Identities and Insecurities: Selves at Work

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Abstract. *This article explores the growing interest in selves and subjects at work. In particular, it examines the analytical importance of insecurity for understanding the subjective power relations and survival strategies of organization. Insecurity in organizations can take many different, sometimes overlapping forms. Highlighting how these insecurities can intersect in the reproduction of workplace selves and organizational power relations, the article argues that attempts to overcome these insecurities can have contradictory outcomes. It also illustrates how 'conformist', 'dramaturgical' and 'resistant' selves may be reproduced, particularly in surveillance-based organizations. The article concludes that a greater appreciation of subjectivity and its insecurities can enhance our understanding of the ways that organizational power relations are reproduced, rationalized, resisted and sometimes even transformed within the contemporary workplace.* ***Key words.*** *identities; insecurity; multiplicity; selves; simultaneity; subjectivity*

Western thinking has traditionally viewed human beings as unitary, coherent and autonomous individuals who are separate and separable from social relations and organizations. Post-structuralist approaches have criticized this perspective for its dualistic tendency artificially to separate individual from society, mind from body, rationality from emotion (e.g. Henriques et al., 1984). Rejecting such dichotomies and the

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essentialist notions of personality that tend to underpin them, post-structuralist perspectives suggest that people's lives are inextricably interwoven with the social world around them (Layder, 1994). Since people are embedded in social relations from birth and throughout their lives, 'society' and 'individual' cannot be separated (Giddens, 1979). Accordingly, individuals are best understood as 'social selves' (Burkitt, 1991) whose actions have to be understood within their complex conditions, processes and consequences.

Demonstrating how subjectivity is a specific historical product embedded within particular conditions and consequences, post-structuralist studies provide new ways of looking at subjectivity, highlighting in particular its discursive, non-rational, gendered and multiple nature (WOBS, 2000). This perspective has been heavily influenced by Foucault's emphasis on the social, organizational and historical contingency of subjectivity and its important inter-relationships with power and knowledge. Questioning traditional conceptions that treat power as a solely negative and repressive property possessed by a 'higher' authority and exercised in a 'top down' fashion, Foucault (1977, 1979) suggests that power is also creative and productive. He argues that practices of power produce subjects, for example, through 'normalization', a process by which the eccentricities of human beings in their behaviour, appearance and beliefs are measured and if necessary corrected. As a form of power that disciplines the self, normalization constructs identity and knowledge by comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing, homogenizing and excluding. Others have drawn on these ideas to illustrate how different social and organizational practices can produce 'normalized' and 'disciplined' selves (e.g. Hollway, 1984; Rose, 1989).

Insisting on the need to combine subject and object, structure and action and power and subjectivity, post-structuralist analyses challenge the prevailing functionalist paradigm and the economic and gender reductionism that frequently characterizes conventional organization studies. The latter typically takes subjectivity for granted, understanding it in the very narrow terms of 'rational, coherent, economic man'. Historically, studies of organization have tended to examine key issues like 'leadership', 'structure' and 'culture' as if their meaning were self-evident, and as if workplace processes were largely determined by an abstract logic irrespective of human volition and thought. Encouraged by post-structuralist analysis, there has been increasing dissatisfaction with such objectivist accounts. Indeed the emergence of this journal and its considerable impact over a relatively short period of time is testament to the development of new, alternative modes of analysing 'organization', many of which appreciate the importance of subjectivity as part of a more critical approach.

Within social theory, the examination of 'subjectivity', 'self' and 'identity' has a long history. Indeed the literature is vast (Jenkins, 1996). A great number of writers drawing on a variety of theoretical traditions

have examined the complex ways that individuals seek to construct subjective meaning for their actions, relationships and identities. Some of the most important contributions include the philosophical approaches of existentialism (Sartre, 1958) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1972), the more sociological perspectives of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), 'interpretative sociology' (Weber, 1947) and social anthropology (Becker, 1971; Cohen, 1994), as well as the social psychological orientations of developmental psychology (Kelly, 1955; Allport, 1955) and psychoanalysis (Freud, 1930, Jung, 1964).

While there are significant points of difference between these perspectives, one of the important concerns that many of them share is an emphasis on human self-consciousness. As reflexively monitoring and purposive creatures, we human beings have the capacity to reflect upon ourselves and to see ourselves as separate from the natural and social world around us. This sense of separation in turn facilitates our consciousness of time, our awareness of past processes and future possibilities. We thus have a capacity to envisage alternative realities and to re-construct and change our world. This creative potential enables us to reflect upon and exercise some discretion and control over our actions. It also enables us not only to 'see' ourselves, but also to try to view ourselves as others may see us and to compare and contrast ourselves with others.

However, some of the foregoing approaches have produced overly voluntaristic accounts of subjectivity that exaggerate autonomy and under-emphasize the significance of its conditions, processes and consequences.[1] Moreover, studies of subjectivity have sometimes neglected the extent to which human self-consciousness may be the medium and outcome of uncertainties, insecurities and anxieties about who we are, how we should live, what 'significant others' think of us etc. For example, temporal awareness can render us anxious about our mortality and about the meaning of our lives (Becker, 1973). Durkheim (1948) argued that culture and social institutions shield individuals from the inherent meaninglessness of life overshadowed by the certainty of death. He was concerned that the specialized division of labour in industrialized societies intensified social fragmentation which reinforced the possibility of individuals becoming increasingly detached from social institutions. Without the 'distraction' of society, this self-conscious awareness of our own existential impermanence might result in an overwhelming sense of 'anomie', which in turn could result in suicide.

This article argues that the growing interest in selves and subjects within the workplace has not always fully appreciated the analytical importance of insecurity for understanding the subjective power relations, practices and survival strategies of organization. Insecurity in organizations can take many different, sometimes overlapping forms. It may, for example, be existential, social, economic and/or psychological. These multiple insecurities can intersect and operate simultaneously,

thus reinforcing their impact on the construction of workplace selves and the reproduction of organizational power relations. Attempts to overcome these insecurities can also have unintended and contradictory outcomes. The first half of this article discusses various forms of insecurity that can impact on the construction of subjectivity. The second half considers how these insecurities, ambiguities and simultaneities may inform everyday organizational selves and practices.

Subjectivity and its Insecurities

Various writers have examined the impact of wider social and economic forces on the changing nature of subjectivities (e.g. Gergen, 1991). In his history of the rise of manners, etiquette and polite society in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards, Elias (1978) focused on the construction of 'civilized selves'. He described the way that these cultural shifts fundamentally impacted on the structure of personality, resulting in a progressive intensification of self-restraint. In his critique of the historical development of capitalism, Marx argued that the commodification of labour resulted in the alienation of workers, not only from production, but also from themselves. When separated from the products of their labour, workers were alienated from themselves and their species being.

Of particular historical importance is the shift in social values from 'ascription' in feudalistic societies to 'achievement' in modern, so-called meritocratic, capitalist societies (Zijderveld, 1973). In more collectivist cultures with relatively simple divisions of labour, identities tend(ed) to be ascribed by birth and legitimized through religion and family status. As a consequence, selves were relatively stable and unambiguous. By contrast, especially in western societies, self-confirmation is no longer secured through family status and religion but is shaped by the much more individualistic values of 'the success ethic' (Luckmann and Berger, 1963) and the 'achievement principle' (Offe, 1976). As the influence of the church has declined, conventional notions of a valued identity have been redefined in terms of upward mobility and material accumulation. Accordingly, the validation of self through career success, material accumulation and the confirmation of 'significant others' can become a new and highly influential religion (Walter, 1979).

It is argued that this broad-sweeping shift from ascription to achievement has resulted in identities that are much more 'open', no longer fixed at birth by, for example, religion, class and/or gender.[2] While these changes have produced greater 'freedom' and choice for human beings, they have also resulted in increasingly precarious, insecure and uncertain subjectivities. Within US society where the ideology of meritocracy is most influential, this openness of identity is enshrined in the 'American Dream'. Here individuals are encouraged to believe that 'you can be who you want to be'. Rather than being ascribed by birth, selves are now achieved through practice. Choice is simply a matter of 'character'. On

the one hand, this openness can provide individuals with increased 'freedom' since they may now exercise much more discretion over what they do, how they do it and 'who they want to be'. Yet on the other hand, this much greater openness of identity can be highly threatening. It can significantly increase individuals' sense of insecurity and vulnerability. In so far as individuals may develop a 'fear of freedom' (Fromm, 1977), they might try to shelter in the perceived security of being told what to do and what to think, viewing this as a less threatening alternative to the responsibility of making decisions and choices for themselves (Berger, 1963).

Meritocratic ideologies are typically espoused in societies that are also characterized by deep-seated class and status inequalities. How does this impact on the construction of more insecure, 'achieved selves'? Luckmann and Berger (1963: 343–4) argued that class inequalities contain 'a built-in frustration mechanism' of 'status anxiety' which can result in a continuing crisis of identity. They suggested that deeply stratified and class-ridden societies tend both to reflect and reinforce recurrent insecurities about self and status. In meritocracies, dignity and respect are no longer an automatic birthright. They are conditional and have to be earned and achieved. Accordingly, insecurities about self can become a permanent feature of everyday experience as identities are pursued through competition in all aspects of life.

The 'success ethic' reinforces the significance of paid employment as a potential source of valued identity. For men especially, paid work throughout the 20th century has been a crucial source of (masculine) identity, status and power (Hearn, 1992). Yet, this workplace competition to acquire material security and dignity can further intensify subjective insecurity. For example, when competition in paid employment becomes the primary means of valuing self, what are the implications for those who are 'less successful'? Miller's (1949) 'Death of A Salesman' poignantly describes the painful psychological collapse of Willy Loman, as his sales performance starts to decline in the later years of his career. It illustrates how the disciplinary ideology of 'achieved selves', which insists that salespeople 'are only as good as their last sale', can have a corrosive impact on employees' sense of identity and well-being.

Moreover, if respect and dignity in so-called meritocratic societies are to be conferred only on those who do middle-class 'mental' work, how do those who are trapped in low status manual jobs construct a positive meaning for their lives? Sennett and Cobb (1977) examined American manual workers' search for human dignity in a class society where respect is conditional upon 'success' and where individuals feel compelled to validate themselves as objects in comparison with others. They found that the combination of class society and meritocratic ideology creates a debilitating self-doubt for working-class people. Feeling compelled to create 'badges of ability', some respondents viewed their work life as an heroic sacrifice for their children. Rejecting any possibility of

upward progress, they treated manual work simply as a means of ensuring that their children would not be like them. Sennett and Cobb graphically describe how class societies that espouse meritocratic ideals can generate in subordinated workers a preoccupation with constructing a dignified self in conditions of its routine erosion.

There are important economic insecurities surrounding paid employment (Burchell et al., 1999). For many workers, a fundamental source of insecurity is the material and economic realities of selling one's labour power in return for a wage. In capitalist organizations hiring labour as a purchasable and disposable commodity is not only the means for creating value and expanding capital, but is also a central feature of workplace discipline. Job insecurity can create material and symbolic anxieties for workers. The fear of losing one's economic independence can be interwoven with more symbolic anxieties. To lose one's job or even to feel compelled to conform to others' demands because of the fear of job loss can erode one's sense of autonomy and self respect (Palm, 1977). Many studies of the workplace continue to demonstrate that subordinated employees often recognize that they are viewed by managers as anonymous and disposable functionaries (Collinson, 2002a). Furthermore, contemporary practices in 'post-bureaucratic' organizations that utilize new technologies to render work more flexible, contract-based, casualized and 'nomadic' can also intensify employee insecurities (Sennett, 2000). By reinforcing individualism, these workplace changes further corrode social relations while increasing material and symbolic insecurity (Kallinikos, 2003). Hence, these interwoven material and symbolic insecurities crucially impact on the selves and subjectivities that currently shape modern workplace practices.

Knights and Willmott (e.g. 1989, 1990) argue that in addition to the way that social and economic change can significantly exacerbate anxieties surrounding subjectivity, there is another element of insecurity that lies at the very heart of identity formation itself. They contend that insecurities can *also* be reinforced by individuals' attachment to particular notions of self. In so far as subjectivity is characterized by a dual experience of self, as both subject (active agent in the world) and object (individuals can reflect back on themselves and on the way others see them), they point to an irreducible ambiguity at the heart of identity construction. As self-conscious human beings we are *both* separate from, but also interdependent with others in the world. This separation and interdependence is a key source of ambiguity (Collinson, 1992). Knights and Willmott contend that individuals typically seek to deny or overcome this ambiguity through attempts to secure a stable identity, either as separate subjects (domination or indifference) *or* dependent objects (subordination).

They argue that this pursuit of material and/or symbolic security through the search for a stable identity is inherently contradictory and is likely to produce unintended and counterproductive consequences.

Their analyses emphasize not only the insecurities of modern identities, but also the various counterproductive outcomes of individuals' attempts to overcome, resolve or deny this insecurity. Since in their view identity can never be fully secured or rendered entirely stable, individuals may become entrapped in an illusory goal, a 'search for the holy grail' of (re-) securing self as *either* subject *or* object. They contend that in modern competitive and unequal societies subjectivities are often characterized by this narcissistic preoccupation with attempts to secure identity.

Knights and Willmott draw on Foucauldian ideas to locate subjectivity within organizational power relations. But they go further by focusing on the processes through which subjectivity comes to be fetishized in identity. They also draw on Giddens's (1991) view that self-identity is a reflexively organized endeavour designed to sustain coherent biographical narratives in the search for ontological security. But again they go further by arguing that insecurity is an existential condition that cannot be avoided and attempts to do so are likely to be self-defeating. Similarly, Knights and Willmott reinterpret Berger et al.'s (1973) assumption that human beings have a fundamental concern for order (see also Berger and Luckmann, 1967). They question the inevitability of this subjective preoccupation with order, highlighting its roots in the ego's illusory search to secure itself. Knights and Willmott suggest that individuals' attempts to provide a sense of order, meaning and identity for themselves by 'naturalizing' the world are likely to be counterproductive. The more we prioritize order, the more we are likely to be threatened by change. These arguments suggest that while subjectivity is crucially shaped by organization, individuals can also become the victims of their own identity-seeking preoccupations. The more individuals become preoccupied/obsessed with the (illusory) search for a stable and solid sense of identity, the more likely it is that subjectivity will indeed become a 'psychic prison' (Morgan, 1997).

Knights has extended this analysis by suggesting that the search for power and identity in the workplace frequently takes highly masculine forms (Kerfoot and Knights, 1996, 1998).[3] Indeed a number of studies highlight the way that men in organizations often seem preoccupied with maintaining a particularly masculine identity (Craib, 1998; Hodgson, 2003). Many men seem to place the highest value on their identity in the eyes of other men. Their search to construct and maintain masculine identity appears to be an ongoing project, frequently characterized by ambiguity, tension and contradiction (Morgan, 1992). Like all identities, masculine selves constantly have to be constructed, negotiated and achieved both in the workplace and elsewhere. Typically, this is through processes of identification and differentiation (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Yet, this preoccupation with securing clearly defined and coherent gender identities may further reinforce, rather than resolve, the very insecurity these strategies were intended to overcome (Collinson, 1992).

The attachment to identity can be especially problematic given that in practice, we *simultaneously* occupy many subjective positions, identities and allegiances (Nkomo and Cox, 1996). Rarely, if ever, do we experience a singular or unitary sense of self. There also appears to be an almost unlimited number of possible sources of identity. Human beings seem able to construct coexisting identities from many different aspects of our lives (e.g. one's body, ethnicity, religion, possessions, family status, gender, age, class, occupation, nationality, sexuality, language, political beliefs, clothing, etc.). While some of these coexisting identities are mutually reinforcing, others may be in tension, mutually contradictory and even incompatible. The multiple nature of selves can thus reinforce ambiguity and insecurity. For example, we can experience discomfort and awkwardness when previously discrete 'life worlds' (Berger et al., 1973) come together, say when friends meet parents, or when work meets home. Yet, many studies of subjectivity tend to examine identity as a singular phenomenon, concentrating narrowly on just one primary feature of self, such as class, nationality, gender or ethnicity. By privileging one aspect of identity, such approaches neglect other, potentially important features of self that may intersect in complex ways.

In deconstructing or de-centering the subject, post-structuralist feminist analysis has been particularly important in emphasizing the significance of the multiplicity of subjectivity as well as its ambiguous, fragmented, discontinuous, non-rational character within asymmetrical power relations (Henriques et al., 1984). Recognizing men's and women's fragmented and contradictory lives in and around organizations, Kondo's (1990) work has been especially influential. She contends that actors should be seen as 'multiple selves whose lives are shot through with contradictions and creative tensions'. In her account of a family-owned Japanese firm she argues that identities are open, negotiable, shifting and ambiguous. Kondo suggests that selves are never fixed, coherent, seamless, bounded or whole; they are 'crafted selves' not least through contradiction and irony. She explores the construction of multiple, gendered selves in workplace relations characterized by ambiguity, paradox and power relations. Kondo insists that the analysis of gender has to be interwoven with other social categories such as class, ethnicity, nationality and age.

This appreciation of the significance of multiple identities can also be seen in the recent interest in multiple masculinities in the workplace (Martin, 2001).[4] Such accounts contend that masculinities are by no means homogenous, unified or fixed categories but diverse, differentiated and shifting across time, space and culture (Connell, 1995). Specific and different masculinities may be constructed and persist in relation both to femininity/ies and to other forms of masculinity shaped by, for example, class, ethnicity and age (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Masculine subjectivities may also be shifting, internally contradictory and in tension. Barrett (2001) found that US male navy officers were particularly

concerned to define themselves in terms of masculine identity. Aviators emphasized their autonomy and risk-taking, surface warfare officers prioritized their perseverance and endurance, while supply officers prided themselves on their technical rationality.

Barrett's study graphically demonstrates how the Navy reproduces a dominant masculinity taking multiple forms that values physical toughness, endurance, aggressiveness, a rugged heterosexuality, unemotional logic and a stoic refusal to complain. By contrast, women and gay men serve as the differentiated others, against which heterosexual men construct, project and display a gendered identity. He argues that masculine identities in the US Navy are constructed by differentiating and elevating self through outperforming, discounting and negating others. Yet, underpinning these concerns, he suggests, is an 'enduring sense of subjective insecurity' (2001: 97) that is not resolved, but reinforced by these processes. He concludes that masculine identity strategies often reproduce insecurity and competition which in turn reinforces the perceived need for identity-protection strategies.

So far, the discussion suggests that a considerable number of intersecting material and symbolic insecurities can shape the construction and reproduction of selves and subjects. Social change, workplace power relations and their shifting nature and the ambiguities and multiplicities of subjectivity itself can all exacerbate insecurity and anxiety. Given the socially constructed, multiple and shifting character of identities and power asymmetries, attempts to construct and sustain particular identities may actually reinforce the very insecurity they are intended to overcome. In what follows, I now consider how various selves can be expressed within and through the asymmetrical power relations of organization. By exploring the workplace construction of selves, I argue that a greater appreciation of subjectivity and its insecurities can enhance our understanding of the ways that organizational power relations are reproduced, rationalized, resisted and, just occasionally, even transformed.

Subjectivity in Practice

As the foregoing discussion intimated, workplace power asymmetries can reinforce material and symbolic insecurities, especially for those in subordinated positions. Within critical organizational analysis, power has typically been examined in terms of management control (Braverman, 1974). Post-structuralist writers have focused on the ways that specific power/knowledge regimes are inscribed on individual subjectivities. Foucault argued that social control is now produced by exposure to 'the gaze'. Through measurement and assessment, surveillance systems render individuals 'calculable' and even 'confessional' selves who collude in their own subordination. Within contemporary UK organizations employee performance is increasingly monitored through, for

example, productivity targets, appraisal systems, performance-related-pay, league tables, customer feedback, outsourcing and casualization. What is the impact of this intensified visibility?

On the basis of my own research in organizations over the past 20 years, I now consider in turn a number of subjectivities that routinely seem to emerge, especially in surveillance-based organizations. These selves can also be viewed as 'survival practices' adopted by individuals, especially in surveillance-based organizations. While the notion of 'survival' might seem a little melodramatic (Noon and Blyton, 1997), it is intended to address the complex ways that individuals may try to protect and secure themselves in a physical, economic and/or symbolic sense within disciplinary regimes. Often these concerns will overlap. For example, in manual employment, problems of dangerous work, low pay and degraded identities may not only be inextricably interwoven, but also mutually implicated in shaping particular employee responses. Noon and Blyton (1997) demonstrate how, even in tightly monitored organizations, employees can find creative responses such as making out, fiddling, joking, sabotage and escaping. The following discussion seeks to link more explicitly their focus on survival strategies with the construction of selves in the workplace. In particular, it considers 'conformist', 'dramaturgical' and 'resistant' selves.

Conformist Selves

Foucault pointed to the way that workplace surveillance systems produce disciplined and 'conformist selves'. His ideas have inspired many workplace studies (McKinlay and Starkey, 1998) that highlight the self-disciplining impact of workplace surveillance systems which tie individuals to their identities. Studies have explored, for example, corporate culture initiatives (Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993; Casey, 1995), performance assessment systems (Rippin, 1993; Townley, 1992, 1993, 1994), teamworking (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Barker, 1993) and new technologies/information gathering systems (Zuboff, 1988). As Alvesson and Willmott (2002) recently argued, 'identity regulation' is a central feature of organizational control in contemporary 'post-bureaucratic' organizations. Illustrating how power and discipline actively construct conformist selves, these studies show how forms of power exert control over people, not least by shaping their identities and relationships.[5] In conformity, individuals tend to be preoccupied with themselves as valued objects in the eyes of those in authority, subordinating their own subjectivity in the process.

The pursuit of a 'successful' career is one example of a conformist self within surveillance-based organizations. Grey (1994) explores the disciplinary impact of career as a meaningful project of the self. Emphasizing the totalizing influence of identity preoccupations as they are expressed in careerism, he reveals how identity construction and protection are often significant concerns for managers as well as for more

subordinated employees (see also Watson, 1994). The corrosive impact of careerism can be seen in the way that aspiring individuals come to treat all organizational, social and even personal relations as instrumental to career progress. Equally, this manipulative approach frequently involves attempts to construct workplace reputation through the extensive use of impression management skills, described by Goffman (1959) and prescribed by others (Giacalone and Rosenfeld, 1991; Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Careerism intensifies the highly competitive nature of workplace cultures. For those who are promoted, such identities are reinforced by the remuneration, status and perks of more senior positions. A 'successful' career may also be an important medium through which men seek to establish masculine identities in the workplace. Upward mobility can be a key objective in the search to secure and embellish the male ego.

Yet, particularly in conditions of 'delayering', career bottlenecks and the demise of lifetime employment, there are considerable contradictions associated with such aspirations. Committed to upward progress, men often feel compelled to work longer hours, meet tight deadlines, travel extensively and be geographically mobile at the behest of the company (Collinson and Collinson, 1997). Such corporate requirements may be incompatible with domestic responsibilities and can even contribute to the breakdown of marriages. Equally, as men grow older they are likely to be less able to compete effectively with their younger, 'hungrier' and more aggressive male colleagues. Hence, in the short and/or long term, career competitiveness is unlikely to achieve the kind of security for which men often strive.

For many employees in subordinated work who see little opportunity for personal development, an alternative conformist survival practice is to 'distance' themselves from the organization and escape into a private world outside work (Cohen and Taylor, 1992). Employees may seek to distance themselves either physically, through, for example, absenteeism and resignation, or psychologically, by 'splitting self'. Ascribing primary significance to life outside work, employees can begin to divide their identity between the 'instrumental and indifferent me at work' and the 'real me' outside. They try to build a psychological wall between 'public' and 'private' selves, privileging the latter and (trying to) de-emphasize the former. Yet, the precarious nature of this splitting process can be literally 'brought home' when markets deteriorate and companies announce lay-offs. Such processes underline the inextricable links between 'public' and 'private' selves, between paid work and family (Burrell, 1988).

Hence, this pursuit of material and symbolic security through conformity may itself have counterproductive outcomes. The production of conformist selves is certainly an important outcome of surveillance-based organizations. Yet is conformity inevitable? Do surveillance systems invariably construct conformist, even 'capitulated selves' (e.g. Casey, 1995) in the ways often assumed?

Dramaturgical Selves

Surveillance systems tend to make individuals increasingly aware of themselves as visible objects, under the gaze of those in authority. While this experience *might* produce 'conformist selves', this is by no means inevitable. It is possible that individuals might find alternative ways of expressing themselves as subjects in the workplace. As a result of their heightened self-consciousness, individuals in surveillance-based organizations might become increasingly skilled manipulators of self, reputation and image in the eyes of 'significant others'. This dramaturgical notion of self draws on Goffman's ideas of impression management. Goffman focused on individuals' tendency to present self in a favourable light, using information politically to conceal, mystify, overstate and/or understate.

In the workplace, dramaturgical selves are more likely to emerge where employees feel highly visible, threatened, defensive, subordinated and/or insecure. Various studies document the emergence of dramaturgical selves as an employee survival strategy within intensified monitoring (e.g. Bowles and Coates, 1993; Miller and Morgan, 1993; Collinson, 1993). Equally, there are frequent stories in the UK media concerning the manipulation of performance data in public sector organizations, especially those that are subject to league table assessment (such as hospitals and schools). Dramaturgical selves may also emerge in private sector organizations.

My own research on North Sea oil rigs found that offshore workers frequently restricted the reporting of accident-related information (Collinson, 1999). In the context of a performance assessment system that prioritized safety above all other considerations, and as a means of coping with the contradictory performance indicators introduced by senior management, oil rig workers felt compelled to conceal information about safety and/or downplay the definition of accidents and near misses. They resisted the prescriptions of the safety culture and its monitoring system by withholding information about accidents, injuries and near misses as a defensive survival strategy in the face of the platform blame culture. Precisely because such practices constituted a sacking offence, workers also disguised their oppositional concealment strategies. In this sense performance assessment systems can be seen to create employee 'performances'. Workers' dramaturgical selves and practices were also contradictory in the sense that safe practices are paramount for offshore security. By withholding accident-related information, workers' practices could jeopardize platform safety. Paradoxically, in their concern to survive within asymmetrical power relations, blame cultures and institutionalized inequalities, workers' defensive practices could thereby threaten their own physical survival.

Hence, in so far as monitoring tends to intensify individuals' self-consciousness, employees can develop alternative dramaturgical selves

and survival strategies. Employees can become skilled at choreographing their own practices and managing their reactions to the ways they are monitored. They can learn over time to be more self-consciously skilled and strategic in response to 'the gaze'. Similarly, while new technologies may be used to intensify surveillance (Lyon, 2001), they can also enable dramaturgical selves. By reconfiguring time and space, technologies like email and mobile phones can facilitate dramaturgical claims by employees about where they are, what they have been doing and indeed, even who they are. Hence, when located in their wider conditions and consequences, dramaturgical selves can be seen as informing important survival strategies for those under 'the gaze'. Tending to be neither a passive accommodation nor a total resistance to surveillance, dramaturgical selves are more likely to be characterized by an ambiguous and shifting amalgam compliance and opposition.

Resistant Selves

Resistant selves constitute a primary means by which employees express their discontent about workplace processes. They may help subordinates in 'surviving' organizational regimes of tight control, surveillance and commodification. By engaging in resistance, employees often begin to construct an alternative, more positive sense of self to that provided, prescribed or circumscribed by the organization (Goffman, 1968). Recent studies demonstrate the diverse, shifting and multiple character of oppositional subjectivities and practices (Jermier et al., 1994). They suggest that many resistance practices are frequently covert and subterranean (Gabriel, 1999; Knights and McCabe, 2000). These may include indifference and 'foot dragging' (Scott, 1985, 1990), 'whistleblowing' (Rothschild and Miethe, 1994) and even irony and satire (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). While such processes have received far less attention than more visible resistance like strikes, their disruptive effects should not be underestimated. Recent studies also suggest that worker discontent may be expressed in terms of 'cynical selves' in the context of 'corporate culturism' within call centre work (Fleming, 2002; Fleming and Spicer, 2003) and may also be targeted at customers (e.g. Leidner, 1993). Van Mannen (1991) shows how, in conditions of tight surveillance, Disney employees still found ways of resisting 'difficult' or abusive 'guests'. Pointing to the importance of subjectivity, he argues that workers' actions were motivated by the need to restore self-respect.

By introducing gender into the analysis of employee resistance and by focusing on the possible contradictory consequences of opposition, studies of 'resistant selves' have also helped to demystify and deromanticize workplace dissent. For example, Willis (1977) shows how highly masculine, working-class oppositional forms can unwittingly reproduce the very forms of domination they intend to resist. Central to the lads' counterculture was a highly explicit preoccupation with validating working-class masculine identity. Similarly, my own study of

'Slavs' focused on the contradictory dynamics of shopfloor culture and subjectivity (Collinson, 1992). It describes how, within an organization where they are treated as 'second-class citizens', working-class men may (re)produce a shopfloor culture that celebrates manual work and redefines their sense of self, dignity and respect. Negating management, office workers and women, shopfloor workers elevated themselves through specifically masculine values of being a family breadwinner, 'honest', 'practical', 'productive' and 'having commonsense'. For many men, highly aggressive, sexist and derogatory humour also played an important part in constructing identity and meaning. While workers symbolically inverted the values and meanings of class society, they did so in ways that ultimately and paradoxically celebrated the status quo. The transformative potential of this oppositional shopfloor culture was thereby dissipated by the preoccupation with the construction of masculine identity in conditions of its continual erosion.

Such studies have also highlighted the blurred and ambiguous boundaries between opposition and control. For example, feminist analyses of the exclusionary and segregating practices of organized male-dominated labour (e.g. Cockburn, 1983; Walby, 1986) reveal how male worker resistance against the employer (e.g. over the 'breadwinner wage') can simultaneously constitute a form of control and domination (e.g. through the exclusion of female labour). Similarly, members of shopfloor countercultures who are highly suspicious and critical of managerial motives and practices can simultaneously express a deep-seated commitment to 'management's right to manage' (Collinson, 1992). By distancing themselves from organizational decision-making, they thereby tend to reinforce managerial prerogative and increase their own vulnerability to managerial discretion.

Elaborating her conception of the multiple and ambiguous nature of selves, Kondo (1990) questions much of the literature on resistance. She describes how the countercultures of Japanese shopfloor workers that frequently highlight managerial inconsistencies, can themselves be caught in contradictions, simultaneously legitimizing as they challenge dominant organizational and gendered discourses. While workers criticize management and question the dominant notion of 'the company as family', they simultaneously take pride in belonging to the organization. Similarly, women part-time workers asserted their gendered identities (often as surrogate mothers to the younger male artisans) in ways that creatively challenged the masculine celebration of prowess on the job. Yet, by relying on conventional discourses about women, these identities had the effect of reinforcing their marginality as workers. By casting themselves as mothers, women claimed power over the younger men but simultaneously reproduced their exclusion. Paradoxically, they asserted and marginalized themselves simultaneously.

Rather than deny or reinterpret these highly ambivalent worker subjectivities, Kondo seeks to draw on them explicitly and theoretically.

Criticizing both romanticized and overly determined conceptions of workplace behaviour, she argues that much of the literature tends to see resistance as too neat, closed, monolithic and internally coherent. Kondo develops a more complex view of power and subjectivity which recognizes how people consent, cope and resist at different levels of consciousness at a single point in time. She rejects the notion of a 'pristine space of authentic resistance' and of a fixed, static and singular identity such as a 'true resister' or 'class warrior'. Kondo concludes that 'words like "resistance" and "accommodation" truly seem inadequate, for apparent resistance is constantly mitigated by collusion and compromise at different levels of consciousness, just as accommodation may have unexpectedly subversive effects' (1990: 299).

In sum, recent studies of resistant selves in the workplace highlight their multiplicity, inherent ambiguity and potentially contradictory outcomes. They suggest that countercultures may enable employees simply to accommodate and adjust to their subordinated position (Watson, 1995), reproduce new forms of coercion and domination (Walby, 1986) and might also constitute a visible target for the intensification of discipline and control (Burrell, 1988). Equally, rather than achieve the security and stability they often seek, resistant selves may actually reinforce and intensify employee insecurity (Collinson, 1992). Accordingly, it would be ill advised to assume that resistance in and of itself will lead to 'progress', 'emancipation' and/or positive organizational change (WOBS, 2000). Having said that, resistance can also represent a challenge to dominant interests and values and may even become a catalyst for social and organizational change. Especially where resistance is not primarily concerned with identity-securing strategies and is informed by concern to render managerial practices more visible and accountable, it can produce significant organizational change (e.g. Ezzamel, 1994; Collinson, 2000).

Conclusion

This article has explored the growing interest in selves and subjects at work. Highlighting the insecurities, ambiguities and multiplicities of workplace selves, the foregoing discussion has sought to illustrate how organizations not only produce products and services, but, in important symbolic and material ways, also produce people. Corporations provide economic remuneration and they also confer identities and meanings. Equally, they can generate considerable employee insecurity and anxiety, particularly through disciplinary regimes that erode trust relations.

Workplace monitoring and motivation systems are frequently informed by a concern not merely with work intensification but also with the intensification of workers' material and symbolic insecurity. This seems to be a predominant mode of 'motivating' employees in contemporary organizations. Especially in surveillance-based organizations, employees

may seek to survive 'the gaze' through the construction of a variety of conformist, dramaturgical and/or resistant selves. In so far as these selves are designed to secure material and/or symbolic security, they may in turn also produce unintended and paradoxical effects.

The growth of post-structuralist interest in subjectivity has in some respects paralleled the development of the journal *Organization*. This interest in selves at work is likely to grow in the future. Within the workplace, employee subjectivity could become an increasingly 'contested terrain'. In recent times employers have extended their control strategies ever deeper into employee subjectivities with their concern 'to win hearts and minds' and to shape employee attitudes, emotions, sexualities, values, thoughts, bodies, appearance, demeanour, gestures and even humour and laughter (Burrell, 1992; Fleming, 2002; Collinson, 2002b). This corporate pressure on employees simultaneously to suppress and to deploy particular emotions in performing their organizational tasks is likely to intensify (Hochschild, 1983; Fineman, 1993).

Equally, future managerial control strategies targeting subjectivity may be facilitated by new technologies (Lyon, 2001). For example, we can already see how 'virtual selves' are being artificially constructed to suit corporate purposes. In India, call centre workers employed by transnational corporations are employed to answer telephone enquiries from callers living in the US and Europe. Yet, management has stipulated that callers must not discover that their query is being answered by an Indian worker based in Asia. Consequently, these workers are required to convey the impression that they are English or American and that they are working in these countries. They are trained in the appropriate accents, have to read 'local' papers (so they can chat about the news and the weather) and also have their Indian names changed to English equivalents. In short, they are required to deny their sense of self and take on a whole new identity defined by the corporation.

This growing interest in selves, subjects and subjectivities presents a challenge for organization theorists to reconcile two somewhat opposing conceptions of human agency and organization. Are people best understood as the subjects or objects of the organizational worlds they inhabit? On the one hand, we live in complex, globalized organizations and societies that are not of our making or choosing. In many cases, the asymmetrical power relations of contemporary organizations, leave employees feeling powerless and subordinated to such an extent that they seem to become 'capitulated selves'. Yet, on the other hand, it is also important to remember that organizations and societies are socially constructed and that individuals are not passive entities who are totally determined by external forces. Individuals are knowledgable and creative agents who, in forging relationships and constructing various selves, significantly shape the societies and organizations they inhabit. In so far as people are best viewed as simultaneously both subjects and objects of their societies, organizations and relations, the challenge for critical

organizational analysts is to develop new ways of examining and representing these complex and sometimes contradictory simultaneities as they are reproduced within the multiple asymmetries and insecurities of the contemporary workplace.

Notes

1 Having said that, symbolic interactionism can be criticized for constructing an oversocialized conception of human beings.

2 While this broad-ranging focus on the shift from ascription to achievement is instructive for understanding contemporary subjectivities, it should not be oversimplified. Inevitably, this is to some extent an ideal-typical distinction. In many societies, including the so-called 'meritocracies' of North America, Western Europe and Australasia, ascription continues to have a significant impact in shaping identities, and the 'accident of birth' maintains an important influence on life opportunities. This can be seen for example in the reproduction of family dynasties in professional politics (e.g. Bush, Kennedy), in the familial leadership succession and inheritance of many businesses (especially in small businesses that comprise by far the largest section of the UK economy) and also in the ways that professional families often reproduce themselves through the next generation of same-occupation, middle-class professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers and professional sports players). Equally, while these societies are nominally secular, they also retain significant vestiges of religious influence that can crucially inform ascribed identities. Conversely, it would be misleading to exaggerate the stability and security of selves in medieval societies. Threats of disease/illness, war/invasion and childbirth are just three illustrations of the extensive insecurities that typically characterized medieval society.

3 Indeed, a recognition of the gendered and non-rational nature of subjectivities has important implications for the analysis of power and subjectivity in the workplace (Feree et al., 1999). Gendered notions of identity have been shown to be a vital aspect of gendered power, culture and meaning (Pierce, 1995). Feminist studies have problematized men's attachment to family breadwinner identities (Walby, 1986) and demonstrated how concerns to protect gendered identities often inform the dominance of men's workplace sexuality and practices of sexual harassment (Hearn et al., 1989).

4 To date there has been less focus on feminine subjectivities in organizations.

5 Domination is not just an imperative of capitalist, patriarchal or imperialist society. As Roberts (2001) has recently argued, it can also be informed by the narcissistic concern to confirm self through the exercise of power. As feminists have also argued, men's exercise of gendered control (over women and other men) is one means by which men try to validate masculine identity.

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