claiming strategies. Scholars have explained how people bring a range of personal aims to their careers (e.g., Schein 1996); are equipped by institutions with various tools, practices, and scripts for career building (e.g., Barley 1989); and can adapt features of their roles to bring their personal aims together with the institutional guidance they receive (e.g., Berg et al. 2010). Our findings map onto this essential dynamic of careers as negotiated between people and institutions but also recall and build upon insights from early career studies regarding the importance of morals to people’s building of careers in and around institutions (Hughes 1951, Hall and Chandler 2005, Moore et al. 2007) and draw these insights together with ideas about the functions of purity and pollution in the realm of work (Douglas 1966, Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, Huisig 2015).

Moral claiming strategies are a core pillar of people’s career building that draw together and organize relationships between personal aims, institutions, and individual adaptation. Although scholars have highlighted the importance of various personal aims (e.g., Schein 1996), we contribute to this literature by highlighting how moral aims are a core motivator for people’s career building and showing how they connect people to institutions and are negotiated alongside material aims. The strategies we discover also offer novel insight into how people build careers in dialogue with institutions. The conventional moral claiming strategy can be read as consistent with what may occur when people broadly take on and adapt to institutional socialization processes, but we show the importance of the institution’s moral obligations and conventional purity and pollution rules to this process. Likewise, prior work reveals that people alter the

boundaries of their jobs while they strive to accomplish their personal aims (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al. 2003). The supplemental and reoriented moral claiming strategies may be read as consistent with this scholarship on people’s adaptations, but applying a moral lens illuminates how the focus of this adaptation is the purity and pollution rules.

Second, in examining the dynamics of moral careers, we identify and explain how reckonings punctuate this career-building process. Reckonings, for our participants, consisted of instances in which they began to see that their moral and material aims were unlikely to be realized given the institutional landscape in which they find themselves and prompted changes in their moral claiming strategy. The importance of transformational moments in people’s careers is echoed by a broad range of organizational scholarship that identifies how specific events or gradual realizations can act as “jolts” or triggers that prompt individual sensemaking and schema changes (Roberts et al. 2005, Vough and Caza 2017, Crawford et al. 2019). Reckonings are distinct from these other “aha” experiences because they bring to light the institutional embeddedness of individual experiences: at their core, reckonings crystallize people’s understandings of their self within a dynamic set of social forces. For instance, in our context, reckonings brought the pairing of moral and material aims in a precarious institutional landscape into sharp focus. Studying how people respond to these reckonings offers a new lens on previously identified intertwinements between the moral and material in people’s experiences of their work (Bunderson and Thompson 2009, Schabram and Maitlis 2017); in particular, our work reveals how a reckoning prompted by a material concern, such as a layoff or need for higher pay, can spill over into the moral domain to cause a search for moral as well as material

control in one's career. Overall, reckonings represent a novel mechanism for understanding how people view themselves in relation to their broader institutional landscape as they dynamically construct careers.

Third, we advance knowledge about how people's positions in larger social structures relate to their career trajectories by showing how their position influences their attachment to the conventional moral claiming strategy. In particular, we found that those who entered the occupation after the advent of the internet were more willing to abandon the conventional moral strategy; this is possibly because they were entering the occupation at a time when there was less access to traditional and well-remunerated newspaper jobs. Further, we found that the discrimination women and racial minorities experience, which has been well documented to shape careers (Ashcraft 2013, Rivera 2015), also heightened these members' attention to the purity of jobs at traditional employers. Consistent with prior work that shows how different occupational identities can provide different moral codes (Leavitt et al. 2012), we also show how occupational members' access to alternate occupational identities can shape their moral career building. Taken together, the experiences of these groups suggest that moral career building can also be influenced by one's position in relation to the institution; these groups' willingness to pivot from conventional moral claiming strategies suggests that those who are positioned at the edges of institutions may be at the forefront of creating novel moral careers.

Fourth, we suggest that the career-building process we observe has the potential to both provide important stability and change to the set of career scripts that are collectively endorsed within an institution (here, an occupation). Prior work shows how people can modify existing career scripts to adapt to their circumstances (Dany et al. 2011). We build on these ideas by showing how people modify institutionally endorsed purity and pollution rules and showing how these modifications are motivated by difficulties in meeting the institution's moral obligations while also pursuing personal aims. People's commitments to the institution's moral obligations across the moral claiming strategies stabilize the institution although their adaptation of purity and pollution rules, and sets of acceptable jobs, gradually change the scripts available to those building careers. Patterns in our participants' use of strategies over time suggest that the conventional strategy may be waning in dominance and the reoriented strategy becoming more common. Should such trends continue, the occupation might come to be characterized by greater collective acceptance of careers that are perceived as moral and yet unfold outside traditional news outlets.

Revising Links Between Purity, Pollution, and Morals

Our study of moral career building contributes to scholarship on morals and institutions as well. First, our model reveals how, in the process of building their careers, people can revise understandings about purity and pollution in relation to institutional moral obligations. Prior scholarship on morality and purity in institutions shows how people engage strategically with moral understandings and designations of pure and polluted tasks so as to achieve other aims (e.g., Ashforth and Kreiner 1999, Anteby 2010, Huising 2015). For the dynamics of purity and pollution, we build on prior work by showing that people cannot only follow or deviate from fixed purity and pollution rules, and make a unique contribution by showing how they can also actively reconstruct purity and pollution rules to create new connections between the moral and social order. These findings resonate with Douglas' (1966, p. 5) observation that "to members, the ideas of purity and impurity seem timeless and unchanging...but every reason to believe they are subject to change..." For the dynamics of morality, we show how revisions to purity and pollution rules occur while members still hold fast to a certain set of institutional moral obligations, which act as persistent guides for people's careers. In our context, this surfaced in how the same job might be ruled pure or polluted by the same person at different points in their careers as they seek to meet the same moral obligations. Examining how people build moral careers, thus, allowed us to see how the relationship between purity and pollution rules and morality within institutions—here, occupations—can be strategically altered by people over time.

Second, our study centers careers as a site at which members can resist the social control and exploitation that can be embedded within institutional morals and purity and pollution rules (Hughes 1958, Douglas 1966, Hitlin and Vaisey 2013). Consistent with other studies that show how moral obligations function as a tool to compel personal sacrifice (e.g., Bunderson and Thompson 2009), we find that people using the conventional moral strategy accept the occupationally endorsed relationship between moral obligations and material sacrifice. For corporate news organizations, this internalized association is profitable as they gain labor commitment at little financial cost. However, for members, this strategy and internalized association leaves them at risk for being taken advantage of for corporate gain. The dynamics revealed in the reoriented moral claiming strategy point to how members can resist moral exploitation by recasting personal financial sacrifice as morally compromising and presenting personal financial independence as enabling true pursuit of occupational moral obligations. Thus,

use of reoriented moral claiming strategies can be seen as rejection of corporate news organizations' hijacking of occupation morals for commercial gain; rewriting purity and pollution rules, then, is a means of individual resistance to institutional moral control and exploitation. One question is whether those using the reoriented strategy are truly resisting corporate exploitation or are simply disguising the pursuit of their personal material aims by continuing to claim they pursue moral obligations (e.g., Zelizer 1978). One indicator that the former was the case is that those who used the reoriented strategy still placed bounds on the types of "pure" jobs they would take and did not pursue particularly highly paid work but, rather, found financial stability through creating their own independent newspapers, working freelance full time, or working in government or nongovernmental organizations.

Finally, our model shows how moral claiming strategies include different audiences toward whom career builders turn for validation of their claims. Morals are defined in relation to communities (Manning and Anteby 2016), and occupation members classically look toward each other for validation of their moral standing (Lepisto et al. 2015). We find evidence of this reliance upon occupational audiences in the conventional and supplemental moral claiming strategies; however, we find that people using the reoriented strategy turn outward, to other audiences, for moral validation. Yet, we cannot minimize that turning toward other audiences involves turning away from occupational audiences, which were once important to these individuals; abandoning this source of validation can be painful. Further, we note that members of groups at the edges of the institution's social order (e.g., new entrants, women and racial minorities) were most willing to pivot from conventional strategies; this suggests that marginality and lack of validation might shape members' willingness to seek other validating audiences.

Boundary Conditions and Future Research

Our study relied on narrative, career history interviews. Although such data provide insight into people's choices, sensemaking and ascriptions of meaning (Lamont and Swidler 2014), this design also has some limitations. First, we cannot fully rule out retrospective reasoning or alternative explanations for people's choices (e.g., performance, qualifications). However, many participants were highly qualified, had received awards, had worked at well-reputed outlets (e.g., *The New York Times*) and yet changed strategies. Further, because participants consistently explained choices in moral terms, we feel confident asserting that morality mattered. Second, our analysis emphasized people's subjective assessments of their material circumstances. Third, although social networks shape careers (Granovetter 1973), our data did not permit us to directly address the role of

networks in people's career building. Fourth, our design was not well suited to assessing temporal dynamics such as moving fast or slow in a career. Future scholars might use large samples with quantitative measures of income, performance, and social networks and longitudinal data to further explore these important issues.

Our analysis of people's moral career building lays a foundation for other research on how people pursue moral and material aims as they build careers. Just as occupational morals shape people's careers, future work should examine how other institutions, such as corporations, schools and families, which also offer moral signals and material aspirations (Jackall 1988, Blair-Loy 2003, Anteby 2013) shape careers; further, these different institutional signals may conflict or be in alignment, complicating the task of building a moral career. Further, as gig work expands (Ashford et al. 2018), forms of labor control shift (Kellogg et al. 2020), and economic insecurity spreads (Cooper 2014), studying how people can and cannot bring together moral and material aims represents important scholarly terrain. Another line of inquiry would involve examining how purity and pollution rules that encode ideas about morality (which we examined) interact with purity and pollution rules that pertain more closely to status. The intersection of professional and commercial work institutions in people's construction of purity is also an intriguing direction for future research; although we found that individuals located purity in the specific organizations their occupation has dominated (newspapers), in occupations that are not so closely identified with specific organizations (e.g., human resource professionals), individuals might locate purity more strongly in membership in the profession itself.

The reckonings that punctuate people's moral career building also represent fruitful terrain for future research, which could explore their genesis, contours, and effects. Future scholars might seek to better understand how the duration of reckonings influences individuals' actions: for example, scholars might examine whether people's responses to slow-burning reckonings are similar to acute ones? We also wonder about the group dynamics of reckonings: how are people's perceptions of their strategies shaped by their close colleagues' experiences and actions? Future research might examine such social contagion effects by studying specific workplace communities. Another direction to explore is how moral reorientations in one's career are influenced by other acute or slowly accreting phenomena. Scholars might ask how experiences of burnout (Schabram and Maitlis 2017), work–family shock events (Crawford et al. 2019), or broad social crises precipitate moral reckonings in people's careers. Finally, reckonings are institutionally embedded but also seem to loosen the grip of institutions: we saw that institutional constraints on careers,

such as the scarcity and low quality of jobs, resulted in people's ability to newly see and deviate from institutional prescriptions about purity and morality in careers. Although members stayed true to the moral obligations of the occupation in our study, future work could examine how reckonings may have similar effects beyond shaping moral careers, such as prompting broader "desocialization" of occupational members and exit.

We examined how people build moral careers; however, scholars might also ask how people come to pursue immoral careers and whether they recognize them as such. For instance, occupational morals represented a strong guide for our participants' careers; however, the strength and content of moral obligations may vary across institutions. Further, studies of professors (Anteby 2013) and corporations (Beunza 2019) point to structures that encourage amoral or immoral behavior. Future scholars might merge our model with insights from these other studies to ask how people might hide their immorality from particular audiences by using immoral claiming strategies and whether and how people might sequence moral and immoral claiming strategies. For example, scholars might examine trends of robber barons adopting philanthropic mantels (e.g., Giridharadas 2019).

We examined how cohorts, gender, race, and alternate occupational identities shaped people's moral claiming strategies; future scholars may wish to examine additional characteristics that may be associated with loosened attachments to conventional careers, such as age, class, nationality, and sexuality. Intersections between these may also be revealing: for instance, women and racial minorities in earlier cohorts may have experienced different or greater issues around demographic fit than later entrants because they were pioneers. Institutions must tackle and eliminate discriminatory processes; our findings regarding how members at an institution's edges experiment with moral claims suggests that one avenue for doing so could be legitimizing a wider range of jobs and moral claiming strategies and jobs.

Our study also raises important questions about how the individual resolutions that people come to about how to combine making a living while building a moral career percolate upward to affect how (and how well) institutions meet their obligations to society. To take our case as an example: is the public helped or is it harmed by emergent forms of news reporting and journalists taking communications roles as opposed to journalists continuing to work for stripped-down news outlets? Or is something unique and valuable lost to society when occupation members move into these new and different roles? Future scholars might examine this question with a broad data set that includes external assessments of occupation members' service to public in traditional and nontraditional roles.

Conclusion

We show how morals weave through careers in ways that tie together people, jobs, and institutions. People build moral careers piece by piece, job by job, claim by claim, by holding onto institutional moral obligations as a guiding compass while reconciling these with personal material aims. Bringing these two together often requires adapting to moments of reckoning and revising the set of rules that designate some jobs as pure and others as polluting. People's construction of moral careers might, therefore, be best understood as the ongoing and evolving pursuit of moral and material aims in a shifting landscape of jobs.

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Appendix. Interview Protocol

1. Could you walk me through your work history to date, from when you left school (year graduated), to the present?
2. What is your job now? What kind of tasks do you do?
3. What kind of hours & travel does it involve? How many hours/week?
4. How many hours did you work yesterday? As a guideline, could you talk me through your day, hour by hour, starting with when you woke up?
 - a. Time woke up
 - b. First hour
 - c. ... etc., hour by hour
 - d. Time went to bed
5. What are others' (e.g., editors, colleagues) expectations of your availability for your work? How do you manage these?
6. How typical has your career been relative to others in your field?
7. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? If not here, why? If here, in what role?
 - a. In your experience, do most people in your current organization [industry] anticipate leaving? Why is this?
8. Some people I've spoken with in the course of this research have talked about having a professional identity. Does that term mean anything to you? If so, how would you describe it?
9. How important would you say your work is to your sense of self?
10. Is there a particular person who you view as very successful in [journalism/your subfield]? In what ways are you similar or different?
11. From what you know, are men and women's experiences in this field similar or different?
12. From what you know, are people's experiences in this field influenced by their race?
13. Where do you think this field is going?
14. *If not already covered:* I am interested in understanding how people combine their work with their personal lives. Can you tell me about your life outside work?

- a. Married/serious partnership? How long?
 - b. Children? Number, age?
 - c. Extended family in the area?
 - d. Religious affiliation involvement?
 - e. Other community involvement (local boards, etc.)
15. *If married*: Could you tell me a little bit more about your spouse?
- a. Does your spouse work? If so, at what? What qualifications does s/he have?
 - b. How many hours a week does s/he work?
 - c. How long has s/he been working at this job/career? If less than 3 years, what did s/he do before?
 - d. What are your spouse's career aspirations?
 - e. How do you prioritize your jobs?
 - f. What proportion of the total family income does your spouse earn?
16. *If married*: Do you feel that your marriage has affected how you have approached your career? Do you feel that your career has affected how you have or will approach your marriage? In what ways?
17. *If children*: Do you feel that your children have affected your work behavior or approach to your career at all? If so, how? Did your work behavior change more after your second child was born?
18. *If other involvements*: Do you feel that your involvement in [religious affiliation, community boards, other] has affected your work behavior or approach to your career at all? If so, how?
19. If you were conducting this study, what would you would ask, that I have not?

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