Although most companies continue to hold exceptionally high work commitment standards for their executive and managerial-level employees, there are signs that some companies are experimenting with paid work alternatives that ease the ideal worker norm and recognize the value in changing expectations. Family structure and function have changed in the United States. Most employees do not have a person at home fully dedicated to caregiving and running the household. Some paid workplaces have started to shift their work culture and have opened more flexible alternatives as they realize that research demonstrates that such resources for employees often increase the company's bottom line, decrease turnover, and increase employees' dedication to and feelings of goodwill for the company.

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See Also: "Doing Gender"; Flexible Scheduling; Gendered Work Identities; Identity at Work; Overwork; 24/7 Economy; Work Overload; Work Spillover.

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Identity at Work

Identity in the workplace refers to the subjective side of employment. In contrast to the material dimensions of work often studied in the labor process (e.g., wages, contracts, and career ladders), identity is an experience and may be harder to measure or see. Elements include mental states and orientations; behaviors and gestures; feelings, emotions, and desires; and symbols and images. Perhaps most crucially, identity is about the sense and definition of self. This field emphasizes that fundamental to the dynamics of work is how one understands him or herself as a worker. As a conceptual category, identity is both a cause and effect of labor dynamics: It is a target of organizations, markets, and unions, but it also shapes the outcomes of work and feeds back into the structure of how work is organized.

Work identity was a central concern of the founding sociologists. Émile Durkheim was intrigued by the placement of individuals in the division of labor, and its impact on their sense of solidarity with others in society. Max Weber documented the rise of bureaucratic structures and how they create social roles according to hierarchical positions. Occupants (presumably) override other identities in favor of a neutral rationality and efficiency. Karl Marx theorized about how the system of capitalism and one's location in the relations of production would shape his or her class consciousness and orientation toward collective action. Erving Goffman has also been a strong influence on this field, through the frame of symbolic interactionism. He viewed identity as a performance, used for managing impressions in interactions. As such, he situated identity within the context of the moment, rather than as stable across institutions or relations. Sociologists of work have used this frame to elucidate how everyday routines and microtransactions represent wider systems of power in the workplace.

With their varying orientations, then, these classical sociologists have inspired different directions of research on identity at work, such as managerial control of workers through identity, coercion versus consent in identity construction, the multiplicity of identities and how workers and managers choose between competing versions, hierarchies of work identity in organizations, the mutability of identities as workers fit into jobs or between them; and work identity as a process that has to be continually negotiated.

Organizational Identities

Organizations shape identity through managerial strategies of labor control. These tactics represent

a shift over the 20th century. Earlier strategies (e.g., simple, technical, and bureaucratic systems) achieved control through employee behaviors, like the simplification of work tasks and the enforcement of rules and regulations. Contemporary organizations, alternatively, are relying to a greater degree on "normative control." They tap into the underlying features of work processes (e.g., norms, values, and informal arrangements) and subjective qualities of employees (e.g., feelings, thoughts, and experiences) to bind workers to the organization. This is evident in Michael Burawoy's description of "making out." Factory workers participate in self-initiated games on the shop floor. They use their increasing discretion over the labor process to create routines of play, competing for production, output, and rates. Unsponsored and outside the realm of formal work rules, this practice elicits consent from workers for the profit system of employers. Moreover, these "games" are a sign of identity in the labor process: workers see themselves (at the least in the moment) as players of a game in addition to, if not instead of, workers. In this way, the firm is able to benefit from the subjective qualities of its workforce. Burawoy calls this process of an obscuring of the politics of labor.

Normative-style identity demands are apparent at the higher skill levels in knowledge and professional work. Large firms in the high-tech industry, for instance, deploy a variety of programs to shape the worker in the corporate image. They provide "'the good life': a benign and supportive work environment that offers the opportunity for self-actualization," according to Gideon Kunda. They relax physical controls over employee time and space, and replace them with participation in decision making. In return, managers seek complete allegiance to the firm. They may barrage employees with pro-corporate rituals, symbols, and philosophies through a variety of mechanisms, such as company handbooks, managerial speeches, induction boot camps, and bumper stickers. The aim is to gain from employees "internal commitment, strong identification with company goals, intrinsic satisfaction from work." Thus, even in sites that seem almost relatively free from labor constraints (e.g., the informal, non-authoritarian, creativity-enhancing structures of knowledge work), organizations deploy identity as another type of control, through identity.

Service Identities

The rise of the service sector has created a distinct set of identity demands. These jobs involve doing activities for consumers, rather than producing goods or knowledge. Many of these occupations involve direct contact with customers, referred to as interactive service work (e.g., retail sales, waitressing, and nursing). Therefore, the content of that exchange comes under the scrutiny of employers, as they rely on workers to convey qualities to customers—pleasantness, politeness, happiness, and calmness. Workers, in turn, must delve into their inner selves to display these emotions. They engage in "deep acting" to perform those roles authentically. "Surface acting," in contrast, won't do in the eyes of the customer or the firm—it may be interpreted as "phony." Workers have to legitimately feel the emotion inside that they are showing outside. With this theory, Arlie Hochschild illuminated the process of identity work for employees. She outlined the dynamic of "feeling management" to emphasize the inner psychological, sociological, and even theatrical reconditioning of self that employees conduct. Further, Hochschild links this intimate, private process to economic transactions in the market, and broader still, to the hidden workings of capitalism. Emotional displays by workers become indicators of "quality service." Thus, she brought attention to the way that firms sell workers' feelings and thus profit from identity management.

Recent studies are revealing how service workers not only perform emotions for firms, but also live their brands. "Branding" refers to the process of imprinting the corporate image onto the worker, so that he or she represents the values of the firm. It achieves two goals for firms: conveying the firm's image to the customer through the interaction, and making the worker feel a strong connection to the firm. Recent job titles in the consumer industry demonstrate this: "brand representatives" in clothing stores who become walking embodiments of the label, modeling the merchandise while posing as consumers; and "brand ambassadors" on college campuses who integrate a full range of consumer products into their daily lives, so that other students can subconsciously develop tastes for them. Workers become more than loyal to or even aligned with the firm, as in the Kunda model. These branded employees may

never even step inside of or see the actual organization. Rather, they become one with the brand by structuring much of their lives—leisure and work—around that image.

Branding as a way of performing identity has several mechanisms. It takes an inward form, as employers seek to create "a workforce that reacts and behaves instinctively 'on brand,' effectively managing itself," as phrased by Marion Crain. It takes an outward form as workers transform their physical beings for the job, what Pei-Chia Lan refers to as "bodily labor." In the most extreme example, corporate logos are literally marked on workers' bodies as tattoos. Where sexuality is part of the corporate image, outward branding involves rules about dress and appearance. This includes requirements for makeup and body weight for casino and airline employees, in what Lan calls the "mirroring body." The "disciplined body" performs service identities through gestures and behaviors, such as the Walmart front door greeter, or the Japanese department store elevator lady whose only task is to smile and bow.

Intersecting Identities

Workplaces are embedded with identities along lines of gender, race, sexuality, and other markers. Stated or unstated, these occupational and organizational dynamics privilege dominant identities of masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexuality. They enforce social inclusion and exclusion of employees based on displays of those features.

A well-documented pattern in the sociology of work is that jobs are devalued according to the degree of sex segregation. The more women are in a job, and the more it is labeled as feminine, the lower the wages and other rewards. In addition, occupations are gendered according to their identity demands. Hochschild notes how women are more frequently required to perform emotional labor. Up to half of all women's jobs involve the display of pleasing (and other) qualities. For a variety of reasons, women are concentrated in occupations that require such displays. Gender identities are flexible, however, and can be reconstructed to sustain the social order when men do this work. Robin Leidner illustrates this process in her book *Fast Food, Fast Talk* (1993). Even though fast-food work and door-to-door sales both require placing oneself as inferior to the customer, the gendered qualities are interpreted very differently. The servility of women workers at McDonald's is considered natural and appropriate. Yet, the deference involved with insurance sales by a largely male staff is recast as masculine, and as a skill of seeking power and control in interactions.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter's classic book, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977), brought attention to the way that organizations generate or encourage gendered identities. Because women tend to be overconcentrated in marginalized positions in firms, they develop behaviors commensurate with that low-power and low-opportunity status. As they realize their lack of potential for upward mobility and lack of authority, they respond with behaviors common to those positions, such as a lack of ambition, a tendency to be insecure and controlling, resignation to one's status, and failure to identify with high-status people in the firm. Thus, traits that have been labeled as stereotypically feminine (e.g., timid, emotional, and praise addicted) are attributable not to women's "natural" inclinations, but to coping responses for those faced with structural inequalities. Organizations may favor heterosexual identities.

Employee policies, programs, and benefits often cover only nuclear, heterosexual families. Events and rituals may celebrate heterosexual dating and marriage. Informal conversations and interactions may stigmatize homosexuality. Research by Christine Williams and colleagues shows that, even in proliferating gay-friendly workplaces, employees feel pressured to downplay their sexual orientation in how they look, act, and work because of these dynamics.

Identity management is not just about suppressing subordinate identities as workers, though. It is also about enacting and emphasizing the dominant identities of other groups. Outsiders of the workplace are often pressured to perform the behaviors of insiders in order to counter stereotypes against them and avoid discrimination. This takes a racial form, as people of color display subtle cues to show that they can act like whites, such as laughing alongside racist humor; denying that they speak a foreign language associated with their background; and having lunch with whites, rather than hanging out with people of their ethnicity (which would be labeled as un-collegial). Such gestures are informal meaning systems that

"signal that they are hard working, collegial, team oriented, trust worthy." M. Gulati and D. Carbado call this "identity work," and argue that it amounts to a landslide of "extra" labor that outsiders have to do to fit in. Not only do racial-ethnic minorities have to work harder than whites to demonstrate objective skills in their jobs, they also have to perform this identity work to prove their subjective qualifications. In a Foucauldian sense, they are disciplined into enacting and perpetuating the racial system. This kind of identity work is a common practice among many types of structural minorities, such as women, gays/lesbians/transsexuals, and immigrants.

Flexible Work and Fractionalized Identities

Work identities are increasingly fragmented, given the decomposition of work. Over the second half of the 20th century, there has been a steady breakdown of employment. Employers have moved toward a business model of "flexibility" in efforts to reduce costs and manage competition. Many have abandoned their strategies of providing full-time, permanent, in-house employment, and the accompanying benefits of health insurance and pension plans. Instead, they are favoring reduced work hours, a removal of job security to hire and fire at will, and an outsourcing of work to subcontracting and temporary staffing firms.

This flexibility, in turn, generates a large category of employees who are only partially connected to organizations: contingent, temporary, part-time, and contract workers. Among them, there is a growing sense of confusion over whether or not one is in fact an "employee." Temporary workers, for instance, often lack a full understanding of the purpose of their work, and may not be around long enough to see the products of their efforts. They encounter office hierarchies in which they have a lower status than full-time employees. They are unsure whether or not they are eligible for informal, employer-sponsored activities like softball teams. They are typically unaware of who their "real" co-workers are, that is, those from their staffing agency, since they are dispersed across various organizations.

Furthermore, contingent workers must have a pliable identity. They may have to change their dress and demeanor so that they can fit into each new setting where they are placed. They may need to deny features of their "real" identity, such as educational credentials and skills, which may conflict with their identity as a "just a temp." The link of identity to work is perhaps best illustrated by the absence of a job. Workers who lose their jobs are prone to depression. In the United States, they are four times more likely than employed people to have thoughts of harming themselves. Among the many reasons, some are financial (e.g., anxiety about not being able to support themselves and their families) and related to identity (e.g., losing a sense of routine, purpose, and meaning of who they are).

National and Transnational Work Identities

National contexts structure identities by diffusing their "imagined communities" within the workplace. The performance of identity at work can be influenced by state policies, nationalist symbols, and local meanings of the labor market. Globalization, in turn, may invoke contestations over national identities at work. This is emerging in the growth of multinational corporations (MNCs) that set up subsidiaries or merge with firms across borders. Galit Ailon and Gideon Kunda published a study about a European MNC in Israel that suppressed the nationality of employees in its subsidiaries by, for instance, advocating a global imagery for its overarching corporate culture. At the same time, it acknowledged and allowed national differences in terms of wages, executive appointments, and styles of customer service. Moving even further from its global rhetoric, the firm placed explicit limits on transnational membership when it came to the protection of workers' bodies. Western expatriates would be provided with gas masks in the event of a violent attack on the site—but not local Palestinian employees. The authors conclude that while national identity is tamed in MNCs, it may also be invoked as a tool "to enhance profits, cut costs, or protect their own status," according to the authors.

MNCs can be sites where the definition of multiculturalism is under debate. U.S. and Indian managers of an MNC are shown to filter "diversity" rhetoric: the former selecting gender as an identity to prioritize, the latter choosing race—despite counter-veiling realities in both locations of their workforce distributions and inequalities, as per W. Poster. Relations between organizational units

in the global economy can affect identity at work: Head firms may tend to overinflate the "global-ness" of their identity rhetoric and regimes, and subsidiaries may exaggerate the distinctiveness of their identities as "local."

Virtual Work Identities

The movement of work to the virtual realm is likely to ignite new issues for identity. Organizations are using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to transfer work from physically grounded, in-person environments to computerized platforms like e-mail, video-conferencing, online networks, information sharing sites, and telework. Employees interact through simulated images and media—text, voice, video, and avatars—even though they may be in different locations or working at different times. Virtual workplaces can be sites for reifying and magnifying inequalities of identity. Studies show that employees are more likely to invoke gender stereotypes in the way that they assign tasks, when expecting to work in computer-mediated versus face-to-face settings, according to Madeline Heilman and colleagues. Technology also offers employers a means to surveil aspects of employees' nonwork identities. With social networking sites like Facebook or online background-checking databases, managers are able to uncover personal aspects of workers' identities not represented in résumés.

ICTs are leading to new categories of work in which changing identity is a precondition for the task. Call-center workers in India are asked by managers to pose as Americans within their customer support conversations, as Poster argues. Through accent, cultural, and script training, employees use "national identity management" to alter the sound of their voice on the phone—for the purpose of smoothing communication and easing political tensions with U.S. consumers. A female cyber spy for the U.S. government poses as male Middle Eastern militants in online chat rooms in order to gain their confidence and catch acts of violence before they happen, according to Poster. Alternatively, ICTs may create the opportunity to counter work-related biases of race, ethnicity, and gender. In the process of constructing cyber-selves, employees may use virtualization to transcend the limitations of body-linked identities. For instance, individuals are now interviewing for jobs in the online world of Second Life. By presenting themselves as an avatar (i.e., digital representation) that is different from their offline self, employees may be able to evade biases by human resource professionals, who have been documented to discriminate against people of color, immigrants, and women, just on the basis of physical appearance and names. This might motivate employers to consider qualifications that have more direct bearing on their performance as workers.

Identity Possibilities

A challenge for resistance against these controls is the internalization of identity. It is hard to invoke opposition against what one defines as self. Workers who believe that they are the corporation (through organizational culture and branding) are less likely to voice opposition, file a lawsuit against the firm, or organize a union. They may even vocalize support for the firm, and welcome the identity management process. This undermines the collective features of identity when working for an employer. Jackie Rogers refers to this as alienation from the self, in that workers are unable to achieve a satisfactory internal definition. This is a contributing factor to why some groups, like temp workers, are so unlikely to unionize. Still, sociologists continue to document many forms of identity resistance. Workers assert their personal identities, even when organizations attempt to suppress them. In a more oppositional stance, they go on "smile strikes," refuse to wear uniforms, and refuse to act a different nationality. Identity is often key to mobilizing workers in struggles, such as the "we are the 99 percent" slogan of the union-supported Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011.

Scholars like Herminia Ibarra also point out the fruitful aspects of identity at work. Because of the mutability of identity, and its rootedness within the worker (i.e., under his or her sphere of control), it can be a tool for uplifting one's career. In fact, a reinvention of self is the precondition of successful work transitions. By conceiving one's identity as multiple, rather than singular, an employee can imagine many possible selves from which to choose. Then, he or she can "recombine old and new skills, interests and ways of thinking, and . . . create opportunities that correspond to that evolving self." One can try out new professional roles before committing to any, find new networks that

better nurture an alternative career role, and craft a narrative of self that will make the transition legitimate to potential employers. In short, identity can be a means of propelling oneself into new work trajectories.

Conclusion

The study of identity has shifted our understanding of work. In the early days of sociology as a discipline, identity was thought of as an extension of the structural features of the job. It was considered stable, all-encompassing, and determinate of social roles. An accountant, for instance, was only an accountant, he or she would do this job for life, and he or she would hang out with other accountants socially at nights and on weekends. Now, sociologists are seeing identity at work in a very different way. It is flexible, multifaceted, and dynamic. One can have many overlapping work identities that are enacted for short or long periods of time, and that may be reshaped institutionally or interactionally. Identity is also both a cause and effect of work experiences. Who you are, or how you see yourself as a worker, can impact what you do in your work, and vice versa. Finally, identity can be a source maintaining occupational hierarchies, and a source that changes them.

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See Also: Burawoy, Michael; Culture, Employment; Dress Codes; Emotional Labor; Gendered Work Identities; Globalization; Goffman, Erving; Hochschild, Arlie; Kanter, Rosabeth Moss; Labor, Aesthetic; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Workers; Meaning; Race and Ethnic Groups; Service Work; Sexuality; Temporary Work.

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Illness

Whether suffering from a short illness from an infection, virus, injury, or mild medical condition, or a chronic disease or disability, employees face periods of poor health during their working years. Beyond the symptoms and consequences of the illness, employees may face penalties such as disciplinary action if required to miss work. In some cases, work causes the illnesses that employees suffer. Illness relates to poor health resulting