Debates on work and the labour process have become increasingly concerned with the issue of identity. Recent years have seen a range of ethnographic studies that have done much to contribute to our understanding of the nature of work. For instance, David Knights and Hugh Willmott (cf, 1989) have illustrated the importance of subjectivity in the employment relationship, while Tony Watson (1994; 1995) has demonstrated the angst and anxiety that is the very stuff of a good deal of managerial work. Investigations into call centre work have illustrated both the limits and possibilities of advanced technology in enabling organizations to lay siege to an individual’s identity. Evidence relating to managerial attempts to exercise control over workers through the means of their own self-control is at best mixed. Increasingly research into identity has taken a more concerted linguistic turn (Brown, 1997; Brown, 2001). The work of Alvesson (1994; 2002) in his study of Advertising Executives has illustrated the way in which identity at work is discursively constructed through both image and rhetoric intensity. Similarly, Anderson-Gough et al (1998; 2000) highlight the role of language used in the process of socialising trainee accountants as they navigate their way through a lengthy rite of passage. Their
research highlights the way in which rhetorical tropes such as ‘work hard, play hard’ or ‘going the extra mile to help a client’ have an effective role in the socialisation and disciplining of professional labour. Fournier (1998) highlights the way in which some graduate trainees used a militant register in order to resist a managerialist construction of their identity.

The work of Cynthia Hardy and her collaborators does much to illustrate the way in which language is used to accomplish organizational goals. Her work on refugees demonstrates the way in which categories are discursively brought to life and that far from being ethereal language games can have important power effects. This is a point made repeatedly in follow up studies into a Franco-Palestinian Charity (Hardy et al, 2000), Canadian HIV sufferers (Maguire et al, 2001), refugees (Hardy and Phillips, 1999, Phillips and Hardy, 1997) and the use and banning of DDT (Maguire, 2002). The hallmark of this research is to demonstrate the both the power and performativity of language. In line with this work we treat power and knowledge as being interwoven. Equally, we regard occupations as being agents in the functioning and operation of power relations.

We seek to add to the literature on identity in two ways: Firstly, by undertaking empirical research into four under-researched occupations: (i) Prison warders, (ii) Psychiatric Social Workers, (iii) Counsellors, and (iv) Psychiatrists. Each of these occupational groups is of particular interest in that their practitioners actively intervene in the lives of other human beings. That is, they operate within a circuit of power relations, where the practitioners enact discursively a highly structured regime of knowledge on another: where the effects may range from incarceration to being
numbed and sedated through the administration of hard drugs. Our second area of concern is to ask ‘what happens to the identities of practitioners whose routine work consists of categorising, defining, governing and reforming others’? What we are particularly interested in is the extent to which members of these occupational groups turn their own knowledge and practices back on themselves. To what extent are they reflexive and what impact does this have on their own identity? In addressing these issues we seek to contribute to extant understandings of identity in the workplace. In particular, we will build on recent research by Ken Starkey and Armand Hatchuel (2002), whereby they characterise Foucault’s later work on identity as amounting to a concern that shifts from "Know thyself" to "Take care of yourself".

**References:**


Anderson-Gough, F. , C.Grey and K.Robson (2000). In the name of the client: The service ethic in two professional services firms, Human Relations, 53(9): 1151-1174


