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**Dissertation Abstract:**

For decades, scholars of work have recorded structural changes rendering a ‘new economy.’ In the new economy, professionals experience unprecedented precarity whereby their careers are more unpredictable, insecure, and risky, compared to the postwar model of work. An enormous amount of scholarship analyzes the causes and effects of these structural changes. Although cultural scholars have long argued that when structures change, so must their protecting ideologies, far less scholarship has analyzed ideological structures of work in the new economy.

In this dissertation I analyze the ideology of work passion—what I call the passion paradigm—as an ideology sustaining and motivating professional work in the new economy. The concept of work passion has peppered literature on structurally precarious professionals for the last two decades, and scholars have recently theorized work passion as an increasingly hegemonic cultural script, however its pervasiveness, definition, and function remain unknown. Using interview data from a sample of 74 graphic designers, engineers, and nurses split evenly between males and females who work in either more or less precarious positions, I analyze what work passion is and why the passion paradigm thrives in the new economy.

I find that professionals conceptualize work passion as attraction, enjoyment, motivation and perseverance, and conceptualize the passion paradigm as a coherent and rational ideology of work which centers the prioritization of individual happiness. I argue that the passion paradigm thrives in a precarious economy because it grants adherents clarity and reliability; respondents adhere to it because they find it empowering. Second, I argue that the passion paradigm also thrives because it serves the institution of work by deeply individualizing, thereby depoliticizing the experience of work for professionals, while committing them to work hard and work well. The very cunning of the passion paradigm is convincing adherents that that which ultimately serves and preserves structures of work is of primary service to the self.

The findings in this dissertation contribute rich empirical data on worker well-being, expectations, and adaptations to work in the new economy—data which are essential for the tasks of fighting for and building more equitable and sustainable work.