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*Digital Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations
from the Faculty of Social Sciences 135*

Selected or Rejected?

*Assessing Aspiring Writers' Attempts to Achieve
Publication*

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ACTA
UNIVERSITATIS
UPSALIENSIS
UPPSALA
2017

ISSN 1652-9030
ISBN 978-91-554-9790-3
urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-312277

Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Geijersalen, Engelska parken, Thunbergsvägen 3, Uppsala, Friday, 24 February 2017 at 10:15 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English. Faculty examiner: Professor Giseline Kuipers (University of Amsterdam).

Abstract

Fürst, H. 2017. Selected or Rejected? Assessing Aspiring Writers' Attempts to Achieve Publication. *Digital Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Social Sciences* 135. 86 pp. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. ISBN 978-91-554-9790-3.

In many markets for cultural goods, gatekeepers select the cultural goods, relatively few cultural goods are selected, and the criteria for selection are unclear to both artists and gatekeepers. Not knowing whether cultural goods are of the 'right' quality to be selected, artists and gatekeepers become preoccupied with handling quality uncertainty. This thesis studies such handling of quality uncertainty before, during, and after aspiring writers attempt to succeed in the publishing market.

Drawing on eighty interviews with mainly aspiring writers and publishers in Sweden, three papers investigate three phases of handling quality uncertainty in the publishing market. First, in attempting to get published, writers handled uncertainty about how the quality of their work would be evaluated in the publishing market by using *appraisal devices*: trusted, knowledgeable appraisals of their work's chances of success or failure on the publishing market. Second, publishers responded to uncertainty about the quality of manuscripts by learning to consider means before ends, such that certain qualities of their reading experience became the necessary means for realizing that the manuscript might be publishable. This realization moved the manuscript from the *discovery phase* to *justification phase*, in which publishers made a final decision to select or reject the manuscript. Third, for the rejected writer, the uncertainty of not knowing how the publisher had determined the quality of the manuscript made it possible to *excuse* the course of events. Writers gave reasons why their manuscript had been rejected based on how they imagined publishers had determined its quality. They accepted the occurrence of failure but dismissed the responsibility for having failed. Writers also engaged in *justifications*, *refusals*, and *concessions* of the perceived failure.

These concepts for analyzing the publishing market are based on a perspective that takes into account subjectivity, temporality, and the condition of quality uncertainty. The perspective and concepts are useful for understanding other market situations in the cultural industries, wherein the successful hiring of cultural workers and the acquisition of cultural goods are rare relative to the number of aspirants, and wherein assessments are conditioned by quality uncertainty that needs to be handled.

Keywords: acquisition of cultural goods, acquisition of manuscripts, artistic careers, artistic markets, aspiring artists, aspiring writers, creative industry, cultural industry, cultural production, fiction debut, literary careers, publishing industry, publishing market, quality uncertainty, sociology of success and failure, trade publishing

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ISSN 1652-9030

ISBN 978-91-554-9790-3

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-312277 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-312277>)

List of papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Fürst, H. Being Good Enough on the Publishing Market: Aspiring Writers' Use of Appraisal Devices. *Submitted manuscript*.
- II Fürst, H. Making the Discovery: The Creativity of Selecting Fiction Manuscripts. *Submitted manuscript*.
- III Fürst, H. (2016) Handling Rejection as Failure: Aspiring Writers Getting the Rejection Slip. *Valuation Studies*, 4(2), 153–176.

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Acknowledgments

“There is a great dividing line between being selected and rejected by a publishing house. It is all or nothing.” Before uttering these words, the interviewed writer described years of trying to break through and become published. Being either selected or rejected would send the writer’s literary career in one of two different directions. Would the writer be amongst the very few chosen for publication? Or would the writer be amongst the many who either did not follow through or saw their creative work rejected? These defining moments are not always as dramatic as this writer made them sound, but my interest in these moments of success and failure nevertheless attracted me to this topic for my dissertation.

In attempting to realize my own aspiration to complete my dissertation, I am fortunate to have had such a brilliant supervisor as Patrik Aspers. He practiced true intellectual generosity as he supported me in my attempts to push my ideas to their limits. In addition, his European Research Council Starting Grant (ERC 263699-CEV) made this research project financially possible. I am also fortunate in having had Elin Thunman as my co-supervisor. Her comments on my drafts have always been helpful and have always had a sharp analytical edge.

Besides my supervisors, whom I heartily thank, I have had many 'mentors' throughout my academic career. Karin Hagren Idevall has followed my academic career from the very start and has given me intellectual and social support along the way. Moreover, just before becoming a Ph.D. student, I worked two and a half years as a research assistant in sociology at the Swedish Defence University. There I closely collaborated with Bengt Abrahamsson and Franz Kernic. I deeply appreciate the intellectual insights as well as insights into academia that I gained from our meetings and collaborations. During my time at the Department of Education at Stockholm University as a student and part-time teacher, I also gained very valuable insights and encouragement to continue my academic pursuits from Agnieszka Bron, Ragnhild Mogren, and Camilla Thunborg.

After leaving the Swedish Defence University and Stockholm University, I pursued my doctorate at the Department of Sociology at Uppsala University. I have belonged to a couple of research groups in this department. I have

received much needed feedback from Ellinor Anderberg, Petter Bengtsson, Elena Bogdanova, Jonas Bååth, Ugo Corte, Alexander Dobeson, Dominik Döllinger, Alison Gerber, Clara Iversen, Sebastian Kohl, Tobias Olofsson, Carl Sandberg, Edvin Sandström, and Tiziana Sardiello. I also thank Christoffer Berg, Kalle Berggren, Philip K. Creswell, Hedvig Ekerwald, Hedvig Gröndal, Tora Holmberg, Magdalena Kania Lundholm, María Langa, Mai Lundemark, Nicklas Neuman, Fredrik Palm, David Redmalm, and Maria Törnqvist. Participating in these research groups has genuinely helped me think more deeply and clearly about my ongoing research project.

There have been several readers outside these research groups who have given me important feedback and whom I would like to thank, namely, Karl Berglund, Hannah Bradby, Donald Broady, Linnéa Bruno, Clayton C. Childress, Karim Marini Thomé, Chris Mathieu, Anna-Maria Rimm, Uwe Schimank, and Helena Wulff. I also thank Kelly Besecke for her thorough proofreading of the final version of this dissertation. Moreover, during one of the last semesters of my doctoral program, I greatly benefited from two doctoral courses at Uppsala University: one on modern sociological theory with Hans Joas in the Department of Sociology and another on publishing studies with Johan Svedjedal in the Department of Literature.

I thank the people who have been participants in my research project. Even though the central focus has been to do research, it has also been a personally rewarding experience to spend time in the field with the participants. My family has mostly been in the background in terms of their direct involvement in this research project. But in this last sentence, they finally appear, as I dedicate this dissertation to us.

Henrik Fürst, Uppsala, January 2017

1 Introduction

What do you want to become? Implicit in this question are assumptions of aspiration, change, and uncertainty. People answering this question articulate aspirations to become someone they are not, and they cannot be sure that they will accomplish those aspirations. While the question is existential and has many answers, some common answers come from people who are aspiring to become writers, actors, musicians, or creative artists in some other field. A creative person may aspire to become a musician with a record deal, a fashion model at a modeling agency, or a writer whose work is published by a publishing house. The realization of an aspiration may be a long-cherished dream, but the person may also be offered an aspiration. For example, when fashion model scouts find people with the right 'look', they may offer them an aspiration to be a fashion model.

However, just having an aspiration is not enough to have a breakthrough and enter the creative industries as an artist. The realization of the aspiration often depends on people acting as gatekeepers in the creative industries. The gatekeepers assess what the aspiring person presents to them and decide who will or will not have a breakthrough. Aspiring artists cannot be certain whether these gatekeepers will select or reject them, nor do they have full control over how the gatekeepers will evaluate what they present to them. Aspiring musicians simply do not know or control how artists and repertoire (A&R) at record labels will judge their sound; an aspiring fashion model does not know or control what fashion model agencies are looking for; and aspiring writers¹ do not know or control how publishing houses will evaluate their manuscripts.

Aspiring writers' lack of knowledge and control of the evaluation process creates uncertainty about whether their work of fiction is of the right quality to be published. "It is hard to be selected by a publishing house", an aspiring writer says. "It feels like a lottery, because I have no idea what publishing houses are doing or what criteria they are using when evaluating manuscripts."

¹ I use 'aspiring writers' as a shorthand term for writers who aspire to publish their first fiction book. I refer to writers who publish their first fiction book as 'first-time published fiction writers' or 'first-time published writers'.

It is not a lottery, but publishers² are still unable to give writers an easy-to-follow recipe for success: “I cannot tell aspiring writers what I look for or like to see, [...] because] you cannot simply adapt a manuscript to some standard to make it publishable.” Fiction manuscripts are singularities (Karpik, 2010), non-standardized goods that come in an “infinite variety” (Caves, 2000, pp. 6-7). Manuscripts are neither easily made nor easily assessed, because there are no clear aesthetic standards and guidelines for producing and evaluating fiction (Anheier & Gerhards 1991a, pp. 812-813, 1991b, pp. 139-140; Janssen, 2001, p. 340; Menger, 2014, p. 4). Because manuscripts are unique and of uncertain quality, and because of the lack of evaluation standards, it is hard to comprehend how aspiring writers have their work published by publishing houses.

Quality uncertainty is not only fundamental to these manuscripts but is also a fundamental characteristic of cultural goods in the creative industries (Caves, 2000, pp. 4-5). These types of goods need to be experienced for their qualities to be assessed (Akerlof, 1970, p. 489; Podolny, 1993, p. 835). Accordingly, publishers need to experience the submitted manuscripts to differentiate their qualities, evaluate them, and either select or reject them. The fact that assessments are made under conditions of quality uncertainty is central not only to publishers at publishing houses, but also to aspiring writers, whose success or failure at their aspiration of becoming published depends on publishing houses’ assessments but who may not know what the quality of their manuscript is or how publishing houses will assess it.

While it would be possible to structurally explain why aspiring writers succeed or fail, these structural factors are not only complex but also probably not known to the writers and publishers themselves. Rather, to understand success and failure, it is also important to take the perspective of the actors themselves and understand how they handle the lack of clear standards for evaluation and the condition of quality uncertainty in the manuscript acquisition process. Consequently, a main claim in this dissertation is that to fully understand how artists get a first break in the creative industries, it is necessary to understand (1) how artists handle this quality uncertainty before and after the evaluation and (2) how gatekeepers confronting this quality uncertainty evaluate and acquire new cultural goods.

This quality uncertainty, in creating uncertainty about whether one will succeed or fail, has the consequence of making it possible to at least imagine and dream about successfully becoming published and working as an author. In Sweden and elsewhere, one of the most dreamt about occupations is that of

² Depending on context, I use the word 'publisher' to either indicate the role of someone working at a publishing house or the role of a person involved in the manuscript acquisition process (see also Svedjedal, 2000, p. 102).

an author.³ Also, up to one-fifth of Swedish adults would like to publish a novel, and about a tenth would like to publish poetry or a short-story collection.⁴ Because so many people want to engage in cultural work, aspiring writers invest in an occupation with very slim chances for success and economic returns. Nevertheless, they do creative work for the sake of being creative and engaging in something they feel passionate about (McRobbie, 2016). The dream of becoming a published author is encouraged and shaped by the idea that anyone can make it. On one hand, the idea that anyone can make it is based on the ideological guise of egalitarian principles that promise everyone equal access to success; on the other hand, it also depends on meritocratic principles according to which success depends on the writer's own talents and capabilities alone. In reality, everyone cannot make it: most people fail because of structurally imposed limited opportunities for success (Merton, 1938, p. 680), a fact that has inspired such discouraging remarks as "[t]he main function of authors is to get their manuscripts rejected" (Stinchcombe, 1983, p. 941). The tension between the idea that *anyone can make it* and the idea that *everyone cannot make it* produces a simultaneous hope for and disbelief in the possibility of success. Many people in Sweden dream of becoming published, and some eventually submit a manuscript to a publishing house, but only a handful of these aspiring writers end up as first-time published fiction writers. Of the thousands⁵ of manuscripts that aspiring

³ This is exemplified in Kairos Future and Manpower Work Life's (2013) survey about the most desirable occupations in Sweden. In the survey 4 732 respondents selected the most desirable occupation from a list of 130 occupations. The survey shows that becoming an author is the sixth most desirable occupation. The desirability of becoming an author ranks as number three for women and number eight for men. This situation is not unique to Sweden. For example, in the UK, 'author' is also one of the most sought-after occupations (Dahlgreen, 2015). As stated before, the prevalence of this dream might be due to the uncertainty of success making it possible to at least imagine success in becoming an author. Becoming an author may also be seen as an achievable goal because it does not require any formal education, in contrast to many other occupations, such as medical doctors.

⁴ In a representative sample of 1 043 adults in Sweden, almost a fifth answered that they would like to publish a novel (18 %) or a crime novel (20 %), and almost a tenth said that they would like to publish poetry (7 %) or a short-story collection (11 %) ("Swedish Writing Habits," 2010, p. 12).

⁵ It is hard to estimate the number of manuscripts submitted to publishing houses in Sweden each year. Some publishing houses keep track of the number of manuscripts they receive, while others do not. Some of the largest publishing houses, which seem to receive the most manuscripts, report that they get a couple of thousand manuscript submissions per year. Since aspiring writers often submit their manuscripts to several publishing houses, the largest publishing houses may receive the same manuscripts. All in all, therefore, a very crude estimate

writers submit to publishing houses in Sweden each year, only a small number become published books.

Aspiring writers who submit manuscripts to publishing houses are part of a *publishing market*. A market is “a social structure for the exchange of rights in which offers are evaluated and priced, and compete with one another” (Aspers, 2011a, p. 4). On the publishing market, writers compete by offering rights to manuscripts of unknown quality to publishing houses, and publishing houses compete for these rights. A match between a publishing house and a writer is based on the publishing house’s evaluation of the value of the manuscript and the writer’s evaluation of the value of the publishing house. This makes the publishing market into a social process of match-making in which two sides are evaluating each other. While some writers and publishing houses do not attempt to be matched, those that do either succeed or fail. From this perspective, the successful match of an aspiring writer and a publishing house results in a book project in which aspiring writers become first-time published fiction writers.

The publishing market should not be confused with the whole *publishing industry*. The publishing industry is the whole system that fosters the production, distribution, dissemination, circulation and consumption of literature. The publishing market is only one part of the publishing industry. This market is a point at which new cultural goods enter the publishing industry and at which the industry acquires new manuscripts (Hirsch, 1972). Neither should the publishing market be confused with the *book market*—what elsewhere is called the “market for consumers” (Thompson, 2012, p. 11)—which is a consumer market in which retailers sell books and consumers buy them.

The publishing market has been called the “marketplace of ideas” (Coser, 1975). Publishers act as “gatekeepers of ideas” by selecting and rejecting competing ideas from manuscripts. The publishing market is also called a “market for content” (Thompson 2012, p. 11). Publishing houses compete with one another for the same or similar content from manuscripts. These concepts emphasize the competition between ideas or content and the competition between publishing houses for the content. The publishing market is also an “artistic labor market” in which a match between an artist as a seller of labor and a buyer of this labor results in a job for the artist (Menger, 1999). A more general version of this market may be called an *artistic market*, in which a match does not necessarily result in a job but does result in two sides coming together organize an artistic project (cf. Faulkner & Anderson, 1987). As an example of an artistic market, the publishing market emphasizes both

is that a couple of thousand manuscripts are submitted to publishing houses in Sweden per year (see also Pettersson, 2011, p. 25).

the two sides of the market and the match-making process. When the match is successful, writers and publishing houses trade rights and engage in a short-term book project. The outcome of this process has consequences not only for the publishing houses and writers involved in this market, but also for which literature is produced in a society.

Significant to many artistic markets, including the publishing market involving aspiring writers, is the characteristic of being a *nearly impossible market* to succeed in. A nearly impossible market is a type of market in which successful matchings are *rare* and the criteria of a successful matching are *unclear* to those who participate. To view the publishing market as a nearly impossible market is to take the perspective of the aspiring writer and his or her actual chances for success in a market in which rewards are highly skewed and success is uncertain. This type of market, often found in the creative industries, features a *winner-takes-all structure* in which rewards are continually given to few actors while most participants get few or no rewards (Lutter, 2013; Menger, 1999, 2014; Merton, 1968). Nevertheless, 'winner-takes-all' is a structural concept that refers to certain actors' dominance over the artistic market over time. The concept of a nearly impossible market takes the perspective of market actors competing to get their first break in the artistic market and emphasizes not only the rarity but also the uncertainty of success.

In studying quality uncertainty in the publishing market for aspiring writers, this dissertation will analyze aspects of preparing for, carrying out, and responding to evaluations in this type of nearly impossible market. Uncertainty, market, and evaluation are at the core of not only this dissertation but also the study of markets in economic sociology (Beckert, 1996, 2015, 2016; Karpik, 2010). Economic sociology has been described as the study of how economic actors (in this case market actors) create expectations and handle uncertainty when making decisions (Beckert, 1996, p. 827, 2015, 2016). For example, trust in consumer markets, such as the book market, is important to creating expectations of the quality of the product when the offered product is of uncertain quality (Cheshire & Cook, 2004; DiMaggio & Louch, 1998; Karpik, 2010; Kollock, 1999). An example is consumers' use of trusted judgment devices (e.g. awards and best-seller lists) to create expectations about the quality of cultural goods (Karpik, 2010). In the study of artistic markets, researchers have shown that cultural organizations handle uncertainty in the evaluation of artists and what they present by using flexible employment and short-term, project-based contracts to reduce economic risks (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005) and by building trust relationships with key players in the industry to reduce the uncertainty of success and failure (Hirsch, 1972). Cultural organizations also reduce uncertainty in organizational decision making by repeating and imitating the work of successful or similar organizations (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013, see also White, 1981). When evaluating the quality of cultural goods,

organizations rely on different signals of quality to compare producers and products (Podolny, 1993; see Jones, 2002 for an overview). One often-studied quality signal is the track record of previous artistic projects, which cultural producers and organizations use to gauge each other's status and reputation. Producers and organizations use these signals to determine the quality of each other's past work and to create expectations about the quality of future work (Aspers, 2001; Becker, 1982; Beckert & Rössel, 2013; Faulkner, 1971, 1983; Jones, 2002; Mears, 2011; Menger, 1999, 2014; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & Rittmann, 2003).

One way this dissertation contributes to the literature on artistic markets is the conceptual and empirical understanding that it offers of situations in which the cultural producer and good are new and have not yet been matched in the artistic market. The writer has not had a fiction book on the book market before and is, therefore, untested on the publishing market and the book market. Hence, aspiring writers and their manuscripts, unlike published writers, lack signals of quality from a track record of published fiction books. As a result, quality uncertainty is a most salient problem for aspiring writers and publishers. The case under study can be generalized to the broader process by which market actors on both sides of nearly impossible artistic markets experience, make sense of, and act in response to genuine quality uncertainty in preparing, carrying out, and responding to evaluations in such markets. Because the publishing market involves aspiring writers, it is conditioned by a profound quality uncertainty on both sides of the market and so is an exemplary case to use to understand this process.

The aspiration to become a first-time published fiction writer has not been studied in great depth before.⁶ It is noteworthy that aspiring artists usually are not studied in research on artistic careers; most research focuses on the more or less established artists. For example, research on literary careers usually focuses on the already published writers and their track records (de Nooy, 1991; Ekelund & Börjesson, 2002, 2005; Enzer, 1963; Janssen, 1998; van Dijk, 1999; van Rees & Vermunt, 1996). This focus opens up space for studying how quality uncertainty is handled when there is no track record, but the research gap is also puzzling, because most artists engaged in or trying to be engaged in the creative industries appear to be aspiring artists. It is also puzzling that the study of careers typically focuses on success, for example by

⁶ However, Fürst (2016), Svedjedal (1982), Vandenhaute (2004), and Warnqvist (2007) have studied the fiction debut in Sweden from a historical and statistical perspective. Vandenhaute (2004) and Fürst (2016) have studied routes to the fiction debut. While Vandenhaute (2004) uses this information to predict continuing careers, Fürst (2016) focuses on what happens before the debut and reception of the debut fiction book. These studies, however, are not about the aspiration to become a first-time author. There are also a number of literary biographies that deal with how an author becomes published for the first time.

studying successful track records, and that when researchers do study failures, they treat separately from success (Mathieu, 2012). However, *we need to theorize and study both success and failure* to fully understand how people try to realize aspirations (Mathieu, 2012, p. 21). After all, people only become successful by risking failure and only fail when there is the possibility of success. This dissertation, therefore, emphasizes subjective and objective failures and successes. Objective successes and failures are attempts to be matched on the publishing market that either succeed or fail. The subjective side of success or failure is the meaning that the actor attributes to an objective success or failure. Rejected writers, for example, can turn a mismatch on the publishing market into a subjective success or a subjective failure.

Previous research has not entirely overlooked aspiring artists and their successes and failures in cultural industries. For example, researchers have studied aspiring rappers (Lee, 2016), aspiring rock musicians (Bennett, 1980), aspiring composers (Faulkner, 1983), aspiring studio musicians (Faulkner, 1971), aspiring art students (Flisbäck, 2006; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Strandvad, 2014), aspiring fashion photographers (Aspers, 2001), aspiring poets (Vandenhoute, 2004), aspiring pop musicians (Meizel, 2009; Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2010), and aspiring jazz musicians (Nylander, 2014a). Researchers have also studied aspirants in cultural industries in educational settings (Flisbäck, 2006; Nylander, 2014a; Strandvad, 2014), the former aspirations of now successful artists (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Vandenhoute, 2004; Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2010), and group dynamics and becoming something as a definitional matter (Bennett, 1980). For musicians, success depends on being matched with other band members who are on the same musical level (Bennett, 1980), experiencing social support, and having a professional attitude and network (Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2010). For art students, it depends in part on the ability to create new problems to solve (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976).

All in all, much research has shown that success or failure in the cultural industries depends on at least four factors: (1) the artist's abilities, (2) how the environment conditions the chances of success and risks of failure, (3) the quality of the work, and (4) what value the finished work is given in the course of various evaluations (Menger, 2014, p. 4). A match on an artistic market comes about through an assortative matching process in which the two sides choose each other based on similar aesthetic sensibilities (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 95-97, 133-134; see also Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 249-277, 2008: Vandenhoute, 2004, pp. 176-179). Nevertheless, writers and publishers are not necessarily aware of these and other factors that influence success and failure. Rather, as this introduction has shown, uncertainty about the quality of manuscripts poses a core problem to aspiring writers and publishers on the publishing market. A fundamental claim in this dissertation is that the successes and

failures of aspiring artists in nearly impossible markets are contingent on how the two sides of the market respond to and handle this issue of quality uncertainty.

1.1 Research question and scope

This dissertation investigates both success and failure in an aspiration by studying attempts to succeed in a market where success is nearly impossible to achieve. Writers and their work are untested and conditioned by quality uncertainty on the publishing market. The main research question is: *How is quality uncertainty handled in the publishing market for aspiring writers of fiction?* The question includes both sides of the publishing market for aspiring writers— aspiring writers and publishers—and asks how each handles the uncertainty in the publishing market for aspiring writers of fiction. The answer to the main research question will not only show how quality uncertainty is handled in near impossible markets where the evaluation of goods is conditioned by genuine quality uncertainty; it will also show a new aspect of the process by which aspiring writers have their work published on the publishing market. The analysis also offers insight into similar markets with untested goods and the situation for aspiring artists in other creative industries.

The dissertation is focused on fiction writers' attempts to become first-time published writers of a novel, short-story collection, or collection of poems published for an adult audience through traditional publishing houses in the Swedish publishing market.⁷ This dissertation centers on literary works originally written in Swedish and analyzes a selection of phases of the process of attempting to become published. By focusing on aspiring writers' attempts to achieve publication and specific phases in a particular and relatively delimited language area, I was able to sample a wide variety of publishers and writers, including most of the publishing houses that had published several debut fiction books and a range of aspiring or formerly aspiring writers. However, the results are transposable to other contexts in which people attempt to succeed in nearly impossible markets under the condition of quality

⁷ The publishing industry includes different sectors, such as trade publishing and scholarly publishing, that are all organized differently (Coser, Kadushin, & Powell, 1982, pp. 36-69; Powell, 1985, pp. 21-35; Thompson, 2005, p. 7, 2012, p. 12). Scholarly monographs, for instance, are acquired differently than fiction manuscripts. The dissertation focuses on trade publishing and fiction for adult audiences. While some processes described are similar in trade publishing of fiction books for children, children's book publishing may at times involve combined efforts of an illustrator and fiction writer, making the acquisition process a bit different from when only text is involved in the acquisition. However, the results are probably directly transposable to the situation for writers of fiction for young adults and the publishing houses that publish such fiction.

uncertainty. I discuss this transposability in the concluding section of this introductory chapter and the concluding sections of each of the three papers.

Together, these papers answer the main research question by individually analyzing three different phases of the process of attempting to become a first-time published writer. They discuss writers' aspirations before becoming published or giving up on becoming published, publishers' selection processes, and writers' responses to publishers' decision to reject their submissions. Each paper deals with tensions relating to roles and institutions in the literary world.

The first paper is about the tension between the role of an aspiring writer and the lack of objective standards for evaluation: aspiring artists ask themselves whether publishers will see their manuscript as good enough to be published. The second paper is about the role of a publisher and the lack of standards for evaluation in the selection process: gatekeepers ask themselves whether the aspiring writer's manuscript is any good. The third paper is about the institution of rejection and the emotional tension involved in writers' lack of control over the evaluation process: rejected writers use different techniques to handle the consequences of a publisher's evaluation when rejection may mean that their manuscript is not good enough to be published. The individual papers analyze these tensions to answer the following questions:

- How do aspiring writers deal with the tension between their orientation to becoming first-time published writers and the quality uncertainty involved in this effort? (paper I)
- How do publishers discover fiction manuscripts during the acquisition process when they lack pre-fixed standards for making these discoveries? (paper II)
- How do aspiring fiction writers deal with the tension involved in hoping to be published and having their work rejected by a publishing house? (paper III)

I answer the question of how quality uncertainty is handled in the publishing market for aspiring writers by answering these individual research questions. Aspiring writers deal with uncertainty about how the publishing market will evaluate the quality of their manuscripts by soliciting trusted and knowledgeable appraisals of their work's chances for success or failure on the market. To handle rejections from publishing houses, they adapt to failure by either assuming or not assuming responsibility for the failure and by either dismissing or admitting the rejection as a perceived failure. Writers gradually learn about their future chances of success and failure and are either able or unable to reorient themselves toward attempting to get published again. For writers to achieve success, they need to be oriented toward becoming published by maintaining the hope or belief that success is possible and by

staying resilient in the face of failure. In the end, the aspiring writer's manuscript is selected when publishers 'discover' it in the course of having particular experiences while reading it and are able to justify its publication using different justification strategies. This answer provides details about a particular aspect of success and failure in the attempt to become a first-time published fiction writer. This answer and the study as a whole also contribute to a more general understanding of attempts to succeed under conditions of quality uncertainty in markets that are nearly impossible to succeed in.

1.2 Outline

To explain the context for fiction debut publishing in Sweden, I describe how writers submit manuscripts to publishing houses and how publishing houses handle the manuscripts they receive. The description is accompanied by a description of relevant institutional structures, a statistical description of the distribution of the fiction debut, and a history of the economic and political conditions for writers and publishing houses in Sweden. The point of departure for the dissertation is an emphasis on the importance of the condition of quality uncertainty for cultural production and the role of subjectivity in these situations. From this point of departure, the dissertation discusses literature on cultural production, artistic careers, and the acquisition of cultural goods, focusing especially on research on literary careers and the manuscript acquisition processes. I then explain how this research focus directed the project's research design, approach, and analysis and how I used and developed relevant theories. Next, I present an overview of the outcome of the research drawn from the individual papers. The introductory chapter ends by discussing the papers' joint contributions to the fields of economic sociology, valuation studies, sociology of culture, sociology of art, and what I introduce as the sociology of success and failure. I also discuss the implications of the research for the study of freelance careers and artistic markets.

2 Getting published for the first time in Sweden

This section describes the Swedish publishing market, how manuscripts are selected and rejected, who gets published, and what it means to become published for the first time. It then offers an overview of the economic conditions for literary production and the history of Swedish trade publishing and publishing houses. This presentation contextualizes aspiring writers' attempts to have their work published through the publishing market and the publishers' work in selecting and rejecting manuscripts.

2.1 The publishing market and publishers' acquisition of aspiring writers' manuscripts

Writers get published for the first time in three ways. First, a publishing house may acquire an aspiring writer's manuscript. The publishing house then takes the economic risk for the debut fiction book project. This way of getting published involves the *publishing market*. It is nearly impossible for aspiring writers to succeed in the market; they are typically stymied by the quality uncertainty described in the introduction. Second, aspiring writers may decide to *self-publish*. In this case, the writer takes the economic risk for the debut fiction book project by paying for the necessary publishing services. As the self-published writers both make the economic investment and make the decision to publish their work, self-publishing is different from competing on the publishing market. Deciding to self-publish means not entering a nearly impossible market and not having the manuscript's quality assessed by a publishing house. This dissertation focuses on publishing in a market that is nearly impossible to succeed in and that is conditioned by quality uncertainty; for this reason, the dissertation does not focus on self-publishing. Third, *hybrid publishing* combines self-publishing with a publishing market. The writer decides to self-publish, and the publishing house sells publishing services to the writer but may also reject the writer's manuscript. Publishers interviewed at hybrid publishing houses estimated that about a third of submitted manuscripts are accepted. Publishers interviewed at traditional publishing houses generally estimated a manuscript acceptance rate of a few manuscripts per thousand submitted. Writers and publishers may confront

quality uncertainty on the hybrid publishing market, but this market is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which focuses on the nearly impossible market conditions of the traditional publishing market.

The publishing market features two combinations of role-sets: writers-publishing houses and writers-literary agents-publishing houses. The publishing market is what Aspers (2011a, pp. 83-84) calls a fixed-role market. The roles of publishers are fixed on the buying side of the market, and the roles of writers are fixed on the selling side. In representing writers when selling manuscripts to publishing houses, literary agents sometimes take part in the selling side of the market. Hence, in the publishing market writers give the rights to their manuscripts to publishing houses, sometimes through the mediation of literary agent. But the publishing market also involves aesthetic values and evaluations. These aesthetic values and evaluations are commonly found in markets in cultural industries, creating the aforementioned lack of standards for evaluating cultural goods (see also Aspers, 2001, p. 1, 2011a, p. 91; Entwistle, 2009, p. 53). In hybrid publishing, the writers do not know if they will be published, but in hybrid publishing's particular type of publishing market, the fixed roles are reversed, with the writers as buyers and the publishers as sellers.

There are two types of self-publishing, which are based on two different role-sets: either a *conflated role* or a *differentiated role-set*. In the conflated role, the roles of the publishing house and writer are conflated, and the person switches between them or combines being a writer and taking the role of a publishing house (cf. Aspers, 2011a, pp. 83-84). There is no publishing market involved, there is no competition, and only one person is involved in making the publishing decision. The differentiated role-set involves a *self-publishing market*. The aspiring writer gets published by buying the necessary publishing services from a publishing house, which has competed against other publishing houses that offer self-publishing services for the aspiring writer as a customer. In the traditional publishing market, writers are sellers of manuscripts and publishing houses are buyers. In this self-publishing market, the writer is the buyer of services and the publishing houses are the sellers of these services. The writer selects a publishing firm and buys its services, and the publishing house publishes the book. The uncertainty is thus different in self-publishing than in attempting to be published through the publishing market. Self-publishing writers know that their work will be published if they invest in the necessary services. But writers on the publishing market do not know if they will be published, which is the central problem that this dissertation addresses.

In the publishing market, manuscripts reach publishing houses in three different ways: (1) through unsolicited submissions, (2) through the personal networks of writers and people at the publishing house, and (3) through

literary agencies. In Sweden, manuscripts usually reach publishing houses through unsolicited submissions and occasionally through personal networks (see paper II).⁸ Literary agents and agencies have grown in importance for trade publishing in Sweden since the early 1990s (Berglund, 2014). Nevertheless, literary agencies play only a marginal role in mediating aspiring writers' manuscripts to publishing houses. Instead, literary agents in Sweden mainly handle already published writers and translation rights.

This situation for aspiring writers and literary agents stands in stark contrast to trade publishing in other countries. In U.S. and U.K. trade publishing, for example, aspiring writers are in more dire need of a literary agent to become published at all (Thompson, 2012, pp. 71-74). Literary agents cultivate and develop aspiring writers' manuscripts before submission to a publishing house, a practice which is almost unheard of in Sweden at the time of this study. By contrast, it was not until the mid-2010s that literary agencies in Sweden began to successfully sell aspiring writers' manuscripts to publishing houses (Fürst, 2016). Only one percent (8 of 796) of the debut fiction books announced in the trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel* between 1997 and 2014 initially came through a literary agency (Fürst, 2016). Consequently, literary agencies have a short history and marginal role in handling aspiring writers' manuscripts in Sweden.

One explanation for the marginality of literary agencies is their inability to establish a reputation amongst publishers in Sweden as key agents in the discovery and cultivation of aspiring writers' fiction manuscripts. One publisher I interviewed spoke of this marginality, saying, "Most literary agents in Sweden do not think like publishers and are unable to select the best manuscripts and cultivate them. They are sellers. You cannot know if what they send you is good or bad, and that goes for all literary agencies. You do not see them as serious players yet." Literary agencies in Sweden also see themselves as primarily concerned with economic matters. One literary agent explained that literary agencies' primary aim was to "sell the rights of their writers' books and manuscripts [...] and leave the creative aspects to the writers and their publishing house." This literary agent mirrored the publisher's view of a strict division of labor between literary agencies and publishers.

⁸ Small and new publishing houses are the ones that most often rely on personal networks to receive manuscripts, as these publishing houses often lack a steady flow of unsolicited manuscripts. Network affiliations and positions and their use as signals of quality are important for success and failure, such a study is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The aspect of the acquisition process that this dissertation focuses on is publishers' handling of quality uncertainty when, during the manuscript discovery process, they either perceive that a manuscript and writer lack a known history or attempt to bracket any such known history.

Economic considerations are also in play when literary agents refrain from handling aspiring writers' manuscripts. The economic return for writers published by the largest publishing houses may not amount to more than a month's pay for a person with an average income in Sweden. The minimal economic compensation to writers implies a correspondingly meager compensation for literary agents—if the literary agent is able to sell the manuscript at all. Agents also run a long-term economic risk when they take on a writer. There is only a slim chance that the writer will become well-established and economically profitable in the long run. Instead of going through literary agencies, who are occupied with translation rights and established writers, aspiring writers in the Swedish publishing market usually and naturally submit their manuscript directly to publishing houses.

When these manuscripts reach the publishing houses, they go through certain procedures as part of the manuscript acquisition process. In a very general sense, one to several people are engaged in the manuscript acquisition process. This process includes scanning, reading, deciding what to publish, and later on, when a manuscript has been accepted, editing, designing, engaging in sales and marketing, and distributing the finished book. A common job for an intern or administrator at a publishing house is scanning submissions to identify any suitable manuscripts of the kind that the publishing house publishes. For instance, if the publishing house only publishes crime novels, they will immediately filter out a collection of poems. Publishers may bring unsolicited manuscripts home to read, but they may also have manuscript meetings in which they read the submitted manuscripts that have passed through the initial rough scanning process. At larger publishing houses, publishers and sometimes marketing personnel may sit down, read, and evaluate submitted manuscripts during these meetings. With the exception of resubmitted manuscripts, which publishing houses may have requested, those reading the manuscripts have usually not seen the manuscript before. Publishing houses have developed different strategies for reading the manuscripts, but the manuscripts are always read by one person at a time, and readers may begin by looking at certain parts of the manuscript to determine whether it is worth continuing to read the manuscript. In the end, only manuscripts that produce certain kinds of experiences are selected as potentially publishable manuscripts (see paper II).

After reading and finding something to consider publishing, they may send the manuscript out for external review, for example by asking for a review from one of the writers whose work they already publish, or, if they have had a meeting, they may take the manuscript with them from the meeting to read it more closely. Many people engaged in the evaluation of manuscripts do not have time to read or do not manage to focus on reading during office hours. They may not even have time for acquisition meetings. Instead, they bring the manuscripts home with them to read during their spare time. Publishers told

me, for example, about discovering manuscripts while in the bathtub, in bed before going to sleep, and on an isolated island on Christmas morning. Following the manuscript meeting and a closer reading of the manuscript, the evaluators involved have a meeting where they finally decide whether to publish the manuscript. During this second meeting, they discuss such things as the potential sales of the finished book and whether the manuscript is a good fit for the publishing house. At smaller publishing houses, one person may carry out many of these procedures and may do many of them at the same time.

Few manuscripts get this far in the manuscript acquisition process. Instead, most writers receive a rejection letter (see paper III). These rejection letters may be what is called in the research field “a standard rejection”. In a polite tone, the writer is thanked for the submission and informed that the publishing house will not be publishing the manuscript. The rejection letter can also be more elaborate and may encourage writers to send a revised or new manuscript to the publishing house later on. In the rejection letter, the publishing house usually tries to save the writer’s face. If the manuscript has been externally reviewed, the letter usually does not include the harsher parts of the review.

When a decision to publish a manuscript is reached it becomes a matter of some urgency to contact the writer before any other publishing house does so, because those involved in the evaluation know that (1) writers usually send their manuscript to several publishing houses simultaneously, and (2) other publishing houses usually come to the same conclusion and so are likely to want to publish the same manuscript (see paper I and paper II). A publisher described this situation by saying, “You cannot simply walk around and wait. Because then someone else will get the writer. That is the way it works.” Publishers described the phone call telling a writer that his or her manuscript has been accepted for publication as a very rewarding experience for themselves as well as the writer. If the writer accepts the publishing house’s offer to publish the manuscript, both parties sign a contract, and the editing process begins. A book cover is designed, and a marketing and sales plan might already have been formed. The manuscript is then printed and distributed to retailers, where the debut fiction book finally reaches consumers, libraries, reviewers, and the like. This entire process, from acceptance to publication, may take a year. The writer has now been published for the first time.

2.2 What it means to be published for the first time

A first-time published fiction writer is someone whose fiction book has been selected by a publishing house and published for the first time or who has self-published a first fiction book through either self-publishing or hybrid

publishing. Writers may then make their fiction debut (see also Fürst, 2016). In Swedish, this institutionalized role is called 'debutant.' It has the same connotation as the English word debutant—that of making a first public appearance of some sort. One way of seeing it is that through the book, the person makes his or her debut in the literary world as a fiction writer.

No other phase in the literary career has its own name, and no other phase has as strongly institutionalized a role as the phase of making a debut. The role of the debutant is surrounded by a particular aura, because making a debut is truly a watershed moment and rite of passage in a literary career. It creates some visibility, attention, and prestige for the writer. The role imbues its occupants with the expectations of being both new and untested in a culture longing for both change and continuity. A debut is a novelty in the sense that writers make their debut only once, but it also represents continuity in that the presentation of fiction debuts is a recurring event in trade publishing. The publishing house uses the aura of the debut to market debut books and their writers. Moreover, built into the role of debutant is a hope and promise that occupants will leave a mark in the literary world—even though, in retrospect, most writers do not fulfill that hope and promise.

Writers who claim and enter the role of having made their debut in the literary world also get access to the social, economic, and cultural resources that the role offers. This parallels would-be film directors, screenwriters, and producers, who need to claim and enter their role to get access to resources that are necessary in the film industry (Baker & Anderson, 1991, p. 279). In their role as a debut author, writers may be invited to and presented as debutants at literary events. Their debutant status usually puts them in contact with people in the literary world and enables them to apply for certain grants and to be nominated for literary prizes for debut fiction books. Furthermore, though this was a contested issue in the field, full legitimacy in public literary life as a fiction writer seems to require having published a debut fiction book. Published writers are identified through their debut fiction book and the publishing house that published it. The debut fiction book may become a writer's 'calling card' as well as 'entrance ticket' into literary life. Aspiring writers lack this calling card and entrance ticket and are therefore often relegated to the outskirts of the literary world.

2.3 The people who get published for the first time

This dissertation covers aspiring writers' careers up until their selection or rejection by a publishing house on the publishing market. Nonetheless, to get an overview of debut fiction publishing, this section presents descriptive statistics related to debut fiction books, writers who have made their fiction debut, and the publishing houses involved. These statistics are based on a

sample of 813 debut fiction books written for an adult readership. Fifteen of these books were written by two or three writers. This sample is based on debut fiction books and writers presented between 1997 and 2014 in the Swedish publishing industry trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel* (see Appendix A).⁹

Before their fiction debut, some of the writers studied participated in writing courses, published their writing in journals and periodical anthologies, were nominated for literary prizes, participated in writing groups, had literary mentors, and had their manuscript acquired by a literary agency (cf. Appendix C). As discussed, few writers pass through literary agencies before their debut. Few have been nominated for or have won national literary prizes before their debut. By contrast, many of the writers who end up with the largest publishing houses (e.g. *Norstedts* and *Albert Bonniers förlag*) have participated in writing schools and have published their writing in journals or periodical anthologies before their debut. I have not been able to generate any statistics on the number of writers that had a literary mentor before their debut. Based on interviews with first-time published and aspiring fiction writers, working with a literary mentor seems to be an important part of many literary careers and the attempt to be published.

The fiction debut typically happens the same year the writer turns 32 years old. Slightly more women (56 %) than men (44 %) get published. The same sample also shows a steady increase of debut fiction books published between 1997 and 2014. The number of debut fiction books published increased from 21 in 1997 to 37 in 2005 and from 44 in 2006 to 75 in 2014. However, debut fiction books are only a small portion of the total number of fiction books published during these years. The total number of fiction books published, according to *The Swedish National Bibliographic Databases*, went from 581 in 1997 to 1102 in 2005 and from 1149 in 2006 to 1590 in 2014. Debut fiction books were three to five percent of the total number of published fiction books published each year from 1997 to 2014. Hence, between 1997 and 2014, there was a steady increase in the number of first-time published writers and debut

⁹ In the trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel*, writers announce their fiction debut by writing a text, often about themselves and the book. This announcement makes it clear to the publishing world that they have made their fiction debut. This dissertation uses these announcements as a sampling frame and to create an overview of debut fiction publishing in Sweden. The dissertation also includes two national literary prizes eligible to aspiring writers and samples eighteen literary journals and periodical anthologies. It also samples ten longer writing courses that were still active in 2014. The goal is to give a broad a conception of the structure of aspiring writers' literary activities. I have made a more extensive presentation and analysis of this material elsewhere (Fürst, 2016).

fiction books that paralleled an increase in the total number of fiction books published.

2.4 The rise of the publishing market and the economic conditions for writers

How do unpublished and published writers finance the time they spend writing? The conditions for maintaining and financing a career as a writer have varied throughout history.¹⁰ In the seventeenth century, writers needed a patron of the arts—typically a member of the royal family or the aristocracy (Steiner, 2012, pp. 46-49; Svedjedal, 1993, pp. 216-221; see also Sapiro, 2015). Writers received payment for texts commissioned for ceremonial events. Writers who had been recognized for their literary abilities could also sustain a living by holding a position in public office or working in education, for a church, or in public administration (Steiner, 2012, pp. 46-49; Svedjedal, 1993, pp. 216-221). A major change in the maintenance and financing of a career as a writer was the rise of the book market, which brought with it the possibility of earning income by selling books. During the nineteenth century, some writers could even sustain a living from book sales and other literary activities (Svedjedal, 1993, pp. 216-221). Eventually, the state and publishing houses began to offer grants that writers could use to help finance their work (Svedjedal, 1993, pp. 599-606).

The rise of the publishing market brought about another source of income for writers. In the early nineteenth century, new laws and regulations, particularly the *Freedom of the Press Act* in 1810, gave writers legal rights to their own work and enabled them to transfer those rights to publishing houses. Consequently, they could sell publishing houses the rights to reproduce their work—a necessary precondition for a publishing market.

The economic relations between publishing houses and writers in this publishing market were regulated in 1947 when a general agreement between the Swedish Authors' Association and the Swedish Publishers' Association was signed. This agreement covered regulations regarding the basic level of economic compensation for writers and how the compensation would be paid. In the 1990s the agreement came under scrutiny, and the Swedish Publishers' Association terminated the agreement in 1996. The publishing market became unregulated, and economic terms between writers and publishing houses

¹⁰ The rest of this section is influenced by the production of culture perspective (Peterson, 1985; Peterson & Anand, 2004). It describes institutional and organizational constraints, laws and regulations, technology, careers, markets, industry structure, and organization structures that condition literary production in Sweden.

became negotiable. This resulted in different agreements between writers and publishing houses and between publishing houses, literary agents, and writers.

In the contemporary, unregulated publishing market, writers offer publishing houses the right to reproduce their work for a specific length of time. When the publishing house and writer reach a contractual agreement, the writer may also receive some economic compensation. While writers do not receive a salary, they may receive an honorarium for their work, for example based on the royalty return for an expected number of books sold. Publishers at larger publishing houses told me that the publishing house may offer an honorarium corresponding to one to three months of average income in Sweden. Other publishing houses offer a symbolic sum, and others offer no honorarium at all. Publishing houses and writers also agree on how the income from book sales will be distributed between the publishing house and the writer. Some writers work under contract for a book series, but usually there is no formal agreement between writers and publishing houses stating that the publishing house will publish the writer's next manuscript.

In my sample of writers, a rare few received substantial economic compensation from the publishing house upon the acquisition of their manuscript. Publishers told me of only two instances in which aspiring writers received a substantial financial advance; in these cases, the writers or their coauthors were well-known for their writing in other genres or fields. This type of acquisition—one that comes with substantial economic compensation for an unpublished writer—seems to be more common in the United Kingdom and the United States. In those cases, publishing houses are searching for possible best sellers amongst unpublished writers' manuscripts, and literary agents negotiate economically beneficial deals (Thompson, 2012). The economically beneficial deals are possible because of the search for potential best sellers; as Thompson (2012) put it, “[t]he first-time writer is the true *tabula rasa* of trade publishing, because his or her creation is the book for which it is still possible to imagine anything and everything” (p. 201). The bestsellerism and inflated sales expectations for writers without track records also operate in Swedish trade publishing. Swedish publishing houses, however, do not make the substantial economic investments in aspiring writers' manuscripts that their U.K. and U.S. counterparts do, partly because of the marginal role of literary agents and partly because they are not subject to the same demands for constant economic growth on a year-to-year basis; as a result, they do are not under the same pressure to buy potential “big books”.

To Swedish first-time published fiction writers, the rather low economic compensation and inability to sustain a living through fiction writing alone may come as a surprise. One writer told me, “It was probably during my first meeting with my publisher [at the large publishing house] that they told me about the economic conditions of being a fiction writer. I then realized I could

not make a living out of this.” A winner-takes-all-structure appears in the income distribution amongst published writers. Most published writers cannot make a living from their writing, while a very few continually earn substantial amounts of money. As often is the case for artists, to sustain a living it is generally necessary to perform side activities, and therefore writers may live a 'double life,' combining their fiction writing with another occupation, such as being a medical doctor and a fiction writer (Lahire, 2010, 2015a; Menger, 1999).

For writers whose work has not been published, the economic conditions are even harsher. Many aspiring writers indirectly finance and develop their writing by relying on the educational system. Since the 1970s the Swedish state has indirectly financed fiction writing through scholarships for writing courses and programs at universities and folk high schools¹¹ (see also Childress & Gerber, 2015). However, these writers mainly work without pay and have slim chances for any economic return at all. Publishing houses depend on these aspiring writers' work. Just as cultural organizations in other creative industries are in constant need of new cultural goods, publishing houses need a pool of new manuscripts and writers in the publishing market to be able to select and contract with a few of them. Publishing houses' main resources are their books and writers.

2.5 The history and structure of trade publishing and publishing houses

The publishing market is related to the history and structure of the publishing industry in Sweden. To begin with, publishers in Sweden were active at least as early as the eighteenth century (Rimm, 2009), and many publishing houses emerged during the nineteenth century (Svedjedal, 1993). Two major publishing houses that emerged in the nineteenth century were *Albert Bonniers förlag* and *Norstedts*. These publishing houses have remained in their dominant positions since. They can, therefore, be used as a point of reference to discuss both the history and structure of the Swedish publishing industry.

The structure of the publishing industry can be described by horizontal and vertical integration, diversification, and the cumulative advantage of a few dominant publishing houses. Horizontal integration means that publishing houses have been integrated into groups involving several different publishing

¹¹ While not connected to any regular university, folk high schools provide liberal adult education, including courses for writing, performing music, filmmaking, photography, and drama (see also Nylander, 2014a).

houses. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s a horizontal integration of firms into corporate groups emerged due to several takeovers and mergers of privately owned publishing houses (Gidlund, 2009, p. 55; Hertel, 2012, p. 225; Peterson, 2001, p. 17; Steiner, 2012, p. 78; Sjögren & Hehrne, 2003, p. 39). Vertical integration, on the other hand, means that these corporate groups benefited by being integrated into the supply chain by controlling the distributors and retailers of books. The dominance of a few publishing houses and publishing firms can, therefore, be partly explained by their control of this supply chain (Rimm, 2014). The existence of a few dominant publishing houses and firms is also an expression of diversification. This diversification means that the industry is split between small publishing houses with a short life span and big publishing houses with a longer life span (Hertel, 2012, p. 225; cf. Peterson & Berger, 1975; Thompson, 2012). Vertical integration, horizontal integration, and simply being big, combined with a long history in the trade and the cumulative advantages associated with this history, create advantages for a few publishing groups, for example the groups behind *Albert Bonniers förlag* and *Norstedts*. Smaller and newer publishing houses usually lack these advantages and have a hard time establishing themselves. Smaller publishing houses usually come and go but are also more numerous than larger ones. Hence, in terms of economic resources and size, a few publishing houses became dominant, and the many smaller publishing houses did not. This forms an oligopolistic structure that often characterizes creative industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2012, pp. 71-76).

The contemporary, oligopolistic structure of the publishing industry should be seen in the light of a contraction of the space for consumption of literature in Sweden from the 1970s onwards (Hertel, 2012, p. 225). The contraction of literary consumption involves a decrease in book sales, book lending, book reading, and education about literature among the general population. Perhaps the contraction in sales, lending, and interest can be explained by the rise of new consumer markets and leisure activities: books now compete with television as a leisure time activity (Hertel, 2012, pp. 229-230). As a consequence, publishing houses, book retailers, and libraries were shut down. This contraction makes it hard for many publishing houses to share this space and illustrates the publishing crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this time there was an overproduction of titles. The number of published titles between 1956 and 1970 increased by almost 70 percent (Peterson, 2001, pp. 16-17). While many titles were printed, only a few sold well enough to keep at least some publishing houses afloat (Gedin, 2010, pp. 107-108). To compensate for the decrease in book sales, the publishing houses began increasing book prices. This measure covered the negative results for some time, but it set the publishing houses into an economic tailspin. This eventually led to a decrease in the number of books published and personnel layoffs

(Gedin, 2010, pp. 105-106; Peterson, 2001, p. 17; Sjögren & Hehrne, 2003, p. 38).

During the same time in the 1970s, laws and regulations changed trade publishing when the commission system coordinated by the Swedish Publishers' Association was abolished (Peterson, 2001, pp. 7-9; Svedjedal, 1993, p. 794, 2003, p. 8). In the commission system, publishing houses had set book prices and each book always had the same fixed prize regardless of the retailer (Svedjedal, 1993, pp. 794-795, 2003, p. 9). The Swedish Publishers' Association was responsible for commissioning retailers; they awarded retailers the rights to sell books, and retailers obtained credit, which meant that the retailers only had to pay the publishing houses what they owed once a year (Svedjedal, 2003, pp. 8-9). But already in 1953 the commission system had come under scrutiny when a state law was effectuated to prevent manufacturers from obstructing market competition by determining a product's retail price. This was, in fact, what the publishing houses were doing. The Swedish Publishers' Association managed to keep this law from having a direct effect on trade publishing until the 1970s, when then the association lost the ability to commission retailers and publishing houses were no longer able to set fixed prices for their books.

The state also intervened in trade publishing in 1973, when the state began to offer funding for 'high-quality' literature. This made some publishing houses less dependent on book sales. Escarpit's (1970) typology of cultured and popular circuits has illustrated this intervention (Larsson, 2009). The cultured circuit is the production of literature for a small market made up of members the cultivated middle class, artistic elites, and intellectuals (Escarpit, 1970, pp. 86-108). The popular circuit is literature produced for a broader audience of manual laborers and members of the lower-middle classes (Escarpit, 1970, pp. 86-108). These circuits may be roughly translated into highbrow and lowbrow literature. Since the Second World War, the cultured circuit had declined and become isolated from the popular circuit. The isolation and decline of the cultured circuit posed a threat to literary life and the ruling Social Democrats, who, citing the value of popular education, introduced state cultural funding of 'high quality' literature to make cultured literature available in the popular circuit and so counter its isolation and decline (Larsson, 2009, p. 246). This effort might be seen as a response to the contraction of trade publishing. This state funding was also awarded to publishing houses of any size as long as the literature they produced was of 'good quality'. This funding enabled small publishing houses to stay afloat despite their structurally disadvantageous position and enabled all publishing houses to publish fewer commercial titles. In the early 2000s, another state intervention helped publishing houses: the sales tax on books was reduced from 25 percent to 6 percent.

Another illustrative major change in trade publishing has been the technological change of computerization: the publishers' and retailers' work has become increasingly reliant on computers (Svedjedal, 2000). Technological developments made it possible for the production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of books to be computerized. Thompson (2005, 2012) has called the computerization of production and distribution of books "a hidden revolution" within trade publishing. On the consumption side, e-books emerged as a new format. However, in contrast to some expectations, the e-book format did not gain significant influence. But the Internet has become a major outlet for books and the online production and consumption of fiction, for example through online writing communities.

The organization of employment at publishing houses has changed as securely employed staff has been laid off and increasing numbers of workers are now freelance (Pettersson, 2011, p. 23; Schmidt, 2015). For example, according to their annual financial reports, the two largest publishing corporations, which own *Norstedts* and *Albert Bonniers förlag*, have fewer securely employed staff members than they used to. From 2013 to 2015, *Norstedts* decreased their employed staff from 135 to 106. *Bonnierförlagen* (owning *Albert Bonniers förlag* and other publishing houses) decreased their employed staff from 303 to 207 between 2013 and 2015. Smaller publishing houses usually have no or few full-time employed staff members and often rely on free labor and freelance work.

However, the publishing industry, together with the other cultural industries, is still very important to the Swedish economy. While *Bonnierförlagen* had an annual turnover of about a billion Swedish kronor a year from 2013 to 2015, *Norstedts* had an annual turnover about half a billion Swedish kronor a year. In 2014 an estimated 6 350 million Swedish kronor's worth of books were sold through different retailers (Förläggareföreningen, 2015). By comparison, the Swedish music business sold about 8 200 million Swedish kronor's worth of music (including live concerts, copyright returns, and recorded music; Portnoff & Thurn, 2015).

Swedish trade publishing has stabilized into an oligopolistic structure and has also gone through technological, economical, and organizational changes. However, the existence and functioning of the publishing market are still at the heart of trade publishing. To elucidate how publishers and aspiring writers handle quality uncertainty on this publishing market, the next section discusses research on literary careers and manuscript acquisition.

3 Literary careers and manuscript acquisition

Two aspects of cultural production are central to this dissertation. The first is the key condition of quality uncertainty in cultural production and its role in the publishing market and aspiring writers' careers. The second is experience, action, and sense-making in artistic careers and acquisitions of cultural goods in artistic markets, along with the expression of this subjectivity by aspiring writers in their career and by publishers in their acquisition of manuscripts. Underlying this dissertation's analysis of these two aspects of cultural production is a set of pragmatist assumptions that people act according to habit and that when a problem confronts them with uncertainty, they attempt to create certainty by making sense and orient their actions pragmatically to solve the problem. I discuss the two aspects of cultural production in relation to five distinguishable but interrelated approaches to studying cultural production, artistic careers, and processes of acquiring cultural goods: (1) the production of culture approach, (2) a Bourdieusian critical sociology, (3) the Chicago School of Sociology approach, (4) a communication circuit approach, and (5) an artistic market approach.¹² This review introduces the five approaches and their respective focuses and then discusses research that uses these approaches to understand literary careers and manuscript acquisition processes.

3.1 Cultural production

The *production of culture* approach is a loose framework for studying cultural production. The framework focuses on how the form and content of literary works and other cultural products are shaped by institutional and organizational constraints, laws and regulations, technology, occupational careers, markets, industry structures, and organizational structures (Peterson, 1985; Peterson & Anand, 2004). These constraints influence what literary works become easy or difficult to produce. For example, the previous section indicated that the cultural production of literature in Sweden was constrained by the construction of trade publishing, including laws and regulations, technology, organizational structures, and economic conditions for

¹² While these approaches are not unified bodies of research, they do represent distinguishable approaches that are useful for presenting lines of research on cultural production, artistic careers, and manuscript acquisitions.

occupational careers. Peterson (1985) discusses these constraints in detail in a study of the decline of the golden age of short stories in the United States. Peterson shows that these factors transformed when new media outlets for storytelling emerged and advertisers began to turn their attention to nonfiction and that this transformation led to the decline of the short story. The production of culture perspective has at times been equated with new institutionalism (Santoro, 2015, p. 130n1). Franssen and Kuipers (2013) have used new institutionalism and the production of culture approach to consider publishing houses as organizations; they show that publishing houses act under similar institutional and organizational constraints and imitate one another to reduce uncertainty when making publishing decisions (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013).

The study of cultural production from the viewpoint of art worlds has its roots in the *Chicago School of Sociology*. The idea of art worlds is that cultural production depends on collaborative networks (Becker, 1982). Cultural products are not the result of a single individual alone but are the outcome of networks of joint activity by all people involved in the making of the product. Thus not only the artists are involved, but also different kinds of support personnel. Cooperation becomes possible through shared conventions of how things are regularly done, making people interchangeable in this structure. There are, for example, conventions in how work and cooperation are carried out amongst those involved in the production of a film (Faulkner, 1983). Newcomers to composing music for Hollywood studio films, for example, learn not only how work is usually carried out in filmmaking, but also conventions of film music and how those conventions are supposed to be used to create desired effects in films (Faulkner, 1983, pp. 92-94). Conventions make innovation hard but cooperation easy. In the literary world, books are published through cooperative action that relies on conventions. Publishers, writers, agents, bookstores, and other actors know the conventional forms and tools used to make fictional literature. Together they produce what is commonly known as fiction. Conventions are also used to evaluate the quality of the literature that is produced. Through conventions, 'good' and 'bad' books and writers are identified. This evaluation affects the status and reputation of the people who have made the literary works.

The *critical sociology* approach to studying the production of literature and art assumes a state of competition for status and class struggle as agents strive for legitimacy and influence in cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). The positions of agents in the literary field and the positions they take in their behavior—for example, conforming to certain literary styles—determine how agents are able to act and what literature becomes easy or hard to produce. Numerous studies of literature have been carried out in dialogue with the critical sociology tradition (see e.g. Anheier & Gerhards, 1991a, 1991b; Anheier, Gerhards & Romo, 1995; Bourdieu, 1993, 1996, 2008; Ekelund &

Börjesson, 2002, 2005; Lahire, 2010; Peurell, 1998; Sapiro, 2015; Vandenhoute, 2004). Vandenhoute (2004), for example, shows the struggles for legitimacy and influence amongst poets entering the literary field in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s. The social origin of the poets was important for entering the field. Working class people became poets, but those who became influential and successful in the long run were published by central publishing houses and entered the field in positions associated with high levels of capital. Post-Bourdiesian approaches have criticized this type of Bourdiesian approach for overemphasizing social determinants and underplaying actors as part of a field and confining actors to a single position in the field (Lahire, 2015a, p. 64). The post-Bourdiesian approach takes into account plurality and subjectivity (Lahire, 2011) by adopting an on-the-ground perspective on how the evaluation of cultural goods is carried out (Beljean, Chong & Lamont, 2015, p. 41). This on-the-ground perspective and post-Bourdiesian critique are crucial to this dissertation, which takes subjectivity into account in studying how actors handle quality uncertainty.

The *communication circuit* approach studies cultural production as a cultural industry. The publishing industry is seen as a composition of actors and material coming together on the basis of the basic sender-media-response communication model with a feedback loop. Publishers act as gatekeepers and channel manuscripts by either accepting or discarding them. They respond to those who submitted the manuscripts, and additional gatekeepers further down the line channel out products sent to them, such as when distributor decide not to take on a particular book (Hirsch, 1972). Other models based on the communication circuit approach focus on circuits of production, dissemination, consumption, and circulation of literature. Escarpit (1970) outlines these aspects of production, distribution, and consumption in analyzing the cultivated and popular circuit. Hertel (2012) extends this work by modeling additional circuits. Darnton (1982) also extends the work of Escarpit, focusing on the literary circuit of the literary work and the different 'instances' of the publishing industry that are involved in its production, dissemination, consumption, and circulation. Other models see this process not as a full circuit but as a more linear communication process, including the models proposed by Furuland (2012), Hjorth-Andersen (2000), and Mann (1982, pp. 30-31). Svedjedal (2000, pp. 114-132) contributes to this discussion by showing that functions and the various 'instances' involved in the production, consumption, dissemination, and circulation of literature must be determined empirically. Svedjedal suggests empirical tools for conducting empirically sensitive research on these matters. Most models of publishing as a cultural industry emphasize the role of selection and rejection processes mediated by gatekeepers in the movement of literature through the industry system. This gatekeeping role is also of the utmost importance to this dissertation and is further elaborated in the section on manuscript acquisitions.

The *artistic market* or artistic labor market approach emphasizes the roles of artistic labor markets and networks in the production culture. The aforementioned study by Faulkner (1983) on Hollywood studio composers, for instance, shows that the hiring of freelance film composers in Hollywood depends on the composer's position in reputational structures and professional networks. Composers are deemed as good as their last job. Similar findings concerning network and reputation have been made in the market for fashion photographers (Aspers, 2001) and the market for fashion models (Mears, 2011). These artistic labor markets consist of two sides, buyers and sellers, that are either matched or not matched. Faulkner and Anderson (1987) show that to reduce uncertainty there are recurrent matches between film workers, creating network ties on the artistic labor market. They show that producers, actors, directors, and cinematographers of comparable productivity, in terms of earnings, Oscars, Oscar nominations and number of previous films, are recurrently tied to one another in filmmaking. Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, and Rittmann (2003) extend this analysis, confirming that typecast identities of feature-film actors reduce uncertainty in film production labor markets.

These approaches—the artistic market approach, the communication circuit version of the artistic market approach, the production of culture perspective, the notion of art worlds in the Chicago School of Sociology approach, and the concept of cultural fields in the Bourdieusian critical sociology approach—all show artists' dependency on others to produce literature. These approaches emphasize market competition, communication mechanisms, networks of cooperation, institutional and organizational constraints on literary production, and struggles for positions and position taking in a cultural field. These approaches take different views on why certain things happen in the production of literature and why some writers become successful and some do not. Of all these approaches, Bourdieu's theory of cultural fields arguably is best capable of explaining why certain fiction writers get published. Producers and gatekeepers are matched because they have similar aesthetic sensibilities (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 95-97, 133-134). This approach has, however, been met with a post-Bourdiesian call to look into expressions of subjectivity amongst those involved in the evaluation of cultural goods. This dissertation answers this call by focusing on how people on-the-ground deal with quality uncertainty in the publishing market. By combining the artistic market and communication circuit approach, the publishing market can be described as the communication of two sides. Aspiring writers are sellers or senders of manuscripts. Publishers are receivers of these manuscripts who act as gatekeepers and potential buyers of the submitted manuscript. The match of an aspiring writer and a publishing house on the publishing market means that a debut fiction book is about to be published.

3.2 Artistic careers

Scholars have used at least four approaches to study artistic and literary careers: the *critical sociology* approach, the *Chicago School of Sociology* approach, the *production of culture* approach, and the *artistic market* approach. The *communication circuit* approach has not explicitly focused on careers.

The *Chicago School of Sociology* approach to studying careers has a long history (Barley, 1989). According to Barley (1989), this research emanates from the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) on Polish immigrants' life courses and from work by other scholars in the Chicago School of Sociology tradition, such as Robert E. Park and Everett Hughes. Early on, Hughes (1958) made two important interventions into the study of careers. First, Hughes (1958, p. 63) formalized the study of careers by pinpointing a two-fold view of careers. Careers have an objective side—a series of offices—and a subjective side—the experiences the person has while holding these offices. Second, Hughes (1958, p. 63) argued that careers should be studied in a broad and general sense rather than focusing exclusively on professions and work-related experiences. Goffman (1961) further elaborated these two interventions in career research. In his study of how people become mental patients, he connected the subjective side of careers with felt identity.

One side [of the career] is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations, and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex. The concept of the career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society, without having overly to rely for data upon what the person says he thinks he imagines himself to be. (Goffman, 1961, p. 119)

Goffman emphasizes that the career is not an entirely subjective matter. The objective side of career consists of the positions taken and not taken over time, which are not entirely decided by the persons themselves but are part of a structure. The subjective side is the subjective sense of meaning, which involves an existential sense of oneself and one's personal situation, which must be seen in the light of the objective positions taken and not taken in the career over time. Hence, this approach to the study of careers emphasizes actors' subjectivity while still attending to the objective side and the conditions that individuals confront in their careers.

Hughes' two interventions into career research stand in opposition to the traditional study of organizational careers. In traditional studies, organizational careers are bound to work-related experiences in organizations

(see Hall, 1976; Wilensky, 1960), and career research is only about movements between jobs (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989, p. 8; Hall, 1976, p. 4; Wilensky, 1960, pp. 523-554). This view has also been suggested by the *production of culture* approach, which addresses how the careers of cultural workers are shaped by constraints on cultural production (Peterson, 1985). More recent studies of boundaryless careers have looked at movements between positions within different organizations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; cf. Becker & Strauss, 1956). The study of organizational careers did not make explicit contact with the Chicago School of Sociology tradition and Hughes' interventions into career research (Barley, 1989; Moore, Gunz & Hall, 2007). Nevertheless, the study of organizational careers was influenced by Hughes' work on professions (Arthur, 2008).

The *artistic market* approach has also been influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology. This approach studies careers as a series of job holdings and views the so-called objective side of careers as the match between a buyer and a seller on an artistic market. A career is defined as "lines of occurrences resulting from a dual process in which both sides of the market are recurrently matched" (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987, p. 880). As previously shown, Faulkner and Anderson (1987) have argued that certain film workers are recurrently matched with one another on an artistic market. This line of reasoning informed the definition of the publishing market this dissertation offered in its introduction.

Although the Chicago School of Sociology has a broad conception of careers, it has focused on particular professions, such as medical doctors (Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961; Hughes, 1958) and school teachers (Becker, 1952). It has also gone beyond professions to address deviant careers. For example, Goffman (1961) identified pre-patient, patient, and post-patient phases in the moral careers of mental patients, and Becker (1953) identified three phases of becoming a marijuana user: learning the technique, perceiving the effects, and enjoying the experience (Becker, 1953). Studying criminals' careers is also a distinct tradition in criminology (Carlsson, 2014; Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein, 2003). The Chicago School approach has also been used to study artistic careers, particularly in the context of the United States, including those of rappers (Lee, 2016), rock musicians (Bennett, 1980), film music composers (Faulkner, 1983), studio musicians (Faulkner, 1971), orchestral musicians (Faulkner, 1973), and other film workers (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & Rittmann, 2003). The approach has even been used to study the attachment to a continued literary career amongst first-time novelists (Enzer, 1963).

To further outline research on artistic and literary careers, this dissertation presents two ways of viewing careers that hinge on how scholars answer the question "Why do people have certain kinds of careers?" (Abbott, 2001, p.

161). One way of answering this question is to *explain* careers; I call this approach the *causality perspective*. The other way is to *describe* careers; I call this approach the *narrative typicality perspective*. The causality perspective answers the “why” part of the question. Usually, the aim is to identify causal factors that explain why people have certain careers—for example, the social characteristics that determine the outcome of particular careers. The narrative typicality perspective describes typical careers by identifying what “certain kinds of careers” there are. This is done by identifying different types of narrative patterns or sequences that produce these kinds of careers.

To discuss how artistic careers have been studied from the causality and narrative typicality perspectives, I describe research that uses the Bourdieusian *critical sociology* approach and the aforementioned *Chicago School of Sociology* approach. These are the two approaches that are used most often in the study of artistic careers. Scholars who have studied literary careers using the Bourdieusian critical sociology approach have used the causality perspective to explain careers and find determinants for literary careers (De Nooy, 2002; Vandenhoute, 2004; van Dijk, 1999; van Rees & Vermunt, 1996) and have also used the narrative typicality approach (Bolkéus Blom, 2002; Ekelund & Börjesson, 2002, 2005; Lundén, Ekelund & Bolkéus Blom, 2002). Ekelund and Börjesson (2002) studied three cohorts of first-time published fiction writers in the United States (1940, 1955 and 1970) closely studying the 1955 cohort’s career patterns. They analyzed which careers were successful in terms of being long or prolific. They studied these careers in relation to the publishing houses’ sizes and locations and the reception of their books in the *New York Times Book Review*. By taking a narrative typicality approach, they identified four typical careers and showed who the typical writers were who had each kind of career. For example, writers who were successful and seen as serious (i.e., their work was reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*) were associated with, but perhaps not caused by, the writer being a man, from outside New York, and published by a New York publishing house.

From the entry point of the Chicago School of Sociology approach, Enzer (1963) studied literary careers in a similar way. Enzer studied the cohort of first-time published novelists in the United States in 1958, three years later than the previous study’s cohort. Enzer focused on what might be called the first-time novelists’ value attachment and orientations to their careers. They were attached to their careers by values relating to the world of literature in its own right; they were motivated to pursue a literary career because it offered an opportunity for either self-expression or literary success. Some first-time novelists were also attached to their careers by values external to art, such as a desire to influence society or to influence their own situation, for example by earning money from a literary career. Without going into detail about the combinations of value patterns here, Enzer (1963, pp. 271-273) identifies four different types of first-time novelists: those committed to a literary career, who

are either dedicated or persistent, and those uncommitted to a literary career, who are either casual or indifferent. These four types of careers are associated with the writer's occupation, age, number of novels published, writing interest, and writing activity. For example, dedicated writers have usually published several novels, are young, and are often teachers. Enzer identifies type of attachment to careers at a single moment in time and does not explain the type of attachment but rather associates it with background information and statistical inference. This is an example of research on literary careers that identifies types of careers but does not necessarily explain how those careers come about.

The present dissertation is influenced by the narrative typicality approach. To elucidate this narrative typicality approach, I discuss the work of Abbott and Hrycak (1990), who explicitly linked their research to the narrative typicality approach. They used a dynamic programming technique called optimal matching to study resemblances in eighteenth-century German musicians' careers as typical sequences of events. In accordance with the approach, they did not answer why people had certain kinds of careers; instead, they identified a number of typical career paths from musicians' job histories. They then reduced career sequences into a smaller number of typical paths for the musicians studied. In contrast to Hughes' intervention into career research, Abbott and Hrycak (1990) studied the objective positions the musicians took but did not study the subjective side of the career, that is, narratives of sense-making concerning taking and not taking a certain position in a career.

The narrative typicality approach to the study of careers can be contrasted with Bourdieu's (1996, pp. 258-259, 1999, p. 67) view that literary careers should be studied from a causality perspective. To Bourdieu, a career is a consequence of the structure of a literary field and the social origins of the people involved. In the search for causality, Bourdieu rules out an entirely individualized view of the career in which the individual is seen as the sole creator of his or her literary career. According to Bourdieu (1999, p. 70), to study literary careers from such a biographical perspective would be a rhetorical illusion, because writers make sense of their biography using stories selected from a market of stories (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 74). Bourdieu (1996, pp. 258-259, 1999, pp. 74-75) sees this type of biographical approach to the study of careers as problematic because it depends entirely on the participant's subjective viewpoint. Instead, Bourdieu argues, one can only explain a writer's biography by linking it to the structure of the literary field throughout the various points in time studied. This critique of an entirely subjectivist approach to the study of careers has, at least indirectly, been contested from a post-Bourdiesian perspective. According to Lahire (2015a, 2015b), there are several problems with this Bourdiesian view. One problem is the reduction of the agent to his or her position in the field; every experience before and beyond the literary field is not taken into account. Moreover, this approach

arguably does not account for dissonances within dispositions and between dispositions and positions. This dissertation follows this post-Bourdiesian lead by focusing on expressions of subjectivity in handling quality uncertainty on the publishing market throughout various objective positions in the career.

This dissertation addresses the objective side of literary production by focusing on the objective condition of quality uncertainty. This condition exists without explicit reflection upon it by those involved in the publishing market. The dissertation also takes the objective side of literary production into account by studying both the subjective and the objective side of aspiring writers' careers as they attempt to have their work published through the publishing market. The objective career is the objective positions an actor takes without necessarily being aware of or reflecting on having those positions. The literary careers studied are identified from interviews with writers who narrate patterns of event sequences. These are sequences of objective positions taken and not taken before, during, and after attempting to be published and stories of the writers' experiences, meaning, and actions in these positions. The objective career points, with respect to the artistic market approach, can be seen in part as matches or mismatches on a market. Hence, an objective career point can be identified when an aspiring writer is matched or mismatched with a publishing house on the publishing market. The research perspective moves from a focus on writers as they contemplate being published and manage rejection to the publishing houses' process of selection and rejection, which the next section discusses.

3.3 Acquisition of cultural goods

There are at least four ways of conceptualizing the role of publishers in the process of acquiring new manuscripts on the publishing market. The publisher can be conceptualized (1) as a *gatekeeper*; this conceptualization is linked to the *communication circuit* approach and used in the *Chicago School of Sociology* approach; (2) as a *cultural intermediary*; this conceptualization connects to Bourdiesian *critical sociology*; (3) as engaged in an *institutional decision-making process*; this new institutional view is linked to a *production of culture* approach; and (4) as a *buyer* of manuscripts on a market, a view that is part of the *artistic market* approach.

In the publishing market, the publishers can be seen as acting as *gatekeepers*. The theory of gatekeepers and gatekeeping was first developed by Lewin (1951) and is associated with the *communication circuit approach*. Lewin shows how raw material from the garden or the grocery store reaches the table as food. This flow of material happens through a series of gates occupied by gatekeepers who select and discard the material that reaches them. The idea of gatekeepers and gatekeeping was developed in a groundbreaking study of

how a news editor selects what news to publish (White, 1950). News selection involves gut feelings but also individual preferences and assessments of newsworthiness. The idea of gatekeeping continues to influence the study of the selection and rejection of what eventually becomes or does not become news (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The concept of the gatekeeper has been reformulated from a Chicago School of Sociology approach. Gatekeepers in art worlds are said to “act as intermediaries between parties with disparate interests or viewpoints by embodying and legitimating the shared conventions that allow for cooperation and coordination” (Ahlkvist & Faulkner, 2002, p. 192). The gatekeeper is seen as a broker between diverse interests. In the communication circuit approach, the gatekeepers select and discard manuscripts, a view consistent with the way this dissertation analyzes publishers as gatekeepers.

Lewin’s original gatekeeping concept was further developed by Hirsch (1972, see also Hirsch, 2000). The cultural industry as a communication circuit is conceptualized as a number of funnels controlled by gatekeepers. The last funnel is between distributors and consumers, while the first one is between the creative workers and, in this case, the publishers. In this dissertation, this funnel is called the publishing market. Coser (1975) follows Hirsch’s (1972) line of reasoning and argues that academic and scholarly publishers in the United States are “gatekeepers of ideas”. Coser, Kadushin, and Powell (1982, p. 7) state that demand uncertainty is central to the publishing industry and to gatekeeping; they show how publishers try to create certainty under this condition. To publishers, it is unclear whether consumers will buy the product and whether they will like the product if they buy it (Caves, 2000, pp. 2-3). According to these scholars, publishers use two strategies to create a sense of certainty under these conditions: they may try to find and create bestsellers by marketing and controlling distribution, and they may use the “shotgun” approach of publishing many books and hoping that at least some of the books will be successes. This search for potential best sellers has come to shape trade publishing in Great Britain and the United States (Thompson, 2012). The demand for profit has become the predominant logic influencing trade and scholarly publishing decisions (Thompson, 2012; Thornton, 2004). Quality uncertainty also prevails, but previous research does not discuss how publishers deal with this uncertainty as they receive and make decisions about manuscripts. Demand uncertainty is of the utmost importance in manuscript acquisition, but quality uncertainty precedes demand uncertainty. Publishers’ first implicit question is not “Will this manuscript sell?” but “Is this manuscript any good?” (see paper II). This dissertation answers the unanswered question of how publishers handle this quality uncertainty.

An alternative to viewing publishers as gatekeepers is seeing them as *cultural intermediaries* (Childress, 2012; Pareschi, 2015). Bourdieu (1984, p. 359) argues that cultural intermediaries represent a type of mediation of culture that

originates from the middle class of society. Cultural intermediaries act as professional taste makers and determine illegitimate and legitimate culture. The concept has also come to mean a more general process and practice by which producers mediate culture to consumers (Smith Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 552). Childress (2012) shows that trade publishers in the United States act as cultural intermediaries. The introduction of new technology for measuring book sales seems to threaten these intermediaries' ability to act as professional taste makers and their ability to mediate "their own autonomy, agency and latitude" in deciding what to publish (Childress, 2012, p. 605). Despite the use of the seemingly objective criterion of previous sales data, the acquisition editors Childress studied still managed to keep their role as cultural intermediaries and managed to express autonomy, agency, and latitude when making publishing decisions. They creatively used sales data to make their own decisions. This also shows the importance of subjectivity in publishing decisions.

Publishing decisions may also be viewed as part of *institutional decision processes*. This view is associated with new institutionalism and the *production of culture* approach (Peterson & Anand, 2004, p. 332). As Franssen and Kuipers (2013) show, publishers of translated books, who act under similar institutional and organizational constraints, reduce uncertainty and gain legitimacy by imitating similar publishing houses in other publishing fields. Publishers are also affected by institutional logics: they focus their attention differently depending on the prevalent logic and reach different publishing decisions depending on the logic they use to make them. By studying U.S. higher education publishing between the 1950s and 1990s, Thornton (2004) shows a shift from an editorial logic to a market logic. The editorial logic typifies a personal type of business in which the legitimacy of publishing operations and decisions came from the reputations and networks of the editor and owner. The market logic, on the other hand, typifies a market type of business in which publishing operations and decisions are made in relation to the publishing house in a market with other publishing houses. More concretely, publishers' attention is shaped by the prevailing institutional logics, which steer them to be concerned with certain manuscripts and not others.

The publisher's role as a *buyer* who observes other producers on a market has been central to the *artistic market* approach following the work of White (1981) on production markets. For instance, Aspers (2001) has shown how editors acting as buyers at fashion magazines monitor one another and the photographers involved. Status struggles and positions in status hierarchies influence their decisions to buy and print certain photographs in the magazine.

The concepts of cultural intermediaries and institutional decision-making processes emphasize the role of the publisher in a cultural system and have

been linked to Bourdieusian and new institutionalist theories respectively. The idea of cultural intermediaries assumes that publishers instill and promote certain values by making decisions or by mediating between production and consumption. The idea of institutional decision-making assumes that decision making follows certain institutionalized patterns. The idea of gatekeepers used in this dissertation is linked to the idea of the cultural industry. Gatekeepers have a function in the industry system: they let in and stop the flow of material that becomes cultural products, and this role directly links them to decision making; they do the selecting and rejecting that influences writers' careers. Hence, gatekeepers are part of a cultural industry and make decisions in the context of an overabundance of material. Manuscript acquisition is also shaped by quality and demand uncertainty. Publishers as gatekeepers are one side of the publishing market and the first funnel of the publishing industry. Their decisions to select or reject a manuscript shape aspiring writers' literary careers and determine who will succeed and fail. Hence, the idea of gatekeepers can be linked to the idea of artistic markets and objective careers: an objective career point is an objective success or failure in being matched or mismatched on the artistic market.

Moving from the institutional structures of publishing and the publishing market to the manuscript acquisition process, this dissertation argues that publishers reach publishing decisions by going through a *discovery phase* and a *justification phase*. Publishers move between different positions in these phases and experience, make meaning, and act in these objective positions. There is a difference between discovering a manuscript and justifying why a manuscript is being or should be published. This depiction of the acquisition process as about the discovery and justification of manuscripts offers a different perspective from the structural explanation of why certain manuscripts are selected. This perspective focuses on subjectivity—the patterns of experience, meanings, and actions involved in acquiring a cultural good.

The distinction parallels the so-called “DJ distinction” found in philosophy of science studies of scientific work and scientific discoveries. In the philosophy of science, Reichenbach (1938) proposed a distinction between the discovery of an idea or hypothesis (the context of discovery) and how it is justified (the context of justification). Research on gatekeeping in cultural production and artistic markets seems to be implicitly making the same distinction. Strandvad (2014), for example, states that the gatekeepers at a design school first make “inductive” or first-impression assessments and then turn to official standards to grade the submissions. Put another way, they move from moments of discovering a new talent to attempts to justify their choice.

In the context of publishing, the justification phase can be seen as the context in which publishers try to justify their publishing decisions. This justification

often happens during acquisition meetings. By then the manuscript has already been 'discovered' in a process described as “gut feeling” and “intuition” (Coser, Kadushin & Powell, 1982; Powell, 1985; see also White, 1950). Previous research has settled for studying the way in which manuscripts are justified for publication. The moment of discovery has been hard to research because publishers do not use pre-fixed standards to evaluate manuscripts. The problem of lack of standards comes from the quality uncertainty in the input boundary of the publishing market. How do the publishers solve this problem? The answer has been that the publishers trust their “gut feeling”. This dissertation argues that this gut feeling is, in fact, a particular type of reading experience. The dissertation identifies certain qualities in the reading experience that publishers associate with publishable manuscripts as they read them during the discovery phase (see paper II).

While scholars have largely presented the discovery phase in publishing as being about gut feeling and intuition, the justification phase has been studied extensively (Childress, 2012; Coser, 1975; Coser, Kadushin & Powell, 1982, pp. 118-147; Powell, 1985, pp. 78-127; Thompson, 2012, pp. 195-212; Volkmann, Schimank & Rost, 2014). Taken together, these studies indicate at least three justification strategies that publishers use during the manuscript acquisition process: (1) *explicitly finding similarity and dissimilarity through comparison*, (2) *referring to gut feeling*, and (3) *referring to reputation*.

Explicitly finding similarity and dissimilarity through comparison means comparing a new manuscript with the writer's own track record (Childress, 2012; Thompson, 2012, pp. 198-202) or finding books comparable to the manuscript under discussion (Thompson, 2012, pp. 202-204). The manuscript can then be compared with these reference points. The new manuscript is judged based the sales history of the writer's previous published books or a similar book. A decision to acquire a new manuscript may be based on such comparisons using book sales data (Childress, 2012). In another context, a similar process is exemplified by radio producers using research data to justify decisions about which songs to play on the radio (Ahlkvist & Faulkner, 2002). The process of comparison can also be about finding similarities between the publisher's position and the position of some other publisher, as in the case of decisions about which translation rights to buy (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013). Imitation also plays an important role: specific looks are imitated in the fashion industry (Mears, 2010), and imitation shapes the selection of TV shows in network prime-time television programming (Bielby & Bielby, 1994). Using conventions (“how it is usually done”) and relying on stereotypes are additional strategies in the fashion industry and in prime-time television programming selection. Conventions and stereotypes are related to appraising the content of cultural goods, such as in selecting a manuscript, because such appraisal follows or disrupts specific conventions and stereotypes within a literary genre. People involved in acquisition use these

intermediary tools or heuristics as justification strategies as they deal with demand uncertainty and uncertainty about the economic return of a particular book or cultural good.

Another justification strategy is *making reference to a gut feeling*. The publisher refers back to subjective taste and first impressions to give reasons why a manuscript should be published (Franssen & Kuipers, 2013; Thompsons, 2012, p. 195). Radio programmers also refer to gut feeling when selecting music to play (Ahlkvist & Faulkner, 2002). Radio programmers attempt to listen to music as a regular radio listener and use their sense that regular radio listeners will favor a piece of music to justify selecting it. Referring to gut feeling is also a justification strategy for legitimizing decisions about manuscripts. This may simply mean that someone says that they “have a good feeling” about a manuscript, a statement that can be backed up by the person’s reputation in the publishing organization. In the discovery phase, gut feelings are about the immediate acts of discovery and descriptions of the experiences, meanings, and actions involved. In the justification phase, on the other hand, publishers are justifying publishing a manuscript. To refer to gut feeling then becomes a rhetorical strategy for making their case for publishing a manuscript convincing. They either refer back to the gut feelings they experienced in the discovery phase or express gut feelings that they experience during the justification phase about the prospects of the manuscript on the consumer market. While in the justification phase, the gut feeling is mainly about handling demand uncertainty, in the discovery phase, it is mainly about handling a manuscript’s initial quality uncertainty.

The *reputation* or status of those involved in decision making is also an important justification strategy. A publisher’s thoughts and statements carry a different meaning and weight depending on his or her reputation in the publishing house as, for example, a well-known, senior publisher or a new, junior publisher (Thompson, 2012, pp. 205-212). The writer’s reputation also matters; the publisher considers the writer’s imagined identity on the book market, which is “the position from which an author speaks”, expressed as “a combination of their credentials, visibility and promotability, especially through the media” (Thompson, 2012, p. 204, see also Aspers, 2001; Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Bielby & Bielby, 1994; Faulkner, 1983; Powell, 1985, pp. 178-183). An obvious example is celebrity publishing, in which the writer has the leverage of being well-known amongst consumers (but perhaps not famous for being a fiction writer).¹³

¹³ Although celebrities have published fiction books in Swedish trade publishing, celebrity publishing is more common in nonfiction publishing. Publishers may see the commercial benefits of publishing celebrities’ works of fiction, but a publisher told me, “It is extremely dangerous to publish trash written by a celebrity.” When publishing a book written by a

These justification strategies are about how publishers justify their publishing decisions, that is, their reasons and explanations for why some manuscripts should be published and others should not. Publishing decisions in acquisition meetings are reached by using these justification strategies. But to understand the whole selection process, one also needs to understand the discovery of manuscripts and how manuscripts are moved from the discovery to the justification phase before they are justified for publication. Following the perspective in this dissertation, this entails taking into account publishers' subjectivity as they handle quality uncertainty in moments of discovery during situations of manuscript acquisition.

This dissertation's analysis of how quality uncertainty is handled on the publishing market for aspiring writers takes into account (1) the discovery and justification phases of manuscript acquisition and (2) the subjective and objective sides of literary careers and manuscript acquisition. The dissertation uses these distinctions to analyze how writers and publishers handle quality uncertainty. Taking into account subjectivity involves studying experiences, actions, and meanings in particular objective positions and movements between positions. The objective side of manuscript acquisition includes the discovery phase, the justification phase, and the movement between the two phases. The subjective side of manuscript acquisition includes the reading experiences of the publishers who occupy these different objective positions. The objective side of a literary career includes the phases before, during, and after successful and failed matching attempts between the two sides of the publishing market via the writer's manuscript. The subjective side of a literary career is the writer's stories of experiences, actions, and meanings related to the phases before, during, and after failing or succeeding in being matched on the publishing market. The first paper takes into account writers' stories of their experiences, meanings, and actions in relation to the objective position of attempting to determine their chances of getting published. The third paper focuses on the movement from the objective position of attempting to be published to the position of being rejected and the writer's experiences, meanings, and actions in relation to that movement. The second paper takes into account publishers' stories of their experiences, meanings, and actions during moments of discovery and the movement from the objective position of the discovery phase to the objective position of the justification phase.

celebrity, the publisher thinks about the risk of failure and the impact of publishing "trash" on the identity of the publishing house. The reputation of widespread celebrity publishing in trade publishing may also be self-reinforced by celebrities who attempt to get published because of this reputation. The reputation of celebrity publishing amongst publishing houses may also become a burden for the publishing house: "If [this well-known actor, singer and entertainer] calls us and tells me that he has written a collection of poems, we think, like, 'Oh, no'. Instead he should do [what he do the best]."

4 Research methods

This presentation of research methods explains how I narrowed down the research focus to quality uncertainty in the publishing market and expressions of subjectivity by aspiring writers in their careers and by publishers in manuscript acquisition. The presentation describes the overarching research design, including data collection techniques, coding, and analysis. The research design made it possible to address the overall research question and the questions for the individual papers.

4.1 Pre-study and main study: A three-part data collection process

I arrived at the focus of this research project through three steps, from a pre-study to a two-part main study (Aspers, 2011b). This design made it possible to first define and review the field of study to identify possible research questions and theories for the main study. The main study was then informed by focused research questions and theories relevant to the papers under development.

4.1.1 Pre-study

The pre-study was about taking a broad look at the area under study; it involved reading about publishing industries and cultural industries and doing field work. During the pre-study, I conducted five interviews with six people: one fiction writer, one fiction book consumer, one trade fiction book publisher, one scholarly book publisher, one person responsible for digitalization at a publishing house, and a person at an e-tailer (a company that sells books on the Internet). I also made observations, wrote field notes, and conducted several informal interviews with different actors from the publishing industry at a book fair and at a literature festival.

To deepen my understanding of the field, I conducted a situational analysis of the material I collected (Clarke, 2005). Star (2007, p. 87) suggests that situational analysis is suitable for studying “changes in science, industries, politics or social movements (or a combination of these), and in facing the

initial 'messiness' of the data and the nature of developments.” I used a situational analysis of the publishing industry to reduce the perceived messiness of the data. I began by mapping the Swedish publishing industry to create a broad picture of it and the changes going on in it. Through the situational analysis, I identified actors (human and non-human), such as particular book formats, computer programs, publishers, literary mentors, and so on,¹⁴ as well as organizations such as publishing houses and writing schools. Contested issues in the industry were at the time mainly about digitalization and economic turnover amongst publishing houses and retailers. Positions taken and not taken were, for example, about the relative legitimacy of self-publishing and traditional publishing and the implications of being an insider or an outsider in the industry. This analysis captured the worlds of people doing things together with literature, as literary groupings around certain persons, literary journals, and publishing houses in the broader arena of literature.

The situational analysis was about seeing the publishing industry through these elements and taking the social worlds involved into account. The result, combined with an initial coding and analysis of the interviews, created a broad picture of the Swedish publishing industry. I discovered that many actors talked about getting published, but these actors could not explain in a unitary manner how to actually become published. This became the main empirical puzzle to be solved in the main study.

4.2.2 Main study

After the pre-study, I formulated the main study's empirical research question: “How do you become a first-time published fiction writer?” In answering this question, I adjusted the research focus to how quality uncertainty was handled on the publishing market for aspiring writers' manuscript. I narrowed the focus by carrying out the main study in two phases. The first phase was guided by the empirical research question and the mapping of the publishing industry as it had evolved from the pre-study. During this phase, I collected and analyzed material simultaneously and wrote the first drafts of all the papers. However, I carried out more than three-quarters of the data collection during the second phase of the main study. The second phase involved returning to the field to sample for more variation in the material and to focus on the particular research problems and theories I had used in the drafted papers

¹⁴ While the initial direction was guided with insights from actor-network theory in situational analysis, it did not play a major part in the main study. The analysis took into account the importance of materiality, but materiality was not the main focus and is beyond the scope of this study.

(Aspers, 2011b). Throughout, I used a constant comparative technique to develop and refine tentative ideas, to analyze ideas, and to connect ideas into coherent structures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Ethics

During the formal interviews, I handed interviewees information about the study and what participation in it would entail. I informed the prospective participants that they could choose whether or not to participate in the study and were free to refuse to answer the questions I posed as they saw fit. I told them that I would do my utmost to keep all participants from being identifiable to outsiders. For instance, many participants asked whom I had previously interviewed, but I never answered this question. In reporting my findings, I have changed the participants' names. I have also made minor changes to quotes to protect the participants' anonymity. I have chosen to present quotes that I can change in these minor ways without affecting their bearing as evidence. I always kept the original material locked away. These issues were formally addressed in the course of the project's ethics approval process.

Sampling and interviews

A general idea for the whole research project was to initially collect as much material as possible related to the research question, regardless of the type of material (Aspers, 2011b, p. 166). There were, however, constraints to this data collection technique, since the research focus influenced what kind of data was necessary; in addition, access and time became important factors limiting the amount and range of material I could collect. The papers mainly use the interview transcripts, but my interpretation of this material was supported by field notes, statistics, historical material, and some photographs. In total, I conducted eighty interviews—five during the pre-study and seventy-five during the main study. Of the seventy-five interviews I conducted during the main study, eighteen took place during the first phase in 2013, and fifty-seven took place during the second phase in 2014. The interviews usually lasted for one to two hours and were on average about one and a half hours long. In total, I transcribed over one hundred hours of interview material.

I interviewed writers in different positions in their objective careers, including those who were aspiring to become published and those who were not aspiring to be published because they either had been published, had not been published and had stopped trying to be published, or, for the sake of comparison, had never aspired to be published. This covered people in different positions in their objective career and enabled me to study different sequences of attempts to be published.

I interviewed most of these writers individually, but I conducted three group interviews at writing schools and one interview with a writing group. I counted each of these group interviews as one interview, but the table below describes the roles of the individual participants. I interviewed people who had their own publishing house and people who were working at publishing houses. I interviewed some participants who had more than one role in the publishing industry, for example as both a publisher at a publishing house and a published writer. In these instances, the interview was a bit longer and divided into two parts, one about their role as publisher and one about their role as a writer. In reporting the total number of interviews, I have counted each of these combined interviews as one interview. Also, I interviewed nine writing school teachers, six of whom I also interviewed in their other roles. I interviewed people in several additional roles, including editors of literary journals, literary critics, and external manuscript reviewers for publishing houses. Finally, I also interviewed one person who was organizing a book fair and one person in a retail organization who was buying books for several book stores. Table 1 shows the different roles of the participants interviewed in the pre-study and main study.

Table 1. The interviewed participants' literary roles

59 Writers

25 Writers: unpublished writers

34 Writers: published writers

9 Published writers: self-published debut fiction book¹⁵

8 Novels as the first book

1 Poetry collection as the first book

0 Short-story collections as the first book

25 Published writers: debut fiction book published through publishing market

18 Novels as the first book

5 Poetry collections as the first book

2 Short-story collections as the first book

28 Persons engaged in publishing houses

¹⁵ This figure includes writers who had self-published through their own publishing house and writers who had purchased publishing services from a publishing house or a hybrid publisher.

- 23 Persons engaged in publishing houses on the publishing market
 - 4 Persons engaged in publishing houses publishing self-published books¹⁶
 - 1 Persons engaged in publishing houses publishing scholarly books
 - 9 Writing school teachers
 - 4 Literary agents (2 with experience working at a publishing house, not included above)
 - 4 Editors at a literary journal or magazine
 - 4 Literary critics
 - 2 External reviewers of publishing houses' manuscripts¹⁷
 - 1 Book consumer/reader
 - 1 Book fair organizer
 - 1 Digital publishing strategist
 - 1 Employee at e-tailer
 - 1 Retail organization employee
- Total: 119

I conducted a descriptive analysis of a database of first-time published fiction writers, published between 1997 and 2014, to construct a sampling frame for selecting first-time published fiction writers (see Appendix A). I conducted this descriptive analysis with the aim of sampling as large a variation (Aspers, 2011b, pp. 94-97; Becker, 1998, pp. 86-108; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 49-55; Strauss, 1987, pp. 16-17) of first-time published fiction writers as possible within the limitations of the study (see Appendix A for a list of the variables in the database). The goal was to prevent the conceptualizations made in the papers from being skewed—for example, by representing only young male writers published at large publishing houses. Rather, the conceptualizations are based on material that covers great variation in experience, including different positions in writers' literary careers, different types of publishing, and different phases of manuscript acquisition. I sought this variation without attempting to find associations or factors that might determine a particular outcome. For example, one might expect some gender variation in the

¹⁶ The interviewed persons represent companies that offer either self-publishing services or hybrid publishing.

¹⁷ I conducted three additional informal interviews with external reviewers of manuscripts at publishing houses.

responses and strategies that writers use to handle rejections from publishing houses (see paper III). Evaluating such hypotheses is beyond the scope of this study. Future studies might use these empirically grounded conceptualizations of how people handle rejection as failure to collect additional data that would speak to questions about how strategies and responses for handling failure are distributed and associated with, for instance, gender. My focus, by contrast, was on finding as much variation and empirical grounding for responses and strategies as possible so as to create rich conceptualizations of the ways people handle the uncertainty in the publishing market for aspiring writers.

In general, the first-time published writers I interviewed were either about to be published or had been published during the five years prior to the interview. I chose to focus on writers who had been published during the previous five years on the assumption that they would recall the experience better than if a longer time had passed since their work was first published. The decision to contact a writer was then based on whether the book had been published within the previous five years prior and whether the writer would bring additional variation to the material. I contacted writers by e-mail and also made contact during literary events. Most writers responded and agreed to meet for an interview. For unknown reasons, some writers did not respond to my request for an interview. Only four writers explicitly declined to participate, citing, for example, health issues or a lack of available time to meet for an interview. Since the database was based on the 813 writers who had been announced as first-time published fiction writers between 1997 and 2014 in the trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel*, I used additional sampling strategies to identify first-time published fiction writers whose fiction debuts had not been announced through this outlet. I investigated all fiction books written in Swedish for an adult audience and registered in the *Swedish National Bibliographic Databases* between 2011 and 2013. The aim was to determine whether the book listed was the writer's first published fiction book and, if so whether the book was included in the database. If a debut fiction book was not included in the *Svensk Bokhandel* database, I contacted the writer if an interview might bring additional variation to the existing material.

Aspiring writers are harder to sample than first-time published fiction writers. It is harder to create a sampling frame for aspiring writers because aspiring to publish a work of fiction and even submitting a manuscript to publishing house are not as salient and visible as, for example, having your name on the cover of a debut fiction book. I sampled aspiring writers by accessing the social networks of published and unpublished writers I had already interviewed, approaching people during literary events and at literary places (e.g., literary festivals, libraries, and bookstores), and by conducting group interviews with unpublished writers at writing schools and in a writing group. I sampled as many different networks as possible and attempted were to find

as much variation as possible in terms of previous literary engagements, age, gender, and so on.

Using the database I constructed, I listed publishing houses that had published at least one debut fiction book since 1997. I focused on publishing houses that had published a debut fiction book during the five years prior to 2014 (when I carried out data collection) and especially those that had published several debut fiction books.¹⁸ This made it possible to sample almost all the publishing houses that followed these criteria. Initially, however, I sampled the publishing houses based on their different ages, different numbers of books published, different numbers of employees, and different locations in Sweden and in Stockholm. In the end, there were difficulties sampling publishing houses because I had already visited the house, the house had ceased to exist, or the house declined to participate. It was rare, however, for a publishing house to decline to participate. Most publishers answered my initial e-mail message, and only two publishers explicitly declined to participate, citing lack of time. For the sake of variation, I also interviewed self-publishers and people who worked at publishing houses that offered self-publishing services. I included these participants to compare the self-publishing business with the publishing market. Moreover, like writers published through the publishing market, self-published writers often had stories about failed attempts to be published through the publishing market, which made them relevant to the sampling frame (see paper III).

When I approached the larger publishing houses, I did not always interview the 'usual suspects'—those in high positions with the most power and status within the organization—but interviewed other persons in the organization as well (Becker, 1998, pp. 93-95). This also meant that I sometimes conducted formal interviews with several people who worked at the same publishing house, for example, the head of publishing, editors, and publishing assistants; I also conducted informal interviews with several interns during different literary events. To avoid sampling only a single place—for example, the cultural center of Stockholm—I interviewed writers and publishing houses

¹⁸ I constructed an additional database that included 1191 publishing houses based on a register from the trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel*. I classified the publishing houses based on whether they published fiction and first-time authors, whether they were self-publishing houses, and whether the publishing house was still active. There were 128 active publishing houses engaged in self-publishing fiction debut books and 103 active publishing houses publishing fiction debut books that were not self-published. This brought some additional publishing houses into the sampling frame. But most of the publishing houses had not published several debut fiction books; they had usually published one debut fiction book, sometimes several years prior to 2014. Almost all the publishing houses that had published several debut fiction books were already included in the other database.

near five large Swedish cities: Göteborg, Malmö, Stockholm, Umeå, and Uppsala.

The interview situations

Before the interviews with writers, I prepared myself by, if possible, reading about the writers, and if the writer had published a book I also read about the book and its publishing house. I also used information from the database to get a grasp of the first-time published writer's literary career, which I used during the interview as an aid to probe questions.

I conducted all the interviews with the assistance of an interview scheme that listed themes for discussion (see Appendix B). I asked probing questions to encourage participants to talk about their own experiences and sense-making related to the topic of becoming published through the publishing market. These themes brought focus to the interview, but I did not generally determine beforehand exactly how I would ask the questions. The general procedure for the interviews was to have the first one-third open-ended and the following two-thirds more structured around the themes in the interview guide. Early on, I developed a note-taking system in which I noted on paper keywords from the interviewed person's talk. Using this note-taking system enabled me to get a quick overview of the interview as it was happening. Using this technique also meant that it was easier to return to issues that the person had talked about before. I circled particularly important keywords and, instead of interrupting the interviewee with direct questions about these matters, brought them up later on in the interview when it was more suitable.

The place and time for the interviews were usually based on the preferences of the person being interviewed. Interviews with publishers and literary agents usually took place during office hours at their office or at a café. Interviews with writers took place from early mornings to late evenings during all days of the week. Interview locations included a café, a university building in Uppsala, and the writer's workplace, home, or country house. The interviews most often ended when all the themes had been covered.

In the interviews with writers, I developed an interview aid for elicitation that I call the 'career scheme template' (see Appendix C). The template was a paper, handed to the participants during the interview, that contained a table of different forms of literary engagements and an interval of years. The types of literary engagements on the template were saturated during the first couple of interviews, but for the sake of not forcing the types of engagements on the participants, I waited to give them the template until after the first third of the interview so they could begin by talking more freely about their engagements. I then asked the participant to enter information into the template while talking about it. I developed this methodological tool to more systematically study the

objective and subjective sides of participants' literary careers. The information that participants entered became the objective side of their career, and the subjective experiences and meanings they spoke of in discussing it became the subjective side of their career. This technique made it possible to study how they had dealt with quality uncertainty in different positions in their careers and to relate those methods to different types of literary engagements.

To prepare publishers and literary agents to talk about the manuscript acquisition process before the interviews took place, I sent publishers a list of debut fiction books that their publishing house had published since 1997 and sent literary agents, a list of debut fiction books that they had sold to and had published by publishing houses since 1997. I created these lists based on the database I had developed for this project. During the interview, I asked how the books on the list had been selected, and interviewees narrated their experiences discovering the manuscript and explained the reasons the book had been published. The publishers also described the differences between publishable and non-publishable manuscripts as well as the classification systems and considerations in play during manuscript selection and rejection.

The issue of post-hoc justification is relevant to reflect on in this study. On the other hand, post-hoc justification is always relevant to reflect on when participants talk about the past. In general, as long as there is talk about the past, even in the moments immediately after something has happened, post-hoc justifications are a possibility. I selected a story-based interview design because the research focused on the experience of the selection process for manuscripts selected at various times before the interview. This design was therefore also a practical strategy because manuscripts are rarely selected to become debut fiction books. This design also made it possible to research the different acquisition processes and experiences of many different persons and publishing houses.

I used several strategies to capture different types and ranges of stories, and perhaps to reduce the influence of post-hoc justifications: (1) I initially selected which debut fiction books on the provided list we would discuss, in an attempt to prevent the interviewees from cherry-picking books and stories (although we usually ended up discussing most of the recently published books), (2) I asked them to describe, rather than explain, concrete selection processes and the selection process in general, (3) at the end of the session I asked some of the interviewees to review a number of debut fiction books that I had brought to the interview, making it possible for them to (in a simulated fashion) demonstrate and reflect on the selection procedure.

Secondary material from observations, informal interviews, and texts

Field notes from my visits to the interviewees and the interview situations are part of the secondary material of the main study. It became apparent, for instance, that the publishing houses expressed their publishing profile (what kinds of books they published) in their geographic location and their interior design. For example, some interior designs at smaller publishing houses were highly personalized, reflecting not only the taste of the publisher but also the identity and type of books the publishing house published. During the main study, I collected secondary material from observations, photos, and informal interviews at literature festivals (*Sigtuna litteraturfestival* in Stockholm and *Littfest* in Umeå). I also participated, took field notes and photos, and made observations at two release parties for debut fiction books. The focus of the field work during the festivals and release parties was to record the event, who was there, how space was organized, who talked to whom, what they did with each other, and how the evening was scheduled, and to understand what role the release party had in the institution of the fiction debut. I used a similar focus and procedure at two public readings with both unpublished and first-time published fiction writers, as well as at several book signing events at different bookstores. Furthermore, I participated in a four-day writing course at a folk high school as a participant and researcher. I took field notes while there and conducted informal interviews during long walks at the folk high school. The data collection for this study took place between the first and second parts of the main study. It made it possible to experience how it felt to be a fiction writer together with other fiction writers (cf. Aspens, 2011b, pp. 107-137). Because these events—literary festivals, public readings, release parties and the writing course—were clearly delimited in time, I had no problem exiting the field when the events ended. The secondary material not only provided context in the interviews but also guided and aided my analysis of the primary material by introducing additional context for interpretation.

4.2 Coding and analysis

The main study was informed by a sensitizing analytical strategy involving conceptualizations from the evolving imagery of the field studied combined with the research questions and existing theories for the individual papers. The publishing market, quality uncertainty, and subjective and objective sides of careers became sensitizing concepts for research. I analyzed writers' careers as narrative patterns, looking for positions, actions, experiences, and meanings at different parts of the career, both in attempting to be published and dealing with quality uncertainty in that context (paper I) and in the quality uncertainty and response involved after the rejection (paper III). I understood the

acquisition process as part of a market-like situation in which manuscript discovery is carried out under the condition of quality uncertainty (paper II). Hence, codes were about the publishing industry, the publishing market, quality uncertainty, and careers, in addition to codes related to the research questions and theories used in the individual papers.

Coding is an analytical act, and in qualitative inquiry codes are assigned to the textual, visual, or audio material or a combination of this material; in this case, the coded material is mainly transcribed text. Coding, in this case, means condensing a large amount of data into telling codes that fit the interpreted meaning of the empirical instances and that can be used during subsequent analytical procedures (Aspers, 2011b, pp. 165-169; Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). I carried out the coding in several steps. Saldaña (2013) distinguishes between two cycles of coding: first-cycle coding and second-cycle coding. The initial first-cycle coding was informed by the main research question and the focuses of the papers. It involved asking questions of the material, such as “What is going on here?”, and making comparisons between text elements, between text elements and codes, and between new and old codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116). It also involved using the secondary material to pose questions and as a comparison case for developing the codes and insights about the material. In this cycle of coding, it is important to have sampled material of different types, that is, to have sampled as a great variety as possible of such things as positions vis-a-vis getting published. The constructed codes were either concrete and close to the material—for example, names of particular books discussed and feelings experienced—or more abstract and theoretical—for example, different roles and different positions in a career. This cycle involved a continual linking of abstract and concrete codes, such as different feelings in different phases of the career and in relation to specific events such as being rejected. After a while, I started to make hierarchies of the codes into several levels such as: “rejection: dealing with rejection - unclear evaluation criteria”. I used this code for instances in which rejected writers handled rejection by claiming that the publishing houses use unclear evaluation criteria. The first-cycle coding resulted in over 3 000 hierarchically ordered codes¹⁹; several of these hierarchies were quite extensively developed. This detail and structure indicate that there is great variation within the material. The number of codes may appear daunting, but the coding list was both well-structured and clear making it easy to apply and develop new codes to bring about additional variation within the material.

I began the second-cycle coding after drafting the papers. I returned to the existing codes and read through all codes and material. I then wrote a memo

¹⁹ Of the 3 000 codes, about 1 000 were descriptive background codes, such as names of writers and publishing houses mentioned in the interview.

in which I tried to answer the papers' research question. I returned to the material and created families, with codes from the first-cycle coding, pertaining to the paper. This reduced the number of codes to about 350 to 750 codes for each paper. I had at this point identified relevant existing theories for the papers and could focus the second-cycle coding on linking existing codes and theoretical constructs. I was doing elaborate coding, which is based on existing theory and in which the ambition is to refine theoretical constructs from the existing theory (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, p. 104; see also Aspers, 2011b, p. 169) and, as an addition, I was attaching the theoretical constructs to the codes and empirical material.

The coding procedure was roughly similar for the three papers. The third paper, about dealing with rejection, can serve as an example of the coding process and how theorizing entered into this process. In the first part of the main study, I asked participants questions pertaining to how they dealt with rejection. During the second part of the main study, I developed a tentative analytical scheme of different ways of dealing with failure, which was an early version of the final version, presented in table 2 in the next section. With this scheme in mind, including concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals, I went back to the field and asked questions about how the writers dealt with rejection, and I also asked publishers and agents about how they gave rejections.

During the first-cycle coding, I bracketed the analytical scheme. However, because the coding included all phases from preparing a submission to receiving a response from a publisher, in the next step, I focused on the codes and material about publishers giving rejections and writers receiving rejections. In the second-cycle coding, I brought the scheme back in and compared it with the already existing coding. I developed four main codes, which were the four ways of dealing with failure listed in this contingency table. In the first-cycle coding, I had identified the fourteen sub-codes that represented the fourteen procedures attached to these four ways of dealing with failure; I had already identified some of these procedures, while others were new. The logically consistent contingency table was thus part of the sampling procedure; I used it to ground the research process in existing theory and to refine the existing theory. The end result was an empirically grounded theoretical scheme and a number of concrete strategies that writers used to deal with rejection as a failure.

4.3 Making analytical generalizations

Having sampled as great a variation as possible in the empirical cases and having attempted to find 'negative cases' made it possible to create empirically grounded and theoretically saturated concepts. For example, one interviewee

told me that it was easier for so-called celebrities to become published. Perhaps these were negative cases? To find out, I talked to publishers about celebrity publishing (see footnote 12) and also contacted someone that had been published and that I thought of as a celebrity. This person's story about how he had become published and handled quality uncertainty was, however, very similar to non-celebrities' stories about how they had experienced and handled the condition of quality uncertainty. However, I discovered variation in terms of how manuscripts were submitted and accepted by publishing houses: at times, network and reputation were important for discovering manuscripts that later became published (see footnote 8). I, therefore, came to limit my focus to situations in which more genuine quality uncertainty was involved—specifically, situations in which manuscripts were unsolicited (as most manuscripts were). I also discovered that publishers attempted to create genuine quality uncertainty by bracketing any knowledge about the manuscript and the writer. Trying to find negative cases like this is about putting theoretical conceptualizations to test to either keep them as they are or extend, change, or abolish them (Becker, 1998, p. 195). The concepts are thus developed and empirically grounded through variation, comparison, and negative cases (Becker, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

There is a difference between a field-specific substantive theory and a field-overarching formal theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 32-35). To make analytical and theoretical generalizations from a particular field is to create a substantive theory; in this case, the substantive theory is about writers and publishers handling quality uncertainty in the publishing market for aspiring writers' manuscripts. A theory that is useful in several substantive areas is a formal theory; in this case, the formal theory is about how artists and gatekeepers handle quality uncertainty in markets in which cultural goods are rarely selected and the criteria for selection are unclear. While statistical generalizations are based on generalizing findings from discrete entities to a population, analytical generalization is based on empirically grounded conceptualizations from variation, comparison, and negative cases. The conceptualized patterns covering the variation in the material are analytical generalizations in the form of a substantive theory, which is linked to existing research and theories. The analytical generalizations can be transposed to other substantive areas for further elaboration, for example through analogous reasoning (Hesse, 1970), and put to the test by variation, comparison, and negative cases. This means that the concepts developed in the papers, such as appraisal devices, the discovery and justification phases of manuscript acquisition, and the ways of dealing with failure, can be applied in research on similar subjects or, more specifically, on people working under similar conditions, such as actors dealing with quality uncertainty in the nearly impossible acting market or competitors dealing with quality uncertainty in

talent shows (see paper III). The concluding sections of the papers and of this introduction describe formal theoretical implications of these concepts.

5 Overview of papers

The first paper, *Being Good Enough on the Publishing Market: Aspiring Writers' Use of Appraisal Devices*, investigates how aspiring writers handle quality uncertainty in determining their chances for success or failure on the publishing market. The publishing market is conditioned by quality uncertainty and a lack of explicit and shared objective standards for evaluating manuscripts. To determine their prospects of getting published through the publishing market, aspiring writers oriented to becoming first-time published writers need to not only respond to quality uncertainty but also find ways of determining the quality of their work as it would be evaluated on the publishing market. Writers believe that their chances for success or failure in the publishing market depend on the publishers' assessment of the quality of their work. There is a tension between aspiring to succeed in the publishing market and the uncertainty involving not knowing how publishers in this market will determine the quality of their work.

The interviews show that writers use appraisal devices to resolve this tension. Appraisal devices are reductions of uncertainty about prospective success or failure in the publishing market generated by a perceived correspondence between a future evaluation of their work in the publishing market and a stand-in for this evaluation. For appraisal devices to work, writers need to trust that this correspondence exists and see the stand-ins as knowledgeable and able to create this correspondence. There are two general types of appraisal devices. One comes from simulated evaluations by trusted and knowledgeable insiders (such as literary mentors) acting as assessors. These persons can read the work of aspiring writers and tell them whether they have a shot at being published. Their evaluations only become effective as an appraisal device writers see them as trusted and knowledgeable insiders who can simulate the evaluations of publishing houses. Another type of appraisal device comes from organized competitions, such as literary awards: writers can use the outcomes of such competitions as signs of whether their work might be published in the future. For the organized competition to become useful as an appraisal device, the writer must believe that the evaluation corresponds to the evaluations of publishing houses such that they can see a success in such a competition as representing a potential success on the publishing market. The paper extends work done by Karpik (2010) on judgment devices, but instead of studying how cultural consumers deal with quality uncertainty, as Karpik does, the paper

focuses on how cultural producers deal with quality uncertainty pertaining to their own work in the artistic market. In general, it shows how actors deal with the particular conditions of quality uncertainty in the publishing market and how they produce knowledge to remedy this uncertainty and to create possibilities for self-evaluating their chances of success and failure in such a market.

The second paper, *Making the Discovery: The Creativity of Selecting Fiction Manuscripts*, shows how publishers handle the quality uncertainty in the publishing market as they try to discover publishable debut fiction books from among manuscripts sent by aspiring writers. This paper provides an answer to the question of how manuscripts are discovered by introducing the distinction between the discovery phase and justification phase. This distinction is common in research about scientific discoveries, but this is its first elaboration in relation to the acquisition of cultural goods. Previous research has hinted at this distinction, claiming that the discovery process is highly intuitive and based on gut feeling, and this most of this research has focused on justification strategies. Bourdieu has effectively shown that the structural circumstances for having a gut feeling are based on alignment with structurally powerful dispositions and positions such that discoveries come to seem natural to the gatekeeper. This paper complements Bourdieu's view by moving closer to the actor's expressions of subjectivity in recounting experiences, sense-making, and actions involved in the moments of discovery and the movement from the discovery to the justification phase.

This paper shows how the interviewed publishers learned to identify and act upon certain reading experiences to make discoveries. To become a publisher and make discoveries under conditions of quality uncertainty, the person must not only learn a professionalized taste corresponding to the publishing house's but also learn to abandon pre-fixed ideas about what manuscripts to find. This is a professionalization of the attitude of a publisher as a gatekeeper: success is conceptualized as depending on the ability to maintain such an attitude when evaluating manuscripts. Publishers learn to both identify and act upon certain types of experiences they have while reading manuscripts. These experiences are the outcomes of breaks in routine: they break the routine of sifting through manuscripts by 'having an experience'. The qualities of the experience make them realize that certain ends are possible, that is, that the manuscript may be publishable. There are two routes for making a discovery associated with two reading stances. The publisher may have an experience by entering into a state of reading flow, a reading experience in which the publisher feels a particular harmony with the text and has heightened sensations. Conventions may be important in this reading stance, but they are secondary to the flow experience that is the focus of the experience. The other reading stance involves reading the manuscript more in relation to existing literary conventions, for example as a crime novel manuscript. The publishers still need to deal with quality

uncertainty, since there are no pre-fixed standards for use in evaluating manuscripts. But here, they need to read the manuscript in relation to their tacit knowledge of conventions. Most importantly, however, they must 'have an experience' while reading the manuscript for a discovery to happen. They need to experience the manuscript as exceptional within or contributing to the tacit convention. While the first reading stance, emphasizing reading flow, is closer to an aesthetic reading (ascribing value by identifying qualities of a reading experience) the second is closer to an efferent reading (evaluating a manuscript in relation to a tacit convention) (Rosenblatt, 1978). In both reading stances, it is necessary to creatively act upon the experiences and, while taking this action, discover that certain ends may be possible (the manuscript may be publishable). This identification of possible ends moves the manuscript from the discovery to the justification phase, in which the publisher uses justification strategies to make a final publishing decision. The movement from the discovery to the justification phase therefore involves a creativity of action (Joas, 1996); such acts of creativity happen through corporeal experiences in situations where actors act upon means before ends. This is not to say that there are not slippages from the justification to the discovery phase, but the distinction between the two phases contributes to the study of how cultural goods are discovered under conditions of quality uncertainty. Specifically, this distinction uses an action-oriented and experientialist perspective to answer the question of how such discoveries are made.

The last paper, *Handling Rejection as Failure: Aspiring Writers Getting the Rejection Slip*, examines the consequences of being evaluated by a publisher under conditions of quality uncertainty. The paper focuses in part on how quality uncertainty can become a source of strategies for handling a rejection that is perceived as a failure. The risk of failure is part of the definition of being an aspirant, and artists in the creative industries are especially prone to failure (McRobbie, 2016, p. 56), especially aspiring writers trying to succeed in a nearly impossible market. Writers experience a tension between their aspiration to succeed in the publishing market and their experience of being rejected and perceiving that rejection as a failure. They use cooling out strategies to deal with this tension and perceived failure. Goffman (1952) developed the idea of cooling out from the situation of a confidence game, in which a mark (the person being tricked) is led to believe that fast money is to be made (success), but ends up failing by being tricked by the con artist (failure). A con artist who is left on the scene cools the mark out by describing strategies that give reasons for the failure. This dissertation understands cooling out as the ways people deal with rejection as perceived failure, when a tension arises between an aspiration to succeed and the rejection and perceived failure. Writers handle rejection as a failure in four ways as they either accept or dismiss the accountability of the rejection and either accept or

dismiss responsibility for it (see Table 2). These ways of dealing with rejection as failure involve accounts—either excuses or justifications (Scott & Lyman, 1968)²⁰—concessions, and refusals (Schönbach, 1990). These ideas draw on formulations originally developed by Austin (1956) and used here to theorize breaks in normative expectations, rather than forms of accusations and responses to them.

Table 2. Four ways of dealing with rejection as failure

	Accepting responsibility	Dismissing responsibility
Accepting the occurrence of failure	1. Conceding	2. Excusing
Dismissing the occurrence of failure	3. Justifying	4. Refusing

Source: paper III

Table 2 describes a situation in which the writer has attempted to be selected by a publishing house but has failed by being rejected. As the table shows, conceding means accepting both the occurrence of the failure and the responsibility for it. Procedures involve adopting or being offered a new status (Ball, 1976, pp. 736; Clark, 1960, pp. 574-574; Goffman, 1952, pp. 457; Thomas, 2014, pp. 293-295), for example, starting to work as a writing teacher instead of aspiring to be published; turning sour by outwardly appearing to have conceded the failure but not fully doing so (Goffman, 1952, p. 45); blowing off steam, for example by symbolically destroying the sign of failure (Goffman, 1952, p. 457; Thomas, 2014, pp. 289-290); planning to make a new attempt (Goffman, 1952, p. 457); using synthetic methods, for example, drinking alcohol; or performing magic and ceremonies, for example, setting rejection letters on fire.

An excuse is an account, a way of explaining the failure, in which the responsibility is dismissed but the occurrence of the failure is accepted (Austin, 1956, p. 2; Schönbach, 1990, pp. 79-80; Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 47). The procedures are to claim unclear evaluation criteria, for example by claiming that the publishers do not know what they are doing and are making mistakes when they select and reject manuscripts; to claim clear but wrong evaluation criteria, for example by claiming that the publishers would neglect

²⁰ Justification here refers to the act of justifying or explaining something under the circumstance of perceived failure. Justification during the justification phase of the discovery process, on the other hand, is about finding and expressing reasonable grounds for making publishing decisions.

works not written by a celebrity; and to claim that everyone fails, the so writer is not alone in having failed to get published. Here, the aspirant uses the uncertainty about how publishers have evaluated the quality of the manuscript as a resource to produce these excuses.

Justification is also an account, but an account in which the responsibility is accepted while the occurrence of the failure is dismissed (Austin 1956, p. 2; Schönbach, 1990, p. 80; Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 47). The procedures involve hedging (Goffman, 1952, p. 461), in which the writer may claim that the attempt was not a real attempt but at the same time conceal from others and even from him- or herself a continuing commitment to being published; claiming it was a good attempt so that the rejection was not a real failure, for example in response to a “positive rejection letter”; relativizing, in which the writer distances him- or herself from the desire to be published, for example by claiming that being published is not the only thing that matters in life; and reconstructing in hindsight such that the initial failure is turned into a success—for example, a writer may claim that the rejection turned out to be positive thing.

Finally, the writer may also refuse the failure by dismissing its occurrence and responsibility for it (Schönbach, 1990, p. 80). The procedures involve an inability to comprehend being rejected, for example, claiming, “I am right; they are wrong”. Cooling out happens through the use of accounts and strategies that involve conceding the failure, but the person may also be in need of cooling out while refusing the failure or while conceding it but not yet having adapted to it.

A reverse outline of this table shows what it means to succeed: success can be dealt with by either accepting or rejecting its occurrence and by claiming or not claiming responsibility for it. These schemes are useful for understanding how people handle the consequences of others’ evaluations, both as successes and as failures. This conceptual and empirical framework systematizes Goffman’s (1952) work on cooling out strategies and extends it by exploring additional procedures. The framework is also useful for studying other forms of rejection perceived as failures, such as failures in artistic careers, and also contributes to the study of the consequences of evaluation. The concluding chapter discusses further implications of the three papers.

6 Contribution and further research

In the social sciences, and most notably in social scientific studies of art and culture, there is an ongoing discussion of how uncertainty affects and structures the activities and sense-making of those involved in making creative work. I contribute to this discussion by analyzing how uncertainty about quality affects and structures the activities of aspiring writers and publishers in the Swedish publishing market. The problem of quality uncertainty in the publishing market prevails despite changes in the Swedish publishing industry that include the introduction of literary agents and the expansion of self-publishing. The publishing market remains a nearly impossible market in which many try but only a few get published, and it remains conditioned by quality uncertainty. This results in the winner-take-all structure often found in artistic markets in the cultural industries, in which an oversupply of talent contributes to a saturation of demand and only a few market players become successful in the long run (Lutter, 2013; Menger, 1999, 2014). Because these features are so typical of cultural industries, this dissertation has broad implications even though it covers a rather small language area and only one publishing industry.

In this dissertation, I show that aspiring writers' appraisal devices are central to the way they deal with uncertainty about their prospects of getting published: appraisal devices give them an answer to the question of whether their work is of the right quality to one day be published. Quality uncertainty also poses difficulties for publishing houses, which must evaluate manuscripts and writers that lack a track record of published books. Publishers have developed procedures and techniques for discovering manuscripts of the right quality, including learning to become sensitized by acquiring a professionalized taste that corresponds to the publishing house's taste, learning to realize means before ends, and learning to deploy either a predominantly aesthetic or a predominantly efferent reading depending on the manuscript. The movement from the discovery of a manuscript to a justification for publishing or not publishing a manuscript is based on particular reading experiences that rely on the publisher having become sensitized and acquired the necessary taste. There are no publicly known standards that publishing houses use when evaluating manuscripts. To the rejected writer, it can therefore appear unclear why their work was rejected. To deal with rejection as a failure, aspiring writers may rely on this uncertainty

to excuse the failure (accepting the occurrence of failure but not accepting the responsibility for the failure). They may also handle the rejection as a failure by justifying the failure (not accepting the occurrence of failure but accepting responsibility for the failure). Writers who do not use these strategies have either conceded the failure (accepted the occurrence and their responsibility) or are simply refusing the rejection as a failure and their responsibility for it.

In these papers, I introduce the concept of 'appraisal devices,' develop a model for discovering cultural goods, and explicate four main strategies people use to handle rejection as a failure with respect to their own perceived responsibility for the failure. According to Menger (2014, p. 4), aspiring artists may succeed because of their own ability, because of how the environment conditions chances for success and risks of failure, because of the quality of their work, and because of the value their work is assigned in the course of various evaluations. Nevertheless, as this dissertation shows, dealing with quality uncertainty and using it as a resource are central facts of participation in artistic markets shaped by overabundance and quality uncertainty. I suggest that any sufficient answer to the question of how artists succeed or fail in an artistic market must address how people involved in that market deal with quality uncertainty and use it as a resource.

This dissertation interrogates a situation that is not only generally unstudied but also relevant to several intersecting subfields: the sociology of culture, the sociology of art, economic sociology, and the sociology of evaluation and valuation. This research also contributes to a largely unexplored sociological field that I call the sociology of success and failure. In the following sections, I present these contributions and suggest further research.

Following a post-Bourdiesian tradition and informed by pragmatism, this dissertation contributes to *the study of valuation devices*. A new perspective and research area is opened up by a simple shift in perspective from how cultural consumers select cultural goods of uncertain quality to how cultural producers learn to evaluate themselves when their work is of uncertain quality in reference to an artistic market. Although scholars have studied valuation devices—for example, insurance devices used to cope with economic uncertainty (Menger, 1999)—this dissertation contributes to the study of valuation and evaluation by highlighting the importance of appraisal devices for cultural producers dealing with quality uncertainty. Appraisals about the quality of what the producers present and represent only become appraisal devices if they are trusted and the people giving the appraisals are seen as knowledgeable. This research shows, through its development of the concept of appraisal devices, that evaluations have many layers: cultural producers use others' evaluations to simulate future evaluations on the artistic market in order to evaluate their chances of success and failure on this market.

The idea of appraisal devices is relevant to central concerns in economic sociology, since economic sociology can be defined “as the analysis of the expectational structures that economic actors rely on for the reduction of uncertainty in decision-making processes” (Beckert, 1996, p. 827). Beckert (1996) additionally noted that “actors have to rely on 'devices' that emerge as a result of uncertainty, and that help them make decisions under given informational constraints” (p. 808). Beckert does not explicitly refer to appraisal devices and evaluations; nevertheless, appraisal devices reduce uncertainty, turning uncertainty into risk (Knight, 1921). By using appraisal devices, one becomes more certain and creates expectations of future chances of success or failure on the market. In other words, appraisal devices produce 'fictional expectations' that create a sense of certainty through imaginaries and possible plans for future action (Beckert, 2015, 2016). The devices are about a future that is uncertain but based on trust, and the devices are used as guides to orient people's actions. Appraisal devices enable people to act as if it were possible for them to predict the future. This type of future-oriented action has, in other contexts, been associated with belief or confidence and trust (Barbalet, 1998; Fürst & Kümmel, 2011), as well as hope (Fürst, 2013; Miyazaki & Swedberg, 2016). Expectational structures and their emotional underpinnings are central to the economy, as well as to markets and their actors, and play a pivotal role in enabling people to commit to courses of action based on expectations about the prospects of success or failure.

This dissertation contributes to existing research about *taste and the selection of creative goods* by introducing a theoretical model of the discovery of cultural goods that distinguishes between the discovery and justification phases of the selection process. I theorize the process of discovering creative goods from an experientialist perspective that complements the Bourdieusian perspective on the selection process. Bourdieu (1993, pp. 95-97, 133-134) and research following this approach effectively explain why certain cultural goods are selected. Gatekeeping is based on positions in the literary field and aesthetic sensibilities or tastes that are layered into gatekeepers' dispositions and expressed through their habitus, making taste seem natural to them (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 95-97, 133-134). These tastes may or may not correspond to their position in the literary field (Lahire, 2015a), but gatekeepers' room for maneuvering and making publishing decisions is contingent on this position, which is shaped by a constant struggle amongst actors (or agents) conditioned in part by an uneven distribution of capital in the literary field (Bourdieu, 2008). Nevertheless, lacking is what post-Bourdieuian sociology has called the on-the-ground perspective (Beljean, Chong & Lamont, 2015, p. 41). This on-the-ground perspective includes gatekeepers' subjectivity in making evaluations, and this subjectivity involves corporeality, materiality, performativity, unpredictability, and, I would add, creativity (Acord & DeNora, 2008; Antal, Hutter & Stark, 2015; Beljean,

Chong & Lamont, 2015; Hennion, 2007; Nylander, 2014b; Prior, 2011; Schwarz, 2013; Varriale, 2015). This dissertation's empirically grounded theoretical elaboration of the process of selecting unsolicited manuscripts contributes to the development of this perspective. The dissertation shows that publishers deal with quality and demand uncertainty on-the-ground through a discovery and justification phase and a socialization into professionalized taste and attitude that enables them to consider means before ends and use either a reading strategy that is either predominantly aesthetic or predominantly efferent. In short, this framework complements Bourdieusian explanations by following post-Bourdieusian calls for on-the-ground studies of the subjectivity of valuation and evaluation processes.

This dissertation also contributes to *the study of the consequences of evaluations*, which generally have been overlooked in research about market-like situations and in research about evaluations and valuation (see e.g. Beckert & Aspers 2011; Helgesson & Muniesa 2013; Lamont 2012; Vatin, 2013; Zuckerman 2012). Espeland and Sauders (2007) have addressed the consequences of evaluation in their study of how university rankings affect universities, which seek to adapt to the ranking logic. Some previous research has investigated the consequences of evaluations without explicitly addressing the issue. For example, Internet daters learn to be resilient and adapt to hoping to succeed to find a romantic partner and continually failing, and this is an example of how people learn to adapt to rejections that result from evaluation (Fürst, 2013). This dissertation contributes to the study of the consequences of evaluations by studying how aspiring writers respond to the perceived failure of being rejected after aspiring to succeed and then being evaluated in that aspiration. The dissertation outlines the strategies writer use to deal with this inconsistency and finds that responses are patterned according to responsibility and acceptance of the occurrence of a failure. This outline can be seen as a systematization of work on cooling out strategies and an extension of the range of identified cooling-out strategies. The results inform the study of creative work, a kind of work in which people are especially prone to fail (McRobbie, 2016, p. 56). As a consequence of this dissertation, it has become possible to theorize how actors deal with the risks of failure and chances of success and how they use the failures and successes they experience.

I suggest the development of a particular subfield for research and systematic study: *the sociology of failure and success*. Both success and failure should be studied. Success and failure depend on each other; they cannot exist independently, since success implies the possibility of failure and failure implies the possibility of success.

What is considered to be success and failure in society? This is a most fundamental question to ask, and answering it requires an understanding of scarcity, competition, and prestige. Situations in which many people attempt

to be selected in a competition but only a few succeed reveal the underlying fabric of society. The many attempts to be published, to get a break as a musician, and so on, combined with the relatively few successes also produces the prestige involved in being selected, which shows what is valued and prestigious in a society's culture.

To fully understand both success and failure, it is also necessary to take into account what I call the objective and subjective sides of failure and success. On the objective side, the aspiring person engages in a situation of evaluation and is either rejected or selected (as an outcome of competition) by a gatekeeper of some sort. On the subjective side, the aspiring person makes meaning and experiences a sense of failure or success in relation to the rejection or selection. The types of failure and success studied in this dissertation are, hence, those that depend on the evaluations of others who act as gatekeepers to artistic markets. These types of failures and successes are at the heart of cultural industries (Hirsch, 1972), in which many people attempt to succeed but most fail and in which success and failure depend on decisions made by gatekeepers. These are the objective failures and success; they are failed and successful attempts in these markets. The cultural industries are composed of gatekeepers and markets, and the flow and reproduction of the industry depend on these selections and rejections. To take this further and get a fuller grasp of the publishing industry, it is possible to look at other match-making processes, such as whether a retail organization orders a published book; this would represent another type of objective failure or success of the book. Additional aspects of failure or success might be the book's selection or rejection for review on the consumer market and its nomination or lack of nomination for literary awards. Depending on what writers subjectively consider a success or failure, their response to the objective failure or success may differ. Consequently, dealing with both success and failure are an integral part of the cultural production and offer a possible opening to a much broader field of research, since both success and failure are embedded in cultures and central to the production and reproduction structures of prestige.

Looking beyond the publishing world, it is possible to contrast these findings with those we might obtain from studies of other creative industries, in which the barriers to entry might be different. It is clear that publishing houses have a central place in the publishing world, but is it the same in other industries? Do the record labels hold the keys to entering the music industry? Probably, but in some cases, musicians begin by starting their own record label and then get picked up by major labels after becoming successful on the consumer market or amongst audiences. Similar patterns emerge in the publishing world with the advent of self-publishing. Self-publishing is not an entirely new phenomenon, but it has become more prolific as a result of the rise of digital technology, digital reproduction of books, and online publishing. In these cases, the evaluation of quality might be in the hands of the audience rather

than those of gatekeepers to the artistic market. This would indicate a struggle between judgments of quality made in the consumer market and similar judgments made in the artistic market concerning which music or literature is an appropriate or good cultural good. For artistic markets to continue to play a role in cultural production, people need to believe in and trust gatekeepers' ability to determine the right quality of products. If this belief and trust exists, then gatekeepers will continue to play a role in determining who will succeed and who will fail.

There are a variety of explanations of why artists succeed or fail in artistic markets. Nevertheless, to at least create the possibility of success, artists need to be oriented toward making an attempt to achieve success on the artistic market by (1) having expectations about the future that include a hope or belief that success is possible and (2) being resilient in the face of failure. In other words, success is improbable when the writer orients away from attempting to achieve success on the artistic market by doubting or disbelieving in the possibility of success and being defeated in face of failure. To create hope or disbelief and make reasonable choices about whether to orient toward attempting to succeed on the artistic market, the artist needs to get a sense of the prospects of success and failure by finding out how the artistic market would assess the work's quality. The techniques for handling rejection as failure express resilience or defeatism, which may create hope or disbelief in success, respectively. In the end, success on the artistic market is contingent on gatekeepers discovering cultural goods by having particular experiences and making the necessary justifications for acquiring the cultural goods. Future studies of failure and success on the artistic market should address subjectivity, temporality, and the condition of quality uncertainty on the artistic market and should take these insights into account.

It is not only writers and artists who engage in freelance careers that depend on gatekeepers to markets for the continuation of their career. Freelance careers are part of many workers' contemporary working conditions, including individualized, short-term, and project-based careers. Artistic markets are not the only markets that are hard to enter; labor markets in general can be hard to enter, thus producing failure and success. The freelance career system, for its part, depends on these uneven distributions of, hopes for, and attempts at success. As I argue throughout this dissertation, a full understanding of these markets requires taking into account how quality uncertainty is handled by those involved in the market under study.

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Appendix A. Variables in the fiction debut database

I constructed the main database about debut fiction publishing from announcements of first-time published writers and books for adults in the Swedish trade magazine *Svensk Bokhandel* between 1997 and 2014 (see Fürst, 2016). The database lists 813 first-time published writers and, because some books were coauthored, contains 796 books. The database also includes the 152 publishing houses that published these books.

The database also consists of information about each writer's age at the time of publishing his or her debut fiction book, place of residence, name of the debut fiction book, publishing house, size of the publishing house in terms of the number of debut fiction books it published, whether the book was self-published, and the number of authors of each book. The database also contains information about writers' activities before their fiction debut: writing school participation, nominations and awarded literary prizes, whether they had been taken on by a literary agent, and whether they had been published in literary journals before their book was published.

The database also contains information about the reception of the debut fiction book: screen adaptation, translations, first-book award nominations and wins, an aggregation of bestseller-list positions, and newspapers that reviewed the book. Additional information included the books' length, keywords used by a library to describe the book, and whether the book is a collection of poems, a collection of short stories, or a novel. Moreover, the database holds information about publishing houses, including their location, the number of debut fiction books they had published, and whether they were a self-publishing a self-publishing house or a traditional publishing house.

I used these variables along with descriptive statistics to sample participants to interview. I also used it as a support for understanding the field under study; it gave me an informed overview of the state of fiction debut publishing between 1997 and 2014.

Appendix B. Interview themes

The research focus and research questions guided the interviews and the questions asked. I used the themes as a way of orienting the interviews and to support discussions of some of the core activities involved in being a fiction writer or publisher. Themes included the interviewees' backgrounds, their roles in the literary world, whether they were aspiring to be published, their motives for aspiring or not aspiring to be published, their writing projects, their activities related to becoming published, rejection and selections (e.g., by publishing houses), how they wanted to be published, phases of getting published, relationships with publishing houses and literary agencies, what happened after the publication of their debut fiction book, what was important to them in their writing, how they wrote, and questions related to the field, such as what it means to be a writer, how you know when you are succeeding or failing, self-publishing, digitalization, and the importance of prestige and earning money. The template was combined with and complemented by the 'career scheme template' (see Appendix C).

Themes covered in interviews with publishers (and I used similar themes in interviews with literary agents) were what they did at the publishing house; their background; their publishing profile; the number and type of books they had published; the size of their publishing house; discussion of specific book projects; how they selected and rejected manuscripts in concrete and general terms; the influence of the situation, persons, and content of the manuscript on decisions; publishing house taste and personal taste; trends; considerations in play when selecting and rejecting manuscripts; similar and dissimilar publishing houses; relationships with aspiring writers and published writers; what happens after the publication of a debut fiction book; monitoring of writers and other publishing houses; the interviewee's short-term and long-term focus; what constitutes success and failure; and questions related to the field, such as digitalization, myths about publishing houses and their work, and so on.

Appendix C. Career scheme template

Year	Writing project(s)	Chosen publishing house(s)/journal(s)/literary agent(s)	Selected/Rejected	Writing course(s)	Writing group(s)	Other literary engagement(s) (e.g. reviewer for publishing house, jury member, literary prize(s), writing teacher, having/being literary mentor etc.)
Future						
2014						
2013						
2012						
2011						
2010						
2009						
2008						
2007						
2006						
2005						
2004						
2003						
...						

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