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The Changing Face of Work Precarity: Dependent self-employed professionals and collective response to work precarity*

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The present study explores how professional workers under the arrangement of dependent self-employment experience and respond to work precarity. Drawing on interviews of 53 indie and in-house PDs, I found that the arrangement of dependent self-employment translated into work precarity in three interrelated spheres of work: i) in labor markets, ii) in production processes and iii) in creative communities. Further analysis of the interviews shows that indie PDs have developed a strong professional identity through the alter casting of in-house PDs which highlights the creative and entrepreneurial nature of their work. The cognitive practice of alter casting allows indie PDs to extract positive meanings from their precarious employment arrangement and distinguish themselves from in-house PDs at the major broadcasters. In turn, this professional identity fueled their desire to self-organize in response to the perceived threats to their professional community. Indie PDs opted for a professional association, rather than a labor union, as a form of collective representation to promote social recognition of their professional identity. The theoretical and practical

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implications of these findings are discussed.

▶ **Keywords:** work precarity, precarious professionals, dependent self-employment, non-standard work arrangement

I . Introduction

As organizations have shifted from traditional mass production activities to increasingly flexible, and networked production activities (Heckscher & Adler, 2006), we have been witnessing the demise of the “corporate career” (Davidson III, et al., 1996; Goffee & Scase, 1992; Martin, 2005). In place of organizations, occupations and professions are increasingly becoming stabilizing fixtures of how people understand and engage in their work, life and relationship with others (Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999; Standing, 2009; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Recent advances in technology have accelerated the pace of this transformation, allowing many types of work to be extended beyond the workplace and regular business hours (Rainie & Wellman, 2012).

Destabilizing forces on organizational affiliations of professionals are attributed as a joint product of employers’ motivation for institutional changes (i.e. deregulation of labor market) as well as worker action. However, the consequences of this transformation for professional workers in the workplace remain unclear. Some researchers have lauded the enabling aspects of being independent of organizational hierarchy, citing the many paid-professionals who voluntarily pursue and sustain independent contractor status in anticipation for greater autonomy as well as higher earnings (Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002; McClough, Hoag, & Benedict, 2014; Silla, Gracia, & Peiró, 2005). Others have been less sanguine, shedding much light on the precarization of professional work (Standing, 2009). Unfortunately, few studies have conducted empirical analyses of how professional workers make sense of and respond to the shifting features of contemporary work arrangements. In this vein, my study explores broadcast professionals’ subjective experience of the transformation in their employment arrangements over the past few decades. Specifically, I examine independent producer-directors (hereafter indie PDs), most of whom work as freelancers, yet are economically dependent on major broadcasting companies as channels to disseminate and distribute their products.

Drawing on interviews of 53 indie and in-house PDs, I found that the arrangement of dependent self-employment translated into work precarity in three interrelated spheres of work: i) in labor markets, ii) in production processes and iii) in creative communities. More importantly, indie PDs cited in-house PDs' unprofessional attitudes and practices as a main source of the experience of work precarity throughout their career. Further analysis of the interviews shows that, in response to a growing sense of precarity, indie PDs have developed a professional identity which highlights the creative and entrepreneurial nature of their work. This professional identity allows them to extract positive meanings from work precarity and distinguish them from in-house PDs employed by major broadcasters. In turn, this professional identity has fueled their desire to self-organize in response to threats to their professional community. They opted for a professional association instead of a labor union as a form of collective representation to promote the social recognition of their professional identity.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: relevant research on non-standard work arrangement is briefly reviewed, with a particular focus on dependent (or bogus) self-employment. Then, I attempt to situate theories of social identity and creative work in the context of dependent self-employment arrangement. Next, I discuss the research context and methodology used for the data analysis, followed by a description of my results. Finally, I discuss the main findings in terms of their theoretical and practical implications, as well as avenues for future research.

II. Theoretical Background

1. Dependent Self-employed Professionals

Alternative work arrangements, which have been widely adopted by corporations since the 1990s (Katz & Krueger, 2019), fall into four categories: 1) independent contractors (or freelancers); (2) on-call workers who have designated times when they may (or may not) be summoned to the job; (3) workers from temporary work agencies; (4) workers provided by contract firms. Traditionally, independent contractors are broadly defined as self-employed individuals who contract or sell their services or skills to a client organization for a specified period on a project basis (Gallagher, 2008). They are seen

as distinct to those in wage-employment due to the ‘entrepreneurial flexibility’ marked by their ability to work for multiple clients at a single time and extensive control over how the work is performed while their taking individual responsibility for risks associated with market changes (Arum & Müller, 2004). Independent contractors are not technically employees of the client organization nor are they directly employed by an intermediary organization.

However, the boundary between independent contracting and paid employment has recently become blurred with the emergence of the third category of workers who enter into a project-based contract with an economic dependency on a few clients or employer organizations (Connelly & Gallagher, 2006; Sorge, 2009). While a definition of this irregular form of work arrangement still remains imprecise, there emerges a growing consensus on the definition of ‘economically dependent work’ which is distinguished from independent contracting (Muehlberger, 2007). For instance, ILO (2003) defines dependent self-employed workers as ‘workers who provide work or perform services to other persons within the legal framework of a civil or commercial contract, but who in fact are dependent on or integrated into the firm for which they perform the work or provide the service in question’ (p. 9).

To date, dependent form of self-employment has drawn scholarly attention primarily from labour law researchers concerned with whether this status constitutes employment relations or not (Muehlberger & Bertolini, 2008). Popular attention has focused on Uber and similar labor platform firms which have been roiled by legal controversies over the employment status of those who offer their labor (e.g. grocery shopping, plumbing and driving) through their online platforms. Most of the platform firms have classified them as independent contractors, a classification which exempts the firms from statutory responsibility associated with employment relations. However, compared to the substantial scholarly attention to the legal classification of dependent self-employment, there is still little sociological research which examines the lived experiences and work attitudes of those working under ambiguous employment relationships, especially in professional contexts (Moisander et al., 2017; Petriglieri et al., 2018). Further, this lack of knowledge has limited our understanding of how dependent self-employed professionals may respond to precarity associated with the employment arrangement. Filling this gap in the literature, I highlight the relative deprivation these precarious professionals experience vis-a-vis organizational professionals who engage in professional work under stable employment

relationships.

2. Relative Deprivation in the Context of Dependent Self-employment

In the present study, I draw on the notion of relative deprivation as the key construct for understanding collective identity and representation of dependent contractors in the professional context. Professional service firms (hereafter, PSFs) have long been seen as ‘good’ employers who offer quality employment, such as decent wages, benefits and a high degree of job security, as a way to acknowledge the expertise of its members. Therefore, upon feeling deprived of those elements, dependent contractors working for PSFs are likely to engage in social comparison, which will likely leave them with feelings of unfairness, resentment or helplessness compared to their colleagues or superiors in permanent, standard positions of the firms.

As a matter of fact, relative deprivation has been used by organizational psychology scholars as an antecedent to employees’ work attitudes and behaviors (Smith et al., 2012). The literature suggests that individuals’ reactions to their circumstances can be better explained by the nature of the social comparisons they make in reference to others than by the circumstances themselves (Crosby, 1982; Walker & Smith, 2002). While equity theory concerns object inequality based on an assessment of the ratio of outcomes to inputs, relative deprivation theorists posit that it is only when social comparison results in a subjective sense of inequality that those who are precarious in terms of objective measures feel deprived and take corresponding attitudinal and behavioral reactions (Osborne et al., 2012).

The relative deprivation literature suggests that people may experience two types of relative deprivation, depending on the salience of group membership in the context of their precarity (Walker & Pettigrew, 1984). First, the sense of egoistic deprivation arises when workers compare their working condition with that of others in their in-group or some ideal standard. Second, fraternal, or group-based, deprivation may develop from comparisons between one’s own group and other relevant social groups. Therefore, people are likely to experience fraternal deprivation when their membership of a certain social group (e.g., gender and race) is attributed to the cause of their precarity (Ellemers & Bos, 1998; Smith et al., 1994). The present study explores how dependent contractors make sense of and attribute their precarity, if at all, by examining the type of relative

deprivation which emerges more prominently. Further, we explore the implication of dependent contractors' sense of relative deprivation for how they see their work and professional identity.

3. Identity Construction of Dependent Self-employed Professionals

One of the goals of the present study is to extend the insights from relative deprivation theory and social identity theory to the context of dependent self-employment arrangement. Social identity theory bears great explanatory power to explain how people fulfill fundamental needs for uncertainty reduction, belonging and autonomy (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008) which dependent contracts often have to grapple with in workplaces and labor markets. Thus, scholars have drawn on insights from social identity theory to develop a better understanding of what motivates workers to perform, how they interact with one another, and more broadly, how they navigate their careers (Lapointe, 2011; McArdle et al., 2007).

In recent studies, scholars tend to see social identity not as a static attribute of a person, but as the continuous process of “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness”(Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p.626), a process which they label identity work. Individual workers may actively engage in identity work in order to develop a “coherent, distinct and positively valued” self (Alvesson et al., 2008, p.15). For instance, previous studies illustrated how workers doing so-called ‘dirty work’, tasks which are socially stigmatized as disgusting or degrading, may construct an esteem-enhancing social identity through various cognitive tactics such as ideology manipulation and social weighting (Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006). The sense of relative deprivation that dependent self-employed professionals experience in comparison to organizational professionals is likely to threaten their ability to craft and maintain a favorable professional identity. In this context, my interviews with indie PDs focused on how actively constructed self-narratives helped to resolve the tension between professional work and precarity.

Scholars, especially those in the field of critical management studies, have also proposed the notion of identity regulation (or management) as a mechanism for identity construction, distinct from identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). While identity

work tends to be described as a proactive, strategic process to develop a positively valued sense of self, studies on identity regulation focus on how culture, discourse or ideologies contribute to manufacturing and keeping social identities of workers aligned with organizational interest (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006; Hodgson, 2002; O'Toole & Grey, 2016; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). For example, prior research has shown that discourse regarding consumer care shape service workers' identities in a way that fosters their commitment to and identification with their organization (Casey, 1995; Du Gay & Salaman, 1992).

However, workers do not remain as a passive subject of control by employers. They, on occasion, resist and reject the identities that management injects into their sense of self because of the restrictions employers impose (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Fleming, 2013). For instance, in recent studies, employees' dis-identification or cynicism is described as a self-defensive mechanism by which they subjectively distance themselves from managerial domination and achieve dignity in the unfavorable work environment (Fleming, 2007; Naus, van Iterson, & Roe, 2007). In this vein, social identity of workers has been deemed as an arena for power struggle between the prison of corporate control and the play of resistance (Fleming & Spicer, 2007).

Despite a vast body of literature on control and resistance within organizations, there have been few attempts to extend insights towards workers on the borderline of organizations and employment relationships. This gap in the literature can be rendered more explicit: First, how professional identities of dependent contractors could be regulated when the organization they work for do not serve as a stable provider of professional recognition? (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016) Secondly, how dependent contractors engage in identity work for resistance across organizational boundaries. The media industry is one of the most controversial institutional settings in which professional autonomy and external control over work processes collide on a daily basis. Hence indie PDs in the industry provide an interesting lens through which to explore these questions.

III. Methodology

My research is based on around 53 interviews with indie and in-house PDs including the executives of their professional associations, Korean Independent Producers &

Directors' Association(KIPDA hereafter). The sample of this research consists primarily of indie PDs who take on work from three South Korean public broadcasters – KBS, MBC, and EBS – on a project basis while belonging to small-sized independent production companies or working as freelancers. Thus, this pool of PDs are economically dependent on the public service broadcasters as these firms have constituted an oligopolistic market for media contents. These broadcasters commission programs both to in-house PDs who are under standard employment arrangements and to indie PDs under commercial contracts. However, this does not mean all indies PD interviewees earn their living exclusively through the commission of public broadcasters. Their economic dependence on public broadcasters varied depending on the extent to which they could engage in producing contents for alternative outlets like independent ‘art-house’ movies. This varying degree of economic dependency allowed me to better examine its implication for subjective experiences of work precarity and professional identity construction.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with initial contacts who had become public figures in the independent production sector because of their resistance against the exploitative practices by public broadcasters. I attempted to recruit a wide range of indie PDs in terms of age, gender and work experience. However, it turned out that, out of 35 indie PDs whom I interviewed, all but five fell into the 35-45 age category, most of whom (except for two informants) were male. As a matter of fact, the demographics of participants represent the characteristics of independent production sector in Korea which is today marked as a male-dominated environment and has suffered from a decline of young, junior PDs over the past 10 years.

In the interviews with indie PDs which lasted 1-2 hours, I asked participants to reflect on their life history leading them to pursue the career of an indie PD. My interest was in examining how they manage their career development through inter-organizational mobility across broadcasters (Hall 2002; Rouseacu, 1995). Then, following questions probed their experiences of producing or directing and delivering a program to public broadcasters, with a particular focus on their sense making of work precarity. The final area of focus was their view on collective representation, how KIPDA was established in 2007 and why indie PDs chose professional association over trade union as a form of their collective voice channel.

Besides face-to-face interviews, I also gleaned information from secondary data including fliers, pamphlets, newsletters, newspaper articles and online materials. First of

all, archival data was used to triangulate the emergent findings from the interview data. For instance, in order to reduce hindsight and selection bias, I supplement face-to-face interview data with informants' postings on the intranet or their own blogs, which could be seen as alternative indicators of identity claims (Vazire & Gosling, 2004). I also tracked how media outlets portrayed indie PDs throughout the eight-year period from 2008 to 2016. By virtue of the extensive media coverage of their struggle, a considerable amount of secondary data was available to understand the institutional context of indie PDs' work and life.

IV. Findings

1. Informality and Precarization of Professional Work

Although the job title, 'independent' PDs, implies a greater exercising of control over their working lives, analysis revealed that the programs or segments produced by indie PDs are executed under the close control of in-house PDs. Specifically, control over indie PD work processes are implemented through informal relationships with and obligations to in-house chief producers (hereafter CPs) - producers with more than 20 years experience in a broadcaster - most of whom are in the later stages of their careers as organizational professionals. This form of control is maintained through the mutual exchange of favors and a complicity through which in-house CPs determine the writing formal terms through contracts as unfavorable. The informal control, enabled by the legal status of indie PDs as self-employed freelancers, has reinforced the precarity of indie PDs for many years. In particular, three elements of professional precarity emerge from interviews.

(1) Precarity in Labor Markets.

The first element of precarity is job insecurity in the labor market. With in-house CPs of major broadcasters wielding the authority to establish or renew contracts with indie PDs for a segment or an entire program, contracts with Indie PDs are vulnerable to being terminated by in-house CPs at any time without notice. Termination of contracts often

result in immediate unemployment, especially for junior indie PDs who lack a broad enough network of clients or colleagues to start new projects through introduction. One of the indies illustrated how the absence of formal contracts leads to job insecurity as follows:

“There was this one CP who would draw upon a pool of six external production teams for five slots of a weekday morning show, which meant that which ever team came last would be disqualified for that week. It’s up to us to create an item list, and up to the broadcasters to choose from it. They aren’t really bothered about how a program is shot, that’s out of their interest. They would just watch whatever has been edited and comment on it, saying “it’s no fun”. After the eliminations were made, any other teams waiting on the sidelines would be reintroduced into this pool. We make our money per program, so being eliminated meant that we would be out of work for the next week. All that competition week in and week was so stressful.” (Indie #1)

Each in-house CP possessed his or her own arbitrary rules in regard to managing contracts with indie PDs. Thus, the latter would constantly strive to establish and maintain good social relations with the former, contributing to the reproduction of power imbalances at the micro level and, as will be detailed later, the weakening of any potential form of collective resistance. In the absence of social insurance schemes owing to the current classification as self-employment status, informal arrangement by in-house CPs often accompanied an interruption to indie PDs’ revenue streams leading to income insecurity.

(2) Precarity in Production Processes

Secondly, the informal control by in-house CPs has led indie PDs to face the increasing precariousness in work processes. In-house CPs were given the authority to allocate their departmental budget to individual programs. Most of them have been spending much more production budget on the programs directed by their fellow in-house PDs than on those by the indies. Most indies have tended to accommodate this discriminative allocation of resource against them because of their eagerness for the airtime of their program on major TV channels. However, it engendered a bitter sense of unfairness among the indies. One indie PD expressed his frustration with lack of resource for production:

“It seemed that the higher-ups weren’t really into the program about tigers···. I told them that production would cost at least 75 million won per program according to the initial plan···. At the end of the day, they cut the budget to 50 million won. At the end of the day, we went through with it, because from my point of view, it was better to have the chance to produce at least something about tigers, rather than doing nothing at all···. But, even 000 PD will know that the quality of a production is strictly dependent on the budget.” (Indie #2, an email to the fellow indie PD)

In order to produce broadcast contents on a limited budget, they have no choice but to reduce the size of production crew as many as possible. In parallel, technological advancement in broadcasting equipment such as the spread of 6mm portable camera in mid 2000s has facilitated the development of the one-man production system among indie PDs. The one-man system, in the short term, appeared to relieve indie PDs from lack of production budget. However, in the long run, it has played a crucial role in worsening labor intensity and working conditions for indie PDs to the extent that threatens their health and safety. For instance, one producer, indie C told that he chose to learn the skills for underwater shooting by himself, rather than hiring expert divers, risking decompression sickness. Recently, two producers including indie #2 died in a car accident in Africa on their way back from the shooting scene. Their colleagues lamented that they could have avoided the accident if there had have a budget to hire a local driver to get back to hotel after all-day shooting as in-house PDs usually do.

(3) Precarity in Creative Communities

Finally, the third element that constitutes and reinforces indie PDs’ precarity is the alienation from the outcome of their creative labor. When an indie PD commissions a program, the copyright and other related rights of the program have been reserved to the client broadcaster. Any indie PD who demands the copyright of what they produce has been deemed ‘fastidious and disobedient’ (indie #15, #18) among regular PDs. As poor reputation in the project-based labor market significantly reduces the prospect for commissioning another program in the near future, the indies often give up any right for their product, feeling alienated as expressed below.

“I think of indie PDs (us), as surrogate mothers, who are ousted from the house with

a couple of pennies in hand, directly after giving birth. I'm also often told 'don't ever tell anyone that this is your brainchild. You have no rights... from A to Z.' We wouldn't have to worry about things like copyright if we were creatives with sky high salaries employed by the broadcasters. We would simply take home a paycheck each month, create some contents. We need to consider what indie PDs can do, if they are doing their everything to produce programs, but can't even make ends meet. (former indie PD #3 turned an indie film producer)

This wide-spread practice of stripping away copyright of a program from its creator has perpetuated the precarity of indie PDs by reproducing their economic dependence on major broadcasters. As they were not allowed to re-use the contents they produced for alternative media outlets such as international film markets and social media platforms, they have remained reliant on the projects from major broadcasters. There have been a few cases of CPs in the broadcasters being benevolent by letting the indies access once-commissioned contents for re-creation. However, those exceptional cases only led indie PDs to force themselves to keep dependent social relations with CPs with the hope of them being generous enough to share copyrights.

In sum, informal control mechanisms by in-house CPs at major broadcasters, enabled by the misclassification of indies PDs as 'independent' contractor, has culminated in the growing precarity of indie PDs in the labor market, production process and creative community. In the next section, we shed light on how they make sense of and respond to the precarity as a professional.

2. Collective Response to Professional Precarity: Collective identity formation through altercasting

As seen in the above mentioned quotes, most indie PDs cited in-house PDs attitudes and behaviors as a primary cause of their work precarity. Indie PDs often had after-work social gatherings where they relieved stress and shared their grievances and discontents about working with in-house PDs. In several after-hours socializing I was invited into, it was observed that these grievance-sharing often turned into collective backbiting of in-house PDs. In-house PDs were often portrayed either as the villain who have been exploiting indie PDs' creative labor or the bystander who have implicitly allowed their colleagues to engage in exploitative practices. Indie PDs rated and classified in-house PDs

into several sub-groups according to the extent to which they lack professional qualities as a broadcast journalist. In another words, indie PDs have developed a collective sense of what in-house PDs ought to be as a professional. This observation led me to draw on the notion of altercasting, which refers to “projecting an identity, to be assumed by other(s) with whom one is in interaction, which is congruent with one's own goals” (Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963, p. 454). Below, I describe how indie PDs develop their collective identity through altercasting of in-house PDs with a focus on two altercasting dimensions of relevance: Structural distance and Evaluative distance.

(1) Creativity as the Antithesis of Managerialism

The ‘structural distance’ dimension of altercasting refers to “the position of relative authority Ego is directing Alter to play out in the current encounter” (Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963, p. 457). The structural distance became particularly salient when indie PDs referred to in-house CPs. CPs were often lumped together to be accused of acting as despotic ‘gatekeeper’ who shows no interest or concern in professional autonomy as well as the well-being of indie PDs. The gatekeepers appeared to reduce the radical uncertainties inherent in creative work by according indie PDs lesser autonomy through the in formalization of managerial control. Indie PDs attributed the precariousness they have been experiencing as a content creator to the lack of commitment of in-house CPs to professional principles. Specifically, informants frequently used such terms as order-giving, demanding, arrogant and bossy in describing CPs’ attitudes and behaviors that seek total compliance with their directions from indie PDs. One indie PD illustrated:

“It’s mostly PDs who are incompetent or about to retire who supervise and manage programs outsourced to indie PDs. These guys used to work during the military government, they are living proof of the traditions or norms of that epoch. They are domineering and authoritative. So they consider us indie PDs as subordinates, not as fellow producers. It is no surprise that they curse at us and are even violent if we should even dare to speak our minds.”(indie PD #4)

As hinted by this quote, highlighting the structural distance and the instances of the abuse of their authority implied the disqualification of in-house CPs as a creative professional. In contrast, as for indie PDs, creativity is not mere a virtue but a survival

skill, and their capacity for it grew with their suffering of CP's coercive control. In this vein, some indie PDs proudly told their saga of resistance against the control. The saga typically featured an indie PD meticulously deploying tactics to prevent CPs from intervening into the products of his or her creative work. For instance, one informant (indie #1) narrated his experience that he literally run away with the videotape an hour before it was scheduled to be broadcast in order to avoid a CP's censoring his work. He appeared with the tape mere 10 minutes before the broadcast time, leaving the CP no option but to air it as such. After the fuss, the CP gave indie #1 a notice of contract termination.

In the saga of this sort, a CP is being cast into the role of 'a bureaucratic gatekeeper' who wields the censors' scissors in an arbitrary fashion. In response, indie PDs tend to portray themselves as 'an uncompromising creator' to maintain the higher moral ground as a professional. This element of professional identity as a creator, as an antithesis of a manager, manifest itself in indie PDs' desire for or the pursuit of the alternative career of a documentary film maker.

“Even as an indie PD, I've done a lot of managerial tasks, from planning to meeting with people, managing and delivering the program, and even accounting. At forty, I was fed up of working as a manager. I had never expressly thought of working in film, (I moved because) I was fed up at working as a manager. At the time, I quit production without any plan B. Like I said, I had never set out to work in film. My only thought was that I should live as a creative.” (former indie PD #5 turned documentary film director)

As will be shown later, the professional association of indie PDs, KIPDA, plays a crucial role in articulating and spreading this element of professional identity by promoting this emerging career as a pathway to being truly independent of reigning broadcasters and their CPs.

(2) Entrepreneurship as the Antithesis of Indolent Professionalism

In addition to in-house CPs, indie PDs drew on junior in-house PDs as another referent others in claiming their professional identity. In their citing junior in-house PDs, what stood out to me was Evaluative Distance, the second dimension of altercasting, which is

defined as Ego's projection of the relative evaluative status of himself and Alter (Blumstein, 1973). Evaluative distance is independent of the structural distance in that Ego might be in a structurally subordinate position, in terms of employment arrangement in my research context, yet still, "through skillful playing, cast Alter into a 'one down' identity, making it clear that Alter is not as superior, holy or infallible as his position might imply" (Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963, p. 457).

Unlike CPs or senior in-house PDs whose main role is overseeing the production process from budgeting to inspection, the role of junior in-house PDs is similar to that of indie PDs in the sense that they directly engage in the production process as a 'director'. However, the range of tasks conducted in the process significantly differs across the two groups of PDs, which is due in large part to differential effects of technological changes on their work processes.

As described earlier, the lack of financial resource has led indie PDs to fully embrace new technologies for shooting and editing and, consequently, institutionalize the one-man production system. For instance, an indie PD used to work with camera staff dedicated to shoot the scenes and sound staff in charge of recording devices. Back then, his or her main task remained in the area of 'conception', coordinating the collaboration among multi-occupational groups within the project team. Under the one-man production system which has spread since mid-2005, the role of indie PDs expanded into the area of 'execution', taking over the roles of other production crew. In contrast, abundant organizational resources have allowed in-house PDs to stay focused on the tasks of conception in production processes, leaving tasks of execution to the rest of production staff.

The selective influence of new technologies on work processes fostered the sense of precarity among indie PDs, especially in comparison with in-house PDs. In what appeared to be an attempt to offset their sense of relative deprivation, in interviews, indie PDs often made a sarcastic remark on in-house PDs' reliance on the plentiful supply of resource from their station. One indie PD, for instance, wrote in the newsletter of PD's association:

The advent of the 6mm portable camera that drastically cut production budgets left indie PDs with no choice but to embrace a one-man production system, juggling production, shooting, driving, editing, administration (···) It would be great if in-house PDs, with their entourage of production staff, could experience this system, where they

would be required to put their lives on the line as a way to grow mentally stronger, to pay for hospital fees, to become physically stronger. I am absolutely certain that such an experience will make them kinder in their judgement of Indie programs.¹⁾

This kind of sarcastic remarks on in-house PDs implies their lack of sympathy for indie PDs' precarity. As a matter of fact, in-house PDs have not been an exception for the precarization of professional work in the broadcast industry. Similar to indie PDs, they have also been working in increasingly unfavorable conditions marked by a persistent, autonomy-reducing regime of long working hours. However, in the interviews, indie PDs talked a great deal about the types of precarity (outlined in the previous section) which made them distinct from in-house PDs. Further, they went on to relate the capability of dealing with precarity to one of the core parts of their professional identity, entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial identity entails the multi-skillfulness of indie PDs which has developed through their long-term engagement in one-man production system. They have managed to incorporate new technologies, skills and tasks to their core activities. One of the recent examples was the adoption of drone technology to get a bird's eye view of the scenes they shoot. Many interviewees saw that continuous learning and adoption of new technology is one of the required qualities for a director. However, according to indie PDs, in-house PDs lacked this functional flexibility as they had long stayed indolent basking in the glory of their employing broadcaster. In the similar vein, another quality that indie PDs drew on to emphasize the entrepreneurial nature of their professionalism was their capability of improvising and problem-solving against any type of contingencies. Once again, the development of this capability was attributed to work precarity which indie PDs had to endure.

In sum, the two elements of professional identity - creativeness and entrepreneurship - have formed and strengthened among indie PDs through the altercasting of those who are working under a stable employment relationship with major broadcasters. Altercasting transformed the meaning of work precarity by simultaneously devaluing the attributes of stable, permanent employment relationships (e.g. bureaucrat or indolence) in the professional context and revaluing positive ones such as craftsmanship or entrepreneurship.

1) PD Journal. "In praise of one-man production system" Aug. 17, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.pdjournal.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=28606>

In the next section, I examine how professional identity affected the formation and functioning of the professional association of indie PDs as collective representation for them.

3. Professional Association as a form of Collective Representation and the Reproduction of Precarity

The institutionalization of one-man production system has forced indie PDs to work in an isolated fashion. During the day, they could hardly run into one another under the high intensity of the labor they put into production processes. However, they could have built a non-work, social community since their offices were concentrated in Yeouido, Seoul where major broadcasters in Korea were located. There were lots of informal, late-night gatherings in the bars or one of their work studios which served as a safe space for them to exchange opinions and seek for a potential collaboration. Most participants were veterans who had worked as indie PDs for more than 10 years.

One of the important functions of these ‘social rituals’ was to relieve emotional distress from work precarity by collectively reaffirming their commitment to their profession and denouncing in-house PDs’ unprofessional practices. Individual experiences of hardships and humiliations inflicted by the regulars were drawn onto to foster the “us versus them” mentality. Indie PDs have gradually come to see themselves as being "in the same boat" given their economic dependency on major broadcasters and subordination to the regulars. What drove these veterans to go on beyond this diagnosis of work precarity into the attempt to fix it was the collective sense of threat to their professional community. One veteran PD (indie #6) shared in a column the letter from his assistant who left the profession:

“You know that I always close the books after each program coproduced by you and your wife. Do you know how much money the two of you made last year? You merely made a little more than 20 million Won for the several TV programs you co-produced last year. I’ve been following in your footsteps, thinking that your present is my future. Yet, to think that I would earning 20 million Won per year 20 years down the road makes the future look so bleak. I don’t mind how difficult the work is just now. But, it’s hard to brace for a future that is so clearly cut out.”²⁾

2) MediaToday. “Why we organize KIPDA now” Feb. 5, 2007. Retrieved from

To be a veteran who can be solely in charge of a program or one of its segments, one should work as an assistant director, often called an AD, to several veteran PDs, an apprenticeship period during which he or she learn show to plan, shoot and edit video contents. Veteran PDs have been suffering a shortage of ADs since early mid-2000s as work precarity drove away young people from the career of an indie PD. Veteran PDs took this shrinking of the next generation of indie PDs serious enough to venture outside of an individualistic, nomadic, and ‘non-material’ culture which they had long stood for. Indie #6 continued in the column,

“It was a small income, but money didn’t matter to us. We felt so blessed to be doing what we wanted for a living. So, my wife and I believed that we were living as free spirit. Nevertheless, that doesn’t mean that we can compel our juniors to take on the burden of this sort of lifestyle (as an Indie PD). It’s been a while since the Indie field has had enough ADs. This is because of a low-income system that falls short of the long and arduous work. We had simply drilled our juniors about the significance and value of broadcasting work, without ever mentioning the economic compensation.”

This awareness of the impending threat to the entire indie PD community begot the need for solidaristic and substantive body to promote material interests of indie PDs. Then, informal communities of veteran PDs soon served a basic unit to organize their own collective representation distinct from that of in-house PDs.

Once they intended to form a collective, veteran PDs had two organizing options - a professional association and labor union. The choice between the two forms of a collective was more than a formality. It, in facts, reflected what organizational identity of a collective representation for indie PDs would be. More importantly, it implied the tension between professional and worker identity in their employment status of dependent self-employed professional. There have been some internal debates which ended up settling on the former, a professional association. Korean Independent Producers & Directors’ Association(KIPDA, hereafter) was founded on Feb. 7, 2007 and approximately 200 indie PDs joined as initial members.

There were two reasons for the choice of a professional association over a labor union. First, many indie PDs presumed that the ambiguous legal status would limit their effort

to organize a labor union. Korea's labor law has classified them as an independent contractor not as a worker. Thus, even if indie PDs form their own union, it was unlikely that the labor law acknowledge major broadcasters as their 'employer'. Second, more importantly, indie PDs were not keen to be organized into a branch of industrial union in a media industry, National Union of Media Workers (NUMW, hereafter) since in-house PDs had held a large majority of NUMW. As detailed earlier, indie PDs tended to attribute their work precarity to 'unqualified' in-house PDs. To indie PDs, there seemed no material and ideological common ground between them and in-house PDs which could possibly bring them together under the same umbrella union. In this regard, one indie PD expressed his objection to join NUMW as follows:

“In-house PDs can be practically seen as our employers. It wouldn't make any sense to be in the same labor union as your employers. Consider who has led the NUMW. They were all in-house reporters and PDs of major broadcasters. So, it would be naïve to believe that the NUMW would represent the interests of indie PDs.” (indie PD #7)

KIPDA, the professional association Indie PDs organized, also had its umbrella association dominated by employed PDs, Korean Producers & Directors Association (hereafter KPDA). However, in contrast with their attitude towards NUMW, indie PDs did not see being part of KPDA at odds with their collective identity. Rather, they took it as an opportunity to have their professional identity rightfully recognized by in-house PDs. The first president of KIPDA made this point clear in his media interview:

“While we (Indie PDs) work outside (of broadcasters), we are on equal footing with in-house PDs, and compete among Indie PDs, as contents creators. To us, our own association is significant, not only as a exclusive meeting point for Indie PDs, but also as a foundation upon which we are respected as equal beings as in-house PDs. This will be the first time that Indie PDs and in-house PDs come together in the shared, equal space of KPDA. Inevitably, we were not well-prepared when they opened their doors to us. We, indie PDs, must now ready ourselves to work with in-house PDs in KPDA.” (Lee Sung kyu, an indie PD and the first president of KIPDA, from his media interview on Feb. 7, 2007 after the inaugural meeting of KIPDA)

This comment indicates how veteran indie PDs understand the solution to work precarity which they had suffered throughout their career and now is driving away junior

indie PDs. The initial organizers of KIPDA believed that securing social recognition of their collective identity as a broadcast professional would bring about economic rewards commensurate with their creative and hard labor. In this regard, Choi, a veteran indie PD and chairman of the preparatory committee for KIPDA, emphasized in the media conference “the primary goal of KIPDA is to find a rightful place for indie PD”³⁾. Thus, KIPDA has engaged in the struggle for recognition of their professional identity since its foundation.

Overall, the process of organizing KIPDA well demonstrates the interplay between employment arrangement, work precarity, professional identity and collective representation. In Conclusion that follows, I will discuss the theoretical and practical implication of the findings.

V. Conclusion

The present study explored work precarity experienced by dependent self-employed and how they respond to it. In doing so, I focus on the development and maintenance of indie PDs’ professional identity and the formation of a new collective representation, KIPDA. We found that indie PDs had developed their own professional identity based on the shared understanding of work precarity vis-à-vis employed PDs. The informal, micro-communities of veteran indie PDs played a crucial role in the formation of collective understanding of work precarity and turning it into the key elements - creativity and entrepreneurship - of professional identity. In turn, this professional identity led them to organize themselves in response to the increasing threat to their professional community. They chose a professional association over a labor union as the form of their collective representation to promote the social recognition of their professional identity, which they believed was the most effective way to reduce work precarity.

This examination advances theories on professionalism, creative work and work precarity in three ways. First, my findings offer a deeper understanding of how the shift toward ‘bogus’ self-employment is consequential for job quality and work attitudes of creative workers. I theorized the cognitive mechanism of altercating which helped indie

3) Ohmynews. “Indie PD’s starting salary 6 million Won, remain unchanged for 10 years”. Feb. 1, 2007. Retrieved from http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000389678

PDs reconcile the cognitive dissonance between creative entrepreneurship and work precarity and develop an exclusive form of professional identity vis-à-vis those in the same profession, yet under ‘standard’ employment contracts. This finding offers insights into our understanding of how work precarity associated with dependent self-employment, the emerging form of non-standard work arrangement, may be subjectively experienced by professional workers, as well as, how they act upon it.

Second, my findings contribute to the growing body of literature on collective responses to precarity, including emerging precarious workers’ organization (Doellgast, Lillie, & Pulignano, 2018). Prior research has focused primarily on creative workers’ responses to work precarity at the individual level, while little attention being paid to how they collectively make sense of and deal with it. On the other hand, existing studies in the field of industrial relations have tended to objectify creative workers as targets for organizing. As a result, they were portrayed as passive or recalcitrant recipients of unions’ effort for the revitalization of labor movement. Departing from these approaches towards work, this paper shed light on how the perception of a suitable form of representation developed among dependent self-employed professionals in a collective and bottom-up manner. My findings demonstrate the tension between two forms of collective struggle to redress work precarity: one is the struggle for professional recognition and the other is the struggle for legal status as a worker. The prevalence of the former ultimately shaped indie PDs’ preference to a professional association over a labor union. Theoretically, this process deepens our understanding of how diagnostic (identifying work precarity as critical), prognostic (providing causal attribution for work precarity), and motivational (identifying solutions to work precarity) framing are intertwined in precarious professionals’ collective response to work precarity.

Finally, this research contributes to the on-going debate on relational dynamics at work between standard and non-standard workers. This study examined a professional organization where two groups of professional work force – in-house PDs who have been well-protected by internal labor market and a strong union and indie PDs who are among the least protected without collective voice channel – work side by side to produce programs. Findings suggest that this blended workforce generates antagonism between the two groups of professionals which even took the form of organized conflict. Indie PDs perceived that in-house PDs, while enjoying genuine control over their own labor, exercise managerial control over them. They believed that the control by in-house PDs has

worsened deprivation and insecurity among those in the external labor market and stifled the scope for professional development of indie PDs. This finding has a practical implication for the functioning of a professional organization. Indie PDs may bring news ideas and perspectives into the organization and contribute to skill formation of in-house PDs. However, the rigid hierarchy based on employment arrangements apparently has been limiting the potential benefits of the blended workforce. Thus, professional organizations need to pay close attention to promoting workplace climate and HRM system in which external workforce could enjoy the same level of social and professional recognition for their contribution as their in-house counterparts.

Taken together, my examination of the relationship between in-house and indie PDs suggests the segmentation along different types of employment arrangement functions as a significant barrier to the formation of ‘occupational citizenship’, a notion which several scholars have argued might replace the outdated notion of class-based solidarity. Also, this contribute to recent studies that show workers are not only split into core-periphery or internal-external labour markets, but also segmented in complex configurations between groups with differentiated access to labor market resources (Mccollum & Findlay, 2015) by showing how social boundaries between the groups are constructed and reproduced.

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국문요약

전문직 특수고용노동자들이 겪는 불안정성의 특징과 그에 대한 집단적 대응

노 성 철

본 논문은 전문직 특수고용노동자들이 어떻게 불안정성을 경험하고 대응하는지 살펴본다. 지상파 방송사에서 일하는 53명의 독립 피디와 정규직 피디들을 상대로 한 인터뷰를 분석한 결과 독립 피디들이 노동시장, 노동과정, 그리고 창작 커뮤니티에서 불안정성을 겪고 있음을 확인할 수 있었다. 이들 독립 피디들은 정규직 피디들의 대상화·타자화를 통해 피디로서 창의적이고 창업가적인 면을 강조하는 전문가 정체성을 구축하고 있었고, 이 집단적 정체성은 그들이 조직화하는 데 있어서 핵심적인 역할을 수행한다. 이어지는 내용에서는 독립 피디들의 전문가 정체성에 초점을 맞춰, 그들이 왜 노동조합이 아닌 직종협회를 집단적 이해대변체로서 택했는지 분석하고 그 이론적·실천적 함의를 논의하도록 한다.

주제어 : 노동 불안정성, 전문직 비정규 노동자, 종속적 자영업자, 집단적 이해대변