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# The contemporary work ethic: An exploration of culture and structure in post-industrial society

Marcia J. Ghipina

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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Ghipina, Marcia J., Ph.D.

University of New Hampshire, 1994

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THE CONTEMPORARY WORK ETHIC: AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE AND  
STRUCTURE IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

BY

Marcia J. Ghidina  
Bachelor of Arts, Drake University, 1982  
Master of Arts, University of New Hampshire, 1990

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

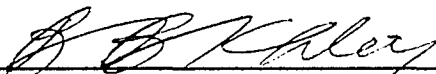
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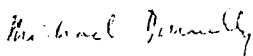
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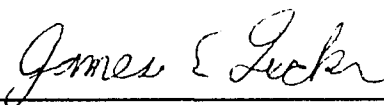
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Dissertation Director, Bud B. Khleif  
Professor of Sociology



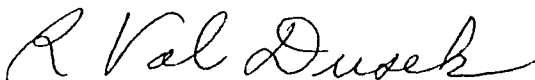
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Michael J. Donnelly  
Associate Professor of Sociology



---

James E. Tucker  
Assistant Professor of Sociology



---

R. Val Dusek  
Associate Professor of Philosophy



---

Allen R. Thompson  
Associate Professor of Economics

April 14, 1994  
Date

To Jan  
and the rest of my family



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## ABSTRACT

### THE CONTEMPORARY WORK ETHIC: AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE AND STRUCTURE IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

by

Marcia J. Ghidina  
University of New Hampshire, May, 1994

In this dissertation the relationship between structure and culture is explored in the context of the American work ethic. This analysis has two components. The first involves a socio-historical examination of the evolution of conceptions of work. Work is first viewed as lacking any positive qualities but with the emergence of the Protestant ethic and its later secularized versions, work took on positive meaning. These conceptions are analyzed in relation to their structural context, particularly early capitalist industrial society.

To further explore the relationship between culture and structure, a second component is included in this research. In order to characterize and analyze the contemporary work ethic, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with and 177 open-ended questionnaires were distributed to individuals in a variety of occupations. The findings of this research indicate that the current contemporary work ethic can be characterized as containing work values emphasizing self-fulfillment, relations with others, and purpose.

Relying upon structuralist constructivism theory, wherein culture is seen as being created within the boundaries delineated by structure, occupational variations in work values are shown to exist. Upper-status professionals are more likely to cite contributing to society and working for mental stimulation and self actualization as important values of work. Middle-status semi-professionals are more likely to report helping others and working to learn and grow as central values. Those working in lower-status occupations more often cite working as a team, pleasing the boss, working to fill time and fight boredom, and maintaining self-sufficiency as work values.

The contemporary work ethic is analyzed according to mass culture and economic structure as well as the interaction of these two forces. Further, by treating the work ethic as an ideology, both traditional and contemporary work ethics are linked to the structural context in which they emerged. The traditional work ethic can no longer provide meaning of or justification for economic structure and has thus undergone transformation to a more self-fulfillment oriented ethic. Similarly, in transformation to a post-industrial society, the nature of the contemporary work ethic may change.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: WORK AND THE WORK ETHIC

The Protestant Work Ethic tells us, among other things, that individuals should work hard, avoid idleness, and be frugal. Some recent analyses and commentary, however, have lamented the loss of this work ethic, labeling the rising dissatisfaction of workers and the precipitous decline in U.S. economic might as a "moral crisis" (Wunthrow, 1982:77; Eisenberger, 1989). One author attributes this decline, in part, to the laziness of Americans, increased concern for sensual satisfactions, and the growth of the leisure ethic promoted by advertisers and the entertainment industry (Eisenberger, 1989:30,32). This "crisis" has reached such proportions that "industrious employees are frequently resented and mistreated by fellow employees" (Eisenberger, 1989:51).

This perspective may not be without merit. After all, the dominance of American industry as a whole has weakened since the 1970s. Profit margins have shrunk, unemployment has risen, the trade deficit has expanded, while layoffs and shutdowns have replaced hiring booms and plant openings. Yet, in order to accept that a decline in the work ethic is to some degree responsible for this economic decline or to suggest explicitly or implicitly that a rebirth of a traditional work ethic would help lead the United States and

other industrialized nations out of economic crises, one must accept that some contemporary force has taken shape to erode the will of individuals to work diligently and selflessly. It is not that the work ethic leads to economic prosperity as much as economic prosperity seems to reinforce the work ethic. In other words, the work ethic may be a dependent, or even intermediate, variable.<sup>1</sup>

This research explores the nature of the contemporary work ethic and examines the possible cultural and structural forces that may be transforming the way Americans think and feel about work. It involves a socio-historical analysis of the evolution of work values as well as an empirical exploration of contemporary beliefs. This exploration will not only illuminate prevalent patterns of beliefs about work and, in turn, offer greater understanding of the modern work ethic, it will also provide insight into the potential effects of changes in American mass culture and of widespread economic transformation. The research will also provide an inquiry into the dialectical relationship between structure and culture, or more specifically between the conditions of modern work and the values and beliefs regarding that work. (Structure refers to the conditions of work created by an economic system.)

---

<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, the work ethic is abstractly conceived, as more than work-based values and beliefs. That is, moral pronouncements about work pervade many aspects of non-work life as well.

Critics who assume that the work ethic has declined and is contributing to current U.S. economic difficulties assume that cultural beliefs have direct structural consequences. Certainly American culture has changed from the golden, and often mythologized, past of Puritan days. An increased standard of living (for some), higher levels of education, an emphasis on consumerism, and a pre-occupation with the self have, in all probability, had influence upon beliefs and values about work. Yet, it would be erroneous to assume that these are the only causes of possible changes in the work ethic.<sup>2</sup> In fact, changes in beliefs about work may result from social structural change, as well as from a variety of other social phenomena.

From the days of Luther and Calvin, as well as Puritan settlers who Americanized the work ethic, the nature of work has changed considerably. The historian Rodgers (1978:xii) has asked of the work ethic during industrialization, "What happened to work values when work itself was radically remade?" Certainly this same question, amplified by the equally radical changes brought about by advanced technology

---

<sup>2</sup>It is widely assumed that a traditional work ethic existed and was pervasive in the past. This assertion is difficult to empirically support. It has been suggested that the work ethic was strongest among the middle, property-owning classes, professional men, independent industrialists and craftsmen, and that the ascetic injunctions of Puritanism never reached far into the working class who enjoyed boisterous play more than hard work, not to mention the conspicuous leisure of the aristocracy (Rodgers, 1978:14-15).

in post-industrial society, can be asked of current work values. Another perspective, then, from which to examine the contemporary work ethic is from the view of the changing nature of work in post-industrial society: more specifically, the effects of the shift from manufacturing to services, advances in micro-electronics, the globalization of the economy, and capital flight (Eitzen and Zinn, 1989:2). Particularly since traditional institutions such as religion and the family no longer have the same power to prescribe particular perspectives of life experience, such as work, it makes sense that the work experience itself would have a greater role in defining or influencing work values.

This interpretation of the work ethic somewhat turns Weber on his head (or more accurately the common interpretations of Weber's work ethic writings concerning the Protestant work ethic and the development of capitalism) for it suggests that instead of culture "determining" structure (the Protestant work ethic contributing to the development of capitalism), structure "determines" culture (the nature of work in post-industrial society contributes to contemporary beliefs about the meaning of work). Yet, since Weber's work, especially when interpreted as directly suggesting that the Protestant ethic contributed to the rise of capitalism, has been hardily criticized (Green, 1973; Tawney, 1963; Sprinzak, 1972), an opposite assertion should

be equally disputed.

As erroneous as it would be, however, to assert that changes in values bring about economic decline, structural changes in the nature of work do not directly or instantaneously bring about changes in work values. It is important to avoid asserting that cultural beliefs (the Protestant Work Ethic) caused certain structural conditions or systems (capitalism) or that current structural conditions necessarily cause cultural beliefs. The relationship between work and work values is not, most realistically, linear nor monocausal. Culture and structure are dialectically related, Weber's "elective affinity" between ideas and interests -- people adopt ideas that reflect their material, and perhaps non-material, interests (Watson, 1980:51).

A theoretical perspective which adequately accommodates the dialectical nature of the relationship between work structure and work beliefs and values is Bourdieu's (1989) structuralist constructivism. While neither deterministic nor purely constructivist, Bourdieu suggests that people use their creative capacities for thought and action but do so within the parameters defined by existing structures. This view allows equally for the influence of external, objective structures (such as conditions of work) and the influence of individual perceptions, interpretations, and constructions of meaning and action (cultural values and beliefs about

work, negotiated in daily conversations or "processed" through the mass media).

We may view the contemporary work ethic, then, not only as arising from changes in mass culture, such as the trend towards individualism, or direct structural changes in the economy, but also according to the intersection of these forces. Therefore, it may be likely that there is no single work ethic in modern American society and, instead, that a variety of beliefs and values about work exist. As two writers explain:

Industrial society has too much differentiation with respect to class, income, occupation, education, status, ethnic and racial groups, and too great a diversity in its work organizations, to find a coherent set of work values valid for the entire society. (Applebaum, 1984:1)

The meanings of work are not likely to be neat and simple, or form some uncomplicated "ethic" but are rather likely to be jumbled and variegated, so that any individual has a whole range of types and levels of meanings on which to draw, and with which to understand or appreciate the labor they are doing at any particular moment. (Moorhouse, 1987:241)

Because values of work do have certain cultural and structural correlates, such as the mass culture of individualism and shared conditions of work, new patterns of beliefs and values are likely to emerge. As Applebaum (1984:4) writes regarding the influence of work structure: "There are features of each work environment which promote certain behaviors and attitudes and suppress others." The work ethic, then, may be an accommodation of the person to his or her work as has been argued, for example, regarding



the emergence of new personality structures (cf. also the consumer society, and prior to that, the rise of Economic Man) during the industrial revolution (Tawney, 1963).

### Research Questions and Method

In order to explore the broad issues of the influence of mass culture, of structural economic change, and of the possible link between beliefs about work and the conditions of work, the following research questions will be specifically addressed in this dissertation:

- 1) How might the contemporary work ethic be characterized? How is it similar to or different from the traditional work ethic?
- 2) Do beliefs and values about work vary according to occupational status, type of work (blue collar or white collar), or conditions of work?

It is hypothesized that the contemporary work ethic will reflect the cultural emphasis on the self either to the exclusion of more traditional work values stressing the importance of service to others or by incorporating these values in service of self-fulfillment. Further, it is hypothesized that variations in work values do exist according to occupational groupings such as status or type of work.

Answers to these specific research questions will provide a basis for a discussion of and suggestions about the following more general issues:

- 1) In what ways might mass culture, economic structure, and the interaction of both affect

the work ethic?

- 2) Based upon the description of work beliefs of those employed in positions that are expanding in a post-industrial economy, what are the implications for the future of the American work ethic?

Answers to these questions were sought through in-depth interviews with 40 individuals in a variety of occupations, ranging from doctors and lawyers to retail salespersons and groundskeepers. In addition, open-ended questionnaires were distributed to 177 individuals in order to extend the sample and add variability which could not be achieved with the interview sample alone. The sample will approximate representativeness on common demographic variables, such as gender, age, marital status, yet because of sample size, results will be analyzed according to more general occupational categories, primarily occupational status and type (blue-collar/white collar), as related to the specific research questions described above. (These categories are discussed in greater detail in Chapter V).

The qualitative method of in-depth interviewing limits the generalizability of findings, but such an inductive approach provides much greater depth of information and meaning. The significance and value of work to individuals is a social construct -- not one handed down from "above" nor one determined simply as response to social structure. "In attempting to understand the meanings of work one should not conceive of symbolic discourse in this sense as an epiphenomenon of underlying 'economic' processes" (Joyce,

1987:12). In order to understand the social construct of beliefs about work, then, an exploration of work values in the context of the symbolic discourse of social agents is needed.

At the same time, especially because links have been made between work belief and work behavior, between economic recession and a decline in the traditional work ethic, it is prudent to acknowledge that belief and action are not necessarily directly related. In fact, the discrepancy between attitudes and behavior has been well-documented (LaPeire, 1934; Saenger and Gilbert, 1950; Ehrlich, 1969; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). More specifically, work beliefs are not consistently realized in work behavior -- an industrious work ethic (an attitude) does not necessarily lead to industrious behavior (Goodwin, 1972:9; Dorst et al., 1978:646).

Not all behavior is governed by values. People may be coerced or induced by material rewards to behave in a certain way. A dominant value system normally exists, but actions are not necessarily always regulated by a central value system.  
(Rose, 1985:25)

It must be remembered, then, that an exploration of work values only loosely suggests implications for work behavior and that in understanding values and beliefs about work we have only one element of many with which to understand work behavior.

## Definition of Work and the Traditional Work Ethic

Prior to launching into research exploring the contemporary work ethic, definitions of work and work values or ethic must first be established. An ethic, generally speaking, involves a set of moral principles or value judgments (Furnham, 1990:214). As a point of reference and comparison, then, the traditional work ethic can be considered to be, in its most general sense, a moral belief in which work has value beyond that of earning a living (Barash, 1983:231), a value in self-definition of the person. The Protestant work ethic, of course, includes a moral and social obligation to God and to fellow men (Furnham, 1990:17). More specifically, the Protestant work ethic emphasizes thrift, industriousness, deferred gratification, work discipline, a competitive spirit, self-reliance, belief in the virtuousness of work, the centrality of work in life, and the following of one's given, putatively God-inspired, "calling" (Jazarek, 1978:666). In 19th century America, the Protestant work ethic was secularized and the emphasis of work as a duty to God was replaced with an emphasis on usefulness and duty to the public good (Rodgers, 1978:9-10). These working definitions of the work ethic, the Protestant ethic, and more generally the traditional work ethic will provide a basis of comparison and reference in the discussion of the contemporary work ethic. (The Protestant work ethic and its

many variations is discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV, as are other work ethics.)

When speaking of work values and a work ethic, it is also important to establish a working definition of work. To what specific activity do these beliefs, values, or moral pronouncements refer? Work is clearly a central and significant component of modern life, both on the individual level as well as the societal level.

Work is the focusing lens for so much of human experience. Work conjures up joy and despair, fulfillment and anesthesia, creativity and drudgery ....It raises the most immediate and pressing issues of unemployment and discrimination, and the most perennial and persisting questions of purpose and achievement. (Heilbroner, 1985:9)

Though a seemingly commonly understood and defined concept, what work is and what is not is frequently ambiguous.

In its simplest sense, work is often thought of as exertion or effort or "in its broadest meaning [work] is the opposite of rest" (Parker and Smith, 1976:41). Yet these definitions are clearly too broad as they would include, in some cases, rising out of bed in the morning as well as more leisured activities such as golf and bowling. The concept of work involves not only energy or the means of activity, but also implicitly the ends of the exertion or effort. In another sense, then, work is "any activity, or expenditure of energy, that produces services or products of value to other people" (Fox and Hesse-Biber, 1984:2). This definition adds the important distinction of production

and, in particular, production for consumption.

Conceptions and definitions of work may, then, vary according to the type of society, whether it be industrialized or non-industrialized.

To the individual in a modern industrial society, work is usually identified with the means of earning a living. In simpler societies, the relationship between work and such basic necessities as food, clothing, and shelter is a direct one for the individual or a comparatively small group; they consume only what they are able to produce. The evolution of society through various forms of social production and ownership of property progressively breaks down the direct link between individual productive effort and consumption of goods and services. (Parker and Smith, 1976:41)

The "evolved" or increasingly complex and fragmented forms of social production have not only severed the direct link between production and consumption in modern industrial society, as well as the link to something outside and beyond the individual -- the community, they have also separated the work sphere from other spheres of social life (cf. mechanical vs. organic solidarity). In simpler societies, the link between work or productive activity is not made distinct from familial, religious, or political activity: "The tasks associated with the physical sustenance of the group are not distinguished by organization of esteem from other tasks and activities also required to maintain collective life" (Heilbroner, 1985:10).

Based on this perspective, Heilbroner argues that there is no "work" in primitive societies. There are, of course, the arduous activities of gathering, hunting, and

cultivation which require exertion and intelligence, yet because these activities "carry no special identifying characteristic that sets them apart" from other spheres and activities of the community, it would be inappropriate to call these activities "work" (Heilbroner, 1985:11).

For example, the integration of "work" activities and meaning with other aspects and spheres of life in simpler societies is expressed in the language of the Yir-Yoront among whom the same word is used for work and play (Sahlins, 1972:64). Among the Iban, whose livelihood and survival depends upon the cultivation of rice, an elaborate system of belief involving family relations and religious meaning is associated with rice and its cultivation (Gudeman, 1986:143). For the Dobu of northern New Guinea who rely primarily on the yam for sustenance, making a garden is related to family lineages and kinship structures as well as their deepest spiritual and philosophical beliefs (Fortune, 1963:69). "On Dobu, production is neither a distinct category nor an instrumental or technically determined act whose referent is the material world. Instead it is an enactment which refers to other social acts" (Gudeman, 1986:141).

In addition to work being defined as activity undertaken in a separate and distinct sphere of society, Heilbroner (1985:12,13) further considers work to be an activity carried out under the condition of subordination or

exploitation. He states: "The essence of work is that these tasks are carried out in a condition of subordination imposed by the right of some members of society to refuse access to vital resources to others" (Heilbroner, 1985:12). This condition exists most clearly in societies where there is private property because property, whether through natural resources or production equipment, gives owners the right to withhold or control these resources.

The necessity to obtain the permission of the owners of resources to gain access to them has universally entailed one main condition: those needing access have agreed to surrender a portion of their work-product to those who controlled those resources. Thus the act of work, as the manner in which human energy is concerted under civilization, is inextricable from exploitation. (Heilbroner, 1985:13)

Work, then, becomes the means to these resources and is therefore defined as activity of submission and exploitation, as well as a personal link with a market system (cf. Collins, 1990).

This definition of work is narrower than even the most detailed and specific interpretation, yet it is a necessary definition especially in a study of work values and behaviors. Heilbroner again explains:

The whole issue of the moral and social ambiguity of work would be incomprehensible if work itself were not originally tainted by its inherent submission. It is against this long-forgotten social condition that the ethical struggles to justify work must be understood. (Heilbroner, 1985:15)

In other words, in order to explore and understand moral valuations of work, the definition of work must include the



element of submission and exploitation. Without this perspective of work activity, beliefs and values of work would be, particularly in the context of modern, capitalist society, inaccurately grounded.

Beyond defining work as a separate sphere of activity, in which submission and exploitation persists, the notion of the "work ethic" developed historically as an ideology and self-conception linking the person with the market system. The work ethic, then, comes as an intermediary link between the traditional *Gemeinschaft*, where the person is considered much more than his or her occupational role, and the *Gesellschaft*, where the person is seen mainly through his or her occupational role. In its modern form, then, work emerges as linkage with an industrial system, a market system. From this view, homemaking is not part of the market system or cash nexus and is therefore not connected with the work ethic.

Based upon these perspectives of work, in this research I equate paid employment in contemporary society with work and uses the stated beliefs and values of individuals in these occupations as a source of data. Yet, even in using Heilbroner's narrow definition of work, certain areas of work are excluded -- namely unpaid domestic work. While domestic labor, usually performed by women though increasingly with the "help" of men in traditional families, is activity that is exploited by the larger capitalist

system and therefore falls under the operational definition of work in this study, people performing unpaid domestic labor are not included. While seemingly unfeminist, this exclusion does not result from a disregard of what has been traditionally women's labor but instead because of the research focus on the influence of occupational conditions on work beliefs and values, thus unpaid domestic labor (based on status and a preindustrial sense of altruism and sacrifice) is not comparable.

In review, then, the purpose of this research is to explore the nature of the contemporary work ethic. Because of a decline of Gemeinschaft in the modern U.S., the rise of the emphasis on the individual, and the variety of occupational experience in post-industrial society due to an ever-increasing division of labor, it is likely that a multitude of beliefs about work exists. (Specifically, post-industrial society will bring about two occupational groupings: knowledge workers for whom work may contain increasing autonomy, creativity, and reward and service workers for whom work is likely to be decreasingly rewarding.) Patterns of work beliefs will be analyzed in relation to broad cultural and structural trends and changes in society. In addition to these comparisons, demographic variations (age, gender, professionalism) will be examined as they emerge. It is hoped that data from this research will provide a comprehensive description of the contemporary

work ethic, as well as a broad foundation upon which more specific and narrow studies of work beliefs may be grounded. The analysis will also contribute to the understanding of the causes and correlates of variations of work belief in post-industrial society. Finally, and more broadly, the present study of work values can be used as a key to unlock more general socio-cultural change in American society.

A thorough study of the contemporary work ethic requires a historical as well as theoretical foundation. In order to provide this foundation, the next chapter discusses historical and cross-cultural conceptions of work. A brief overview of the evolution (or revolution) of ideas concerning work situates the current research in a broader historical framework. Chapter III is a discussion of several plausible theoretical explanations for the contemporary work ethic and its possible variations. Although this research provides a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the contemporary American work ethic, previous research has illuminated various aspects of work beliefs. Chapter IV includes a review of this research. A discussion of the method of research as well as the sample is provided in Chapter V.

Based upon the foundation provided by the historical, theoretical, and methodological discussions, research findings are presented in Chapters VI, VII, and VIII. In Chapter VI, the emphasis placed on self-fulfillment and

self-actualization in expressions of work values and beliefs is presented. In Chapter VII I address variations of beliefs and values about the importance of work relative to others according to occupational status, occupational type, and general conditions of work, including gender, age, and marital status within these categories. In Chapter VIII I address occupational variations, again according to status, type, and conditions with gender and age included, in the purposes of work. In Chapter IX a composite of the contemporary work ethic, as a set of related beliefs and values, is constructed based upon the various views expressed and discussed in the previous chapters. This composite and occupational variations of belief are analyzed according to cultural, structural, and cultural-structural perspectives. Chapter X, the conclusion, addresses the implications of the findings with regard to the structure of work in the future. In Chapter XI, a summary of the dissertation is provided and suggestions for further research are made.

## CHAPTER II

### WORK AND THE WORK ETHIC: PAST, PRESENT, AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONCEPTIONS

Historically, the idea of work as a positive activity is a relatively new perspective. In this chapter, a brief history of the evolution of the concept of work and associated work values is discussed. Historical conceptions of work discussed in this chapter, in which work is primarily viewed as a negative, punishing activity, include Greek, Roman, Hebrew and early Christian, Catholic and Medieval. The shift to more positive conceptions of work can be seen following the Reformation in the emergence of the Protestant Ethic. The development of this conception is reviewed according to the proposed doctrines of Luther (work as a calling) and Calvin (work and calling as predestination). The Puritan adoption and later secularization of the Protestant ethic is then presented as an important potential link between American tradition and contemporary work values. The relevance of these historical conceptions to the present research on the contemporary work ethic is presented at the end of these sections.

In addition, the idea of work from the perspective of other cultures is explored in this chapter to create a backdrop for examination of the contemporary work ethic in

the United States. Non-western conceptions of work, Islamic and Japanese, are examined because they, by contrast, help make American conceptions more apparent. By grounding conceptions of work in historical and cultural contexts, a better analysis of cultural and structural correlates of contemporary work beliefs is possible.

### Historical Conceptions of Work

In reviewing historical conceptions of work, a theme which links Greek, Roman, Hebrew, and Catholic and Medieval perspectives is the negative view of work. Prior to the emergence of the Protestant ethic, the activity of work bore little positive value. Greeks generally viewed work as a curse, an activity which was not fit for honorable citizens. Romans, based on Stoic philosophy, thought of work as toil which resulted from man's loss of the original state of grace. Hebrew conceptions also linked work with a lost state of divinity and viewed work as punishment for original sin. Having not yet let go of the promise of a return to a sinless and hence workless state of being, mythology continued throughout this time to create an image of a heaven on earth, in contrast with the harsh realities under which most lived. Catholic and Medieval conceptions of work emerged, in part, to make deal with this contradiction and asserted that work was part of a divine system of stratification and that because of this, it was one's duty

to perform work, be it pleasant or not. These historical conceptions of work, as well as the relation between them are discussed in this section.

### Greek Conceptions of Work

The Greeks considered work to be a curse, degrading, and without any inherent value. While some occupations were honored and others were recognized to have social value, work (derived from the Greek word *ponos* meaning sorrow) was considered to enslave the worker, corrupt the soul, and rob one of the independence so highly valued in Greek civilization (Yankelovich, 1979:20). Plato, in *The Republic*, granted value in work, but only to the extent that it provided necessary services, protected the state and contributed to the governing of the state. Work for its own sake or even for the production of goods and services was not given great value and was to be left to foreigners (Anthony, 1984:16). Further, in *The Laws*, Plato decided that citizens of the state should be prevented from engaging in business, craft work, industry, or trade and that all forms of work should be done by foreigners and slaves (Anthony, 1984:16). He even designated specific work for particular classes of people: agriculture should be performed by slaves and trade and industry by freemen who were not citizens. Citizens, free of work, would be able to engage in all political functions. "What he [Plato] arrives

at is a state in which citizenship is frankly restricted to a class of privileged persons who can afford to turn over their private business -- the sordid job of earning a living -- to slaves and foreigners" (Sabine, 1951:81).

Similarly, Aristotle, in his preoccupation with liberal education for rulers and citizens, was even more clearly contemptuous of work. Work, according to Aristotle, was debasing and interrupted the proper pursuits of the good citizen, wasting his time and making the important pursuit of virtue<sup>3</sup> more difficult (Anthony, 1984:17). As he explained in *Politics*:

...In the best governed states...none of them [citizens] should be permitted to exercise any mechanic employment or follow merchandise as being capable and destructive to virtue; neither should they be husbandman, that they may be at leisure to improve in virtue and perform the duty they owe to the state. (Aristotle, 1912:1328)

Most Athenians probably were tradesmen, artisans, or farmers, yet Aristotle considered these occupations to be disruptive of the superior activity of politics (Anthony, 1984:17). Ultimately, it was desirable to have all work be done by slaves "in order that citizens might have the leisure to devote themselves to politics" (Sabine, 1951:18).

In his contempt for manual work and useful toil,

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<sup>3</sup> Virtue, in Greek *arete*, means goodness, excellence of any kind (Liddell, 1882:115). Similar to Plato's conception of the good and goodness, virtue is "a mean state as lying between two vices, a vice of excess on the one hand and a vice of deficiency on the other, as aiming at the mean in the emotions and actions" (Kiorman, 1962:506).



Aristotle was specifically scornful of the commercial aspects of work. He made a distinction between proper and improper usage, which subsequently shaped the Medieval attitude towards commerce as well as distinguished what Greeks considered to be proper and improper work. According to Aristotle, "It is not...proper for any man of honor...to learn these servile employments without they having the occasion to them for their own use" (Aristotle, 1912:1277). The nature of the work or task, then, was not the determining factor regarding proper and improper work activity and, thus, menial labor could be performed with honor if the labor was done for oneself, that is, if the results of their own servile employments would be used by those honorable men who performed them.

To work for another man in return for a wage of any kind is degrading...For the ancients, there is really no difference between the artisan who sells his own products and the workman who hires out his services. Both work to satisfy the needs of others, not their own. They depend on others for their livelihood. For that reason, they are no longer free. (Mosse, 1969:28)

Greeks did not disdain manual labor in and of itself, though it became degrading when performed for another and menial when it was monotonous and without joy (Zimmern, 1915:270).

Philosophically and religiously, then, work was thought to be corrupting of citizens (people of means) and distasteful for men of honor (those in charge of other people, people of substance). Work was to be left for slaves who were undeserving of leisure and for sinners who

required toil to redeem their evil ways. Such perspectives of work, and the economies with which they were associated required the corruption of a special class of producers: slaves and foreigners (Anthony, 1984:20). The classical economy, in fact, depended on a classical ideology of work which defined it as unfit for honorable men. Only when slavery declined did this conception of work change. Then, work began to be taken seriously:

...The glorification of labor...and laws against idleness...occurred either at a time when slavery was still in its first stages, or when it was declining, when the scarcity of labor of any kind and the rise in prices put a premium on free and individual labor, thereby creating suitable conditions for an anti-slavery ideology to develop and for a partial rehabilitation of the idea of work. (Mosse, 1969:29).

In Greek conceptions of work, then, cultural and structural correlates of work views can be seen.

### Roman Conceptions of Work

Non-economic (structural) factors may have also contributed to changing conceptions of work and in the Roman Empire, Stoic philosophers, first in Greece and later in the Roman world, were a central part of this process. Stoic characteristics included "the stern virtues of duty and self-sufficiency fostered by a discipline of the will which promotes contempt for the attractions of pleasure" (Anthony, 1984:23). Sounding more like the pronouncements of Calvin than Plato or Aristotle, Stoicism also included a religious

element that stressed the duty of every man to answer his "calling," to fill the role for which he was cast, regardless of its glory or misery (Sabine, 1951:135). The aphorism, "Virtue alone brings happiness" is apt for the Stoic's motto. But probably the greatest influence of Stoicism on the conception of work was the theme of egalitarianism. This theme not only cast a shadow on the existence of slavery, it also rekindled the egalitarian tradition, found in early classical myth, which envisioned a golden age of equality. According to myth, this balanced state of nature was corrupted and vanquished by original sin and private property (Anthony, 1984:26). "By the 3rd century, Christian doctrine had assimilated from the extraordinary influential philosophy of Stoicism the notion of an egalitarian State of Nature which was irrevocably lost" (Cohn, 1962:201).

Greek and Roman poets as well as Christian mythology imagined a picture of a workless past, where man had rightfully lived the leisured life of the gods.<sup>4</sup> However,

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<sup>4</sup>Throughout the evolution of work beliefs, from work as a curse to work as punishment to work as redemption, Christian mythology continued to create an image of a garden where all wants and needs were satisfied without effort or pain. According to Christian myth, paradise existed and, because it was lost due to man's sins, could again be found upon redemption (Rodgers, 1978:2). In European folk legend, a paradise of leisure awaited discovery by an adventurous explorer. Work was still viewed as a painful necessity, yet one which could be avoided upon the landing in a paradise of abundance. These myths and continued longing for leisure sought a land to fulfill them and when America was first discovered, it was seen as this place of plenty, "a land of

because of confusion about righteousness or as punishment for sin, man had lost this first innocent and dignified state: "The age of gold had given way to a poverty-saddled age of want, pain, and endless work" (Rodgers, 1978:2). As Virgil wrote, "Toil conquered the world, unrelenting toil, and want that pinches when life is hard" (Virgil in Bell, 1960:227).

### Hebrew and Early Christian Conceptions of Work

Following the views of the Greeks and Romans, ancient Hebrews accordingly regarded work as a curse and believed it to be devised by God as a punishment of the disobedience and ingratitude of Adam and Eve (Rose, 1985:28). Early Christians followed the Hebrews in their conception of work as a punishment by God for original sins. Later Christians regarded work as necessary to maintain the health of body and mind and to keep evil thoughts away.

The Church developed a new doctrine of the importance of work but strictly as an instrument of spiritual purpose. The Benedictine rule emphasized the spiritual danger of idleness and ordered regular work at fixed times of the day in order to reduce it. The Church also recommended labor as a penance of good scriptural authority emanating from man's fall. Work was a discipline, it contributed to the Christian virtue of obedience. It was not seen as noble, or rewarding, or satisfying, its very endlessness and tedium were spiritually valuable in that it contributed to Christian resignation.

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fruitfulness without toil or labor" (Rodgers, 1978:3). While these myths and legends may have influenced expectations in discovering the "new world", they are most relevant for Puritans settling in northern America.

(Anthony, 1984:37)

Establishing its first positive meaning, work was seen as a defense against despair, an act of expiation, a way to charity (Yankelovich, 1979:21).

The myth of a golden age of worklessness, established by Stoic philosophy and continued by Judeo-Christian mythology, also provided an image of the ideal -- a leisurely life of abundance and equality -- which clearly contradicted the real -- a life of toil and misery for most (Anthony, 1984:27). This contradiction was problematic as the heavenly promises of religious perseverance were in stark contrast to the realities of earthly living. Attempts to recreate the golden age on earth, to make ideal images of a leisurely and plentiful life more closely fit the real hardship under which most lived, were thought to have been one reason for the Flanders revolution in 1380 in France and the Peasants revolt in 1381 in England (Cohn, 1962:210). This contrast between experience and ideology "produced a doctrine which became a revolutionary myth as soon as it was presented to the turbulent masses of the poor and fused with the ferocious fantasies of popular eschatology" (Cohn, 1962:210). Whatever else was responsible for dramatic revolutions or simply smaller scale social unrest, such as other influential cultural and structural changes, the contradiction between the ideal and the real called for resolution.

## Catholic and Medieval Conceptions of Work

Revolutions and unrest were not only brought about by the incongruence between ideal and real images of life. The 100 Years War between France and England had a tremendous effect on changes in European life, the bases of social order, and related religious conceptions. In addition, in France peasants revolted against new taxes and limited relief for the poor while in England itinerant preachers roused the masses by espousing scriptural egalitarianism.

In response to this general unrest and in an attempt to maintain a social order that placed the church at the top of the hierarchy, Aquinas sought to make the real the ideal. That is, to redefine the divine and the earthly in such a way that resolved the incompatibility between the two and that justified inequality and the power of the church. As the main architect of this synthesis, Aquinas developed a conception of the Christian universe where human and divine law were one -- thus, stratification was the result of the divine hierarchy of knowledge, nature, and society (Anthony, 1984:27,28).

Following Aristotle, Aquinas described a society as a mutual exchange of services for the good life. Many callings contribute to it, the farmer and artisan by supplying material goods, the priest by prayer and religious observance, each class by doing its own proper work. (Anthony, 1984:28-29)

This conception justified the "actual" stratification in society, thus making the real become the ideal and resolved

the contradiction that threatened the power of the church. (It also conveniently placed the priesthood as the highest and most important service to society.)

Once established, Aquinas' philosophy reflected the moral and religious conviction of Medieval society and was readily accepted for a time (Sabine, 1951:225). Work in Medieval civilization was viewed as a simple performance of obligation -- ideally to God through the duty of one's calling, and more actually as payment to the lord who provided earthly protection. Thus, the Medieval economic structure was supported by Aquinas' conception of work wherein obedience, the carrying out of duties, respect for customs and authority -- all virtues emphasized by Aquinas and the early Christian fathers -- were necessary for the functioning of the economic system (Anthony, 1984:31). In addition, the Medieval Church in Europe, the Catholic Church that superseded the Roman Empire and safeguarded European unity, made use of a powerful metaphor to ensure the cohesion and "domestic tranquility" -- that of the human organism: The head (nobleman) must protect, must not abuse the feet (peasants), and vice-versa (Brown, 1965:25-28).

In addition to religious re-conceptualization regarding work, the economic system changed when lords of the manor realized that wage-labor served them better than the labor of peasants. Though, without the protection of the lord, peasants were freed from obligation and were in a position

of selling their labor at market prices or demanding concessions from the manor. The Black Death between 1348 and 1368 contributed to the transformation of feudal society by creating a labor shortage and higher wages. No longer working out of obligation but instead for wages, peasants found it worthwhile to work to create surplus which could be sold in the emerging market economy. As the feudal agricultural economy shifted more and more to a market economy, conceptions of work and the "natural" hierarchy of positions underwent considerable strain (Anthony, 1984:31-35). With the transition to a market economy, previously held conceptions of work were brought into question. The church attempted to maintain the "elected" status of priest and the monastic life, the rightness of a stratified society, and their overall institutional power. However, the Reformation and the Enlightenment later challenged the authority of the Church and, in the process, completely transformed conceptions of work.

### The Protestant Ethic

More positive conceptions of work emerged following the Reformation. The Protestant Ethic, through Luther and Calvin, redefined work from an activity arising out of punishment to a calling which reflected one's salvation. Luther, similar to Catholic and Medieval conceptions, defined work as a calling, an activity expressing God given



talent and intent. Calvin furthered the importance of the performance of good work by linking it to salvation through the doctrine of predestination. Salvation was predetermined, yet success through hard work was a certain indication of God's favor. To work, then, according to the Protestant ethic was to serve God, which in the meantime also conveniently brought earthly success and comfort.

Puritans carried this conception with them to colonial America, sought to tame the frontier in the same way they would tame the wilderness in their souls. The Protestant Ethic was then somewhat secularized, idleness and waste were still viewed as evil and sinful, but work for God was replaced with work for the purpose of usefulness and for the good of the community. These Protestant and Protestant-related conceptions of work are discussed in more detail in this section.

#### Luther's Conception of Work: Work as a Calling

The views of Luther and other early Protestants were similar to Medieval thinkers in several ways. Luther agreed that work was a form of penance, a basis of charity, and a defense against evil idleness. He also thought, like Medieval Catholics, that people should work in the trade or profession into which they were born -- that people serve God by staying in their place (Applebaum, 1992:321-22). Luther and other Protestant thinkers differed, however, from

Medieval religious thought in their notion of salvation. Unlike the teachings of Roman Catholic Church, Luther believed that monastic life was selfish and not responsible to the community and the world (Applebaum, 1992:321). Protestant leaders like Luther thought that anyone could be the elect and that God's grace was won only through salvation and not on the basis of good works (Pascarella, 1984:29).

Unlike Aquinas and other Medieval church thinkers, then, Protestants did not rank work according to its determined "usefulness" to society and therefore did not grant monastic activities moral superiority (cf. the dictum *Orare est laborare*, to pray is to work, that is, to toil on behalf of others and of oneself).

Luther's originality was in his idea that one best serves God by doing most perfectly the work of one's trade or profession. With this idea, Luther swept away the concept that there was a distinction between spiritual work and secular work...Luther swept away the idea of the superiority of one type of work over another. As long as work is done in a spirit of obedience to God, every variety of work has equal spiritual dignity and each is the service to God on earth. (Applebaum, 1992:322)

To reformists, worldly activities or work were considered to be "callings" wherein an individual could achieve moral righteousness and salvation by accepting his work as divine ordinance and by fulfilling his obligations to God and the community (Weber, 1958:80). "For everyone without exception God's Providence has prepared a calling, which he should

profess and in which he should labor" (Weber, 1958:160). Luther's view of the calling, therefore, greatly increased the positive meaning of common work by emphasizing its moral and religious relevance as well as reestablishing the ideal of egalitarianism.

#### Calvin's Conception of Work: The Doctrine of Predestination

While Luther agreed with earlier Christian thinkers that "trade, banking, credit, and capitalist industry was part of the kingdom of darkness which Christians ought to shun" (Applebaum, 1992:324), Calvin's doctrine of predestination further transformed conceptions of the value of work. Salvation, according to Luther, was no more deserved for monks than for common laborers. For Calvin, salvation was not a matter of good works on earth, but instead a matter of fate, predetermined by God and regardless of earthly efforts (Weber, 1958:121). (Wherever a doctrine of predestination exists, there is the question as to whether there is any criteria by which it could be ascertained.) Fortunately for Calvinists, because work was defined as a way to serve God, success in work was considered to be the basis by which one's fate could be determined; it became the criterion. Success in work was a sure sign of God's favor while failure in it, or rejection of work, was an indication of certain damnation (Yankelovich, 1979:21).

Only one of the elect...is able by virtue of his rebirth and the resulting sanctification of his whole life, to augment the glory of God by real, and not merely apparent, good works. It was through the consciousness that his conduct...rested on power within himself working for the glory of God; that it is not only willed by God but rather done by God that he attained the highest good towards which this religion strove, the certainty of salvation. (Weber, 1958:114)

Calvinists led a life of discipline and good works, then, not to directly please God, but instead to present an image of their salvation. "If one could do nothing to improve one's chance in the next world, one could at least convince others and oneself that the chances were good" (Anthony, 1984:42).

Calvin also transformed the pursuit of wealth and profit into a less than terrible endeavor. Whereas Luther had thought that material wealth was a sign of a lack of grace (and certainly not deserving of God's salvation), predestination allowed that the pursuit of wealth and the accumulation of profit were mere manifestations of certain salvation. Success, in the form of material and economic well-being, was a sign of God's pleasure (Applebaum, 1992:325).

While Christianity and even early Protestantism had long condemned profit making, Calvin's notion of predestination created a profound economic, cultural, and social shift. "Wealth had long been associated with oppressors; now it was taken as a sign that one was among God's elect" (Pascarella, 1984:30). With this new

perspective, dubbed by Weber the Protestant Ethic, Calvinism not only permitted, but endorsed and encouraged the pursuit of profit and wealth.

Though success was a sure sign of salvation and profit was given religious sanction, the Protestant Ethic emphasized work, not the enjoyment of wealth (Anthony, 1984:42). To work diligently and industriously, to live frugally and without waste, and to avoid idleness as the plague of the devil himself was to serve God. Believers had a religious obligation to fill their lives with heavy toil, hard work, drudgery and to shun physical pleasures and enjoyments, especially those availed by wealth. If success resulted from this form of life, then so be it and the salvation for which it represented. But in principle, believers valued toil and work, for it is these things that God desired and rewarded.

#### Puritan Conceptions of Work: Conquering the Wild

Based upon these Protestant views, it is no wonder that Puritans did not come to America in search of paradise and leisure and that they happened to settle in northern America, north of the Chesapeake Bay, where hard work was a necessity for survival. To the Puritans, this new land was a wilderness, not a paradise, and it represented a mission, not a garden of leisure. "They did not expect to pluck treasures from the land but planned to civilize and tame it,

even as they expected to struggle and to civilize and tame the wild places in themselves" (Rodgers, 1978:4). Puritans chose to call America a wilderness because "it fit the countervision in their minds' eye that the moral life was a matter of hard work and hard-bitten determination" (Rodgers, 1978:5). By shattering the image of America as the refound paradise of Adam and Eve, Puritans also reinterpreted man's original state of grace. Following the Puritan lead, a nineteenth century moralist asserted that Adam's idleness in Eden was sinful, he was put there to till the garden, and therefore work was never a curse sent by God (Rodgers, 1978:6). According to the Puritan perspective, God sent man into the world not to play, but to work (Miller, 1954:44).

These Puritan views and related moral pronouncements did more than establish work as a duty in early American society, they also firmly established a variety of moral doctrines and sentiments (which may explain why Weber call the U.S. the "Calvinist Diaspora"). Leisure and enjoyment, so favored an activity of earlier epochs, were now cursed endeavors, for pleasure did not serve God. Wasting time, that is, not working whenever possible, was the "deadliest of sins" for time in life was too "short and precious" to waste on anything but assuring one's own election (Weber, 1958:157). Similarly, losing time through idleness, sociality, luxury, or even more sleep than necessary was worthy of "absolute moral condemnation" (Weber, 1958:158).

Even "inactive contemplation is valueless, or even directly reprehensible" particularly if it interferes with one's daily work (Weber, 1958:158). The wealthy should work because God's commands it and an unwillingness to work is certainly symptomatic of lack of grace and election (Weber, 1958:159). The moral pronouncements concerning the meaning of and proper behavior associated with work, what is commonly referred to as the Protestant work ethic.

This work ethic can be summarized as:

A universal taboo is placed on *idleness*, and *industriousness* is considered a religious ideal; *waste* is a vice, and *frugality* a virtue; *complacency* and *failure* are outlawed, and *ambition* and *success* are taken as sure signs of God's favor; the universal sign of sin is *poverty*, and the crowning sign of God's favor is *wealth*. (Oates, 1971:84)

#### The Traditional Work Ethic -- Secularized

While religious elements of the aforementioned work ethic persisted to some degree, in the nineteenth century a more modernized version appeared. The Protestant ethic became secularized and the doctrine of the calling and working for the glory of God was replaced by the tenet of usefulness and working towards the public good (Rodgers, 1978:9,10). Public usefulness became "secularly sacred" and efforts towards attaining its state of grace were to be constant and unremitting. Where Puritans had been called to work by God, 19th Americans, during an era of self-conscious industrialization and heavy immigration, believed that it

was one's social duty to produce in a world of such material demand (Rodgers, 1978:10,11). Where work did not serve God, it built character "by ingraining habits of fortitude, self-control, and perseverance" (Rodgers, 1978:12). Out of this secularized version of the Protestant work ethic also came the link between work and social mobility. The United States was seen as a country of self-made men where anyone with ability and willingness to work could rise to the top (Colton, 1844:15). It was through a man's labor that he managed his deserved position in society and through his work that he left a mark on the world.

Although we often refer to this secular version of the work ethic as the Protestant work ethic, it clearly has a broader definition. The Protestant work ethic involved a religious obligation to fill one's life with heavy toil and hard work; drudgery was valued for its own sake and physical pleasures were shunned. This ethic was secularized and translated into pronouncements that people should spend long hours at work and need leave little time for leisure or relaxation. Within this ethic, workers should be dependable, highly productive, and take pride in their work. Workers should be loyal and committed to their company, their profession, and their work group. People should be achievement oriented, strive for advancement and promotion. Just as success is a sign of salvation for early Protestants, prestige in a job is a sign of a good person.



People should also acquire wealth through honest labor and save it through thrift and investment. Again, frugality is desirable and extravagance and waste should be avoided.

(Cherrington, 1980:20)

Even Freud, in his psychoanalytical perspective of work, concurred with the value of toil and the evils of idleness. According to Freud, work is an individual's central link to reality (Freud, 1962). As part of the reality principle, work fights the pleasure principle providing sublimatory activities through which sexual and aggressive impulses may be satisfied. Work "curbs inborn tendencies to carelessness, irregularity and unreliability" and serves as a socializer, encouraging socially acceptable behavior (Furnham, 1990:145). As Freud stated,

Work is no less valuable for the opportunity it and the human relations connected with it provides for a very considerable discharge of libidinal component impulses, narcissistic, aggressive and even erotic, than because it is indispensable for subsistence and justifies existence in a society. (Freud, 1962:34)

According to this view, which also interestingly implies a moral component to work, humans have a natural aversion to work (Levenstein, 1962:20). Because of this aversion, work is inherently an activity which does not bring pleasure.

Besides a variety of related beliefs and moral pronouncements, the traditional work ethic has been said to contain several different yet overlapping ethics within it (Maccoby and Terzi, 1979). First it includes the Puritan ethic which is highly individualistic, oriented to self-

discipline, deferred rewards, and is antagonistic to sensuous culture. Secondly, it contains the craft ethic involving pride in work, self-reliance, and independence. Thirdly, the entrepreneurial ethic which emphasizes merchandising and not manufacture, organization and control of craftsmen, the growth and zeal to succeed, and risk-taking to exploit opportunities. Fourthly, the traditional work ethic includes a career ethic which emphasizes meritocracy, talent, hard work, and ambition which lead to success and promotion. The traditional work ethic has, then, been used somewhat as a catchall for a variety of work values, some of which comprise separate work ethics of their own and all of which, taken together, are not inherently compatible.

While there are a variety of interpretations of the traditional work ethic and many work values are included under this label, most writers agree that at its core is a conception of work as a social obligation towards society and fellow man (Furnham, 1990:17). The traditional work ethic, whether sacred or secular, is generally thought to involve the following traits and beliefs: thrift, industriousness, capacity for deferred gratification, work discipline, a success ethic, a competitive spirit, self-reliance, belief in the virtuousness of work, and the centrality of work in life (Jazarek, 1978).

When contemporary writers lament, then, that modern

workers have no work ethic, they are asserting that the aforementioned traditional values have no hold upon the contemporary work force. Modern workers are thought to be more concerned with self-fulfillment rather than self-sacrifice. They have been described as holding expectations of immediate satisfaction rather than hopes of the rewards of delayed gratification. Workers are thought to care only about "getting by" and to be lacking in the competitive spirit that is so closely linked to American success. Finally, as the assumption implies, workers in contemporary society have reordered their values so that work, lacking any inherent virtue or worth, is no longer central. Work is a burden to be borne in order to partake in other more important and fulfilling aspects of life.

#### Relevance of Historical Conceptions to Current Research

With traditional conceptions more clearly illuminated, the extent to which they have persisted and exist in contemporary views of work can be more readily examined. Having laid out a brief history of the evolution of conceptions of work, cultural and structural influences which transform work conceptions can be put in historical context and can therefore be more clearly examined and understood.

## Non-Western Conceptions of Work

In order to fully understand some of the cultural and structural correlates of work values, it would be illuminating to examine conceptions of work in other cultures. Historically, the Protestant work ethic developed in primarily Christian, Western, industrialized societies. Conceptions of work certainly vary in societies with different religious, cultural, and economic pasts. Reviewing conceptions of work in non-Christian and non-Western cultures will create a broader perspective from which to explore and analyze the contemporary work ethic in the United States. Islamic beliefs, as one example, stress the role of work in a person's moral obligation to God, to others, and to the soul. Unlike Protestant views, however, work is not to be all consuming but is to be kept in balance with other duties in life. In contrast, Japanese conceptions, like Protestant views, define work as a calling to be performed with diligence, competence, and faithfulness. Within a discussion of these beliefs and conceptions of work, the historical and cultural influences of American values about work become more apparent. Naturally, such an examination emphasizes that beliefs about work are socially and culturally constructed.

## Islamic Conceptions of Work

Language is used to express meaning and is therefore often an insightful avenue towards understanding. Varying conceptions of work in other cultures and societies are often very clearly represented in the language of the people. In Arabic, there is no distinction between the word *work* and *action*. The translation for work would be '*amal* meaning action in general and *sun'* meaning activity or action (Nasr, 1985:51). Humans perform two types of functions in the world -- either acting within or upon the world or by making things using materials or objects from the world. The concept of work in the Islamic tradition involves both of these.

Important to understanding Muslim conceptions of work are three covenants of Islam: one between God and man, one between man and his soul, and one between man and his fellow man (Nasr, 1985:52). The very foundation of a work ethic in Islamic society, then, depends upon filling the moral obligations of these covenants, often summarized in the Arabic word *haqq*, that is, the right thing to do, the truth of God -- above all, the sense of justice. Like Judeo-Christian tradition, the Muslim individual is responsible for his or her actions, all of which, including work, exist before God. In addition, a sense of responsibility to fulfill a contract, to perform work as well as possible, and to satisfy the employer persists among traditional Muslims.

Individuals bear responsibility for their actions not only to themselves, their employer, and to God, "but also in relation to the work itself which must be executed with the utmost perfection of which the worker is capable" (Nasr, 1985:52). A sense of craftsmanship is an expression of the glory of God.

While some of these sentiments and perspectives may be similar to Protestant thought, other aspects of Islam create a very different conception of the role and value of work. Unlike Protestant pronouncements concerning work, the Muslim is to do good work, but not simply for the sake of work itself: Man works to live, not lives to work. In addition, Muslims are to work hard, but not so hard as to disturb the equilibrium of Islamic life.

There is no emphasis in Islam upon the virtue of work for the sake of work...In the Islamic perspective work is considered a virtue in the light of the needs of man and the necessity to establish equilibrium in one's individual and social life. But this duty towards work and provision for one's needs and the needs of one's family is always kept in check and prevented from becoming excessive by the emphasis in the Koran upon the transience of life and the danger of greed and covetousness and the importance of avoiding the excessive amassing of wealth. (Nasr, 1985:54)

An Islamic prophet established the social order of equilibrium in life wherein a third of the day was to be spent working, a third sleeping and resting, and a third in prayer, leisure, family or social activities. An exaggerated emphasis on work, one that consumes more than a third of one's day, destroys the equilibrium in Islamic

life. In addition, work is to be undertaken as a religious duty only to support oneself or one's family. To work for any other reason and to another end is to work without virtue (Nasr, 1985:55).

Work that is carried out responsibly, according to a contract based upon justice (a word that summarizes the Islamic ethic), and performed to the worker's best ability will produce earnings that are *halah* or legitimate. Bread, symbolically and literally, bought with these earnings will bring nourishment and well-being to the individual and family. Bread earned in any other way than *halal* brings "the possibility of the wrath of God resulting in illness, loss of property, and other calamities" (Nasr, 1985:56). The interconnectedness of Muslim life is apparent as is the inseparability of economics and ethics. Islam, like Medieval Catholicism in pre-industrial Europe, does not distinguish between the sacred and profane, between religious acts and secular acts, between prayer and work.

These Muslim conceptions of work and the Islamic work ethic are based upon the Koran and traditional Islamic culture. But as in most other societies and cultures, traditional Islamic society is no longer intact and contemporary Muslim attitudes towards work would, in all probability, represent a breakdown of traditional norms as a result of modernization -- particularly in urban areas. Customary views of work and the ethical dimensions

associated with them may have declined due to the modern Muslim man being cut off from his family and social matrix, a severing of the relation to nature and its rhythms, impersonal modes of production which have replaced devotion to a craft, secular laws replacing divine laws, and an economic market dominated by forces which are oblivious to moral considerations (Nasr, 1985:60), in short, due to the advent of a market economy and incorporation of Islamic countries into the Western-dominated world economy.

Although there may be an erosion of the traditional Muslim work ethic, contemporary Islamic conceptions of work are certainly influenced by tradition and offer a contrast to the more individualistic and unrestrained orientation to work as is found in the United States. It is also possible to see how cultural beliefs have shaped Muslim conceptions of work and how modern society works to reform these views and values. Though the content of beliefs differ from that of American society, the proces through which they have been formed and are being transformed is the same and is thus illuminating to the discussion of the contemporary work ethic.

#### Japanese Conceptions of Work

Japan also offers an interesting contrast to the examination of American work values and provides a clear example of the interplay between tradition, in this case



Eastern religion, and modernity -- Western, industrialized society. Religiously and philosophically, early Japanese considered the natural world to be the original world. Unlike early Christian thought, there was no concept of paradise to be sought after or recovered, having been lost to man's original sin. The Japanese, then, did not look beyond the natural world for meaning or understanding of religious order. "To them, the world was the religious universe, in which living itself was a religious act in the broadest sense of the term" (Kitagawa, 1985:33).

Based upon this perspective, ancient Japan, unlike some other Eastern cultures, sought a synthesis of religion, society, and culture. This synthesis embraced aspects of Buddhist, Confucian, and native Shinto tradition, all embodied in the emperor, who is called *Tenno* in Japanese, literally, the "Son of Heaven." The Buddhist tradition brought the notion that a person should master one craft and the interrelatedness of all things; Confucianism included a social morality wherein individuals should faithfully execute their given duty; native Shintoism taught that all humans were equal and are born with certain abilities that they should use. Similar to Luther's calling, Shinto philosophy stated that "the peace and order of ancient Japan depended on individuals properly performing their work according to their competencies and occupations" (Kitagawa, 1985:37). Even the humblest activities, in this light,

provided a path to enlightenment.

The ethos of modern Japan, prior to World War II, incorporated these beliefs along with the ideal of a sacred monarchy, a divine nation, and the unity of religion and state and fused them with the new knowledge and culture imported from the modern West (Kitagawa, 1985:39). An important characteristic of this political, spiritual, and social arrangement was the establishment of a nationally-controlled public education system. The core of this system was an education in ethics -- a combination of civics, morality, a system of values, and mytho-history (Kitagawa, 1985:39). The course on ethics was based on the assumption of the equality of all people with their varying competencies and occupations.<sup>5</sup> It also pronounced that

...each person must cultivate such virtues as diligence, frugality, loyalty, filial piety, and a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the honor and glory of a larger self, namely one's family, one's occupation, one's nation, and the throne.  
(Kitagawa, 1985:40)

Thus, Japan, unlike many other industrialized countries, had successfully formed a modern institution which would serve as bearers of cultural values and in doing so, had established a system to maintain traditional values, as well

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<sup>5</sup> In Japan, one is struck by the dignity and sense of self-worth routinely displayed by the cleaning staff the foreign traveler sees in Japanese railroad stations as they go about their business. The Japanese, unlike Americans, do not seem to maintain a sort of caste-type boundary between manual and non-manual work; for them, it is a matter of graduations within the same occupational structure.

as patriotic ones.

In the reconstruction of Japanese society that followed World War II, many Japanese institutions were dismantled or disrupted. Without these institutions serving as bearers of official values, although the Japanese people were thus liberated from many authoritarian structures and symbols, a moral vacuum was created. Many groups emerged to fill the void. One of the most successful groups was the Japanese business firm. By combining the contradictory features of the prewar family, bureaucracy, occupational guild and social club, business firms created a social nexus in which cultural values could again be borne and disseminated (Kitagawa, 1985:45), in other words, the corporation as family (Sasaki, 1984:1-9).

While many attribute Japanese economic success either to the Japanese national character, the habit of hard work, or initially to the Allied occupation following World War II, their apparent success and work ethic are most likely the results of tradition and historical circumstances. Thus, the "traditionalization of modernity" and the "modernization of tradition" has created a contemporary Japanese work ethic which stresses the competent and faithful performance of work tasks and duty to others, particularly to the company for which one works. While Japan seems to have created harmony between tradition and modern features of organizational and personnel systems, a

growing emphasis on individual rights and equality may call for a new balance between tradition and modernity and in the process create a new Japanese work ethic (Kitagawa, 1985:45).

Similar to the Islamic ethic, a brief discussion of the Japanese work ethic illustrates the nature of the linkage between broader cultural beliefs and work values and the effect modernization has had on the traditional work ethic. While elements of Islamic or Japanese work values may be expressed by those interviewed in this study and these views may be recognized, a discussion of these views is more useful in illuminating cultural and structural correlates of work values in a cross-cultural setting.

#### Summary

A review of ancient and Medieval conceptions of work, the evolution of the Protestant work ethic, the secularization of that ethic in the U.S., and a discussion of conceptions of work in other cultures provides a broad foundation upon which to explore contemporary beliefs about work in the United States. With this historical and cultural background in mind, the next chapter examines potential theoretical explanations of the contemporary work ethic. Some of the topics to be taken up are: The influences of tradition (as reviewed earlier in this chapter); the role of modern culture which emphasizes

individualism and consumerism; the current structure of work in post-industrial society (globalization, shift from manufacturing to services); the individual who is an active interpreter and constructor of social meaning regarding work and non-work; and ultimately the dialectical relationship that underlies the totality or configuration of these areas of life.

### CHAPTER III

#### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORK ETHIC

Whether or not we accept the assumption that the work ethic has declined -- that belief in the traditional Protestant work ethic was once pervasive but has now faded like the photographs of our cheerless, and probably hard-working ancestors -- explanations of contemporary beliefs about work can be sought. The nature of the contemporary work ethic, whether as evidence of cultural erosion or new cultural artifact, is likely to be related to a variety of social forces.

In this chapter, possible cultural and structural correlates of the contemporary work ethic are introduced and discussed as bases for empirical analysis. (An analysis of findings is presented in Chapter IX.) First, the substantive nature of mass culture is explored to highlight possible cultural influences on work values. As an aspect of culture, a more specific component of culture, values will be shaped by the nature of the broader culture. The components of American mass culture that seem most pervasive and most relevant to a discussion of work values are individualism, consumerism, and, most specific to work, the move towards professionalism in many occupation. The historical bases of American individualism, namely

Protestantism and the frontier, and the early 20th century transition to modern individualism, namely consumerism and the social ethic of the 1950s (Whyte, 1956), are briefly discussed. Relying upon Maslow's concept of self-actualization (1954) and Lasch's narcissism (1985), the existence of individualism in contemporary American society is explored. Finally, as a component of mass culture more directly related to work and thus potentially more directly related to work values, the move towards professionalism by many occupations is examined. Having identified and reviewed these substantive aspects of mass American culture, the effect of these trends on work values, as empirically explored in this research, may be more easily highlighted.

Work values are not only affected by mass culture and, in fact, one of the central foci of this dissertation is to explore how structure and the interaction of culture and structure shape or affect work values. Secondly, then, in this chapter the substantive nature of the structure of work and the economy is presented in order to be able to identify the ways in which the structure of work may influence values of work. The structure of work in contemporary society is characterized by the following: rapid advances in micro-electronic technology; shift from manufacturing to services; globalization of the economy; and capital flight. These recent structural changes are described, as well as the effect they may have on work, in order to examine the

potential affect they may have on work values.

It is important to delineate the structure of work because, according to Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism (1977, 1989), culture is created within structural contexts. That is, individuals create culture, such as work values, within the parameters defined by structure, such as the conditions of work. Thirdly, then, in this chapter the relationship between structure and culture is discussed as, apart from the influence of mass culture, the process through which culture is created in structural contexts will offer the deepest insight into contemporary work values. In addition, this theoretical perspective will best explain potential occupational variations in work values because it takes into account variations in occupational structure. Also in this section, the work ethic is considered to be a cultural ideology used to support and justify an economic structure -- namely, industrial capitalism. Using some of the views of Habermas (1975), changes in culture may result from legitimation crises, or the failure of certain cultural beliefs to continue justifying certain structural conditions. This perspective is used to analyze possible changes in the work ethic -- why, for instance, the traditional work ethic has undergone transformation since the Puritans settled in America.

By reviewing the substantive nature of mass American



culture, the current structure of work and the economy, and the relationship between structure and culture, possible cultural and structural correlates of the contemporary work ethic can best be explored and understood. The discussion in this chapter, then, lays the foundation for such an understanding and for the analysis of empirical findings which is presented in Chapter IX.

### The Substantive Nature of Mass American Culture

If American culture was to be characterized by a single feature, it probably would be individualism. It is an emphasis on individual rights that allows Texans and others to use deadly force when they feel their property is threatened; it is an emphasis on individual freedom and fulfillment which drove, in part, the "greed" of the 1980s; and it is an emphasis on the individual which earns the United States the status of being one of lowest spending on social programs of all industrial nations. Individualism is clearly a central component of American mass culture. In this section, a historical foundation for this trait is briefly discussed. This is followed by a description of the foundation, or launching pad, of contemporary individualism -- the rejection of the social ethic of the 1950s and increased consumerism of post-WWII. A closer examination of the nature of individualism in American society will help provide a clearer understanding of the influence of this

aspect of mass culture on values about work. Finally, in this section the more occupationally-specific cultural movement of professionalism is discussed. In an effort to achieve greater autonomy, status, and compensation, many occupations have tried to establish themselves as professions. Part of the process of professionalization includes internalizing a professional creed of service to others and society. To the extent that an occupation has become professionalized, the internalization of this creed will clearly be reflected in one's work values. While there are other aspects of mass American culture that may affect work values, individualism and professionalism seem the most pervasive.

#### The Historical Bases of American Individualism

The Protestant work ethic existed in a particular historical and cultural context. The Reformation questioned the power of the Catholic church and the hierarchy of occupations that it produced, which had placed the priesthood at the top of sacredness and "earthly" activities far from the gates of heaven. In addition, in the shift from a feudal society to a market economy, relations between laborers and owners were redefined. The advent of capitalism and industrialization furthered Protestant work ethic beliefs as hard work for its own sake fueled the emerging capitalist economy and provided a rationale for

sometimes less than ideal conditions of work. These historical events and corresponding cultural changes created the context (or "spirit" according to Weber) in which the Protestant work ethic arose or, since this interpretation is frequently questioned, it is the context within which the ethic can be comprehended.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Puritans viewed colonial America as a wilderness to be tamed for the glory of God. Hard work, then, not only fulfilled this moral obligation, it was also necessary for survival in the rugged conditions of the American frontier. In addition, the individual orientation with which many settlers crossed the Atlantic was accentuated by survival in the new land. Individualism and independence, already present in the European Protestant and American Puritan character, burgeoned as individual initiative was required for physical survival and independence was fostered by the vastness of the frontier (Turner, 1920:18).

#### Early 20th Century: the Social Ethic and Consumerism

These are some of the historical factors that, along with many others, provide the cultural foundation upon which contemporary individualism may be based. Individualism as an aspect of American culture, which has been a topic of considerable discussion by many writers (e.g. Toqueville 1969; Riesman et al., 1950; Bellah et al., 1985), has

undergone considerable transformation in nature throughout American history. Most specifically relevant to a discussion of the work ethic, after the insecurities brought about by the Great Depression and World War II, individualism, primarily in the context of work, seemed to be tempered by the increasing attractiveness of security, especially economic security in the years following the war. Writers such as Whyte (1956) suggested that a social ethic, stressing a steady career within an organization and the importance of getting along with others, replaced the more traditional work ethic which had urged individual striving and success.

It was also during this era that a culture of consumption, somewhat mandated by the shift in manufacturing and made possible by the booming post-war economy, also arose. Following the war American culture shifted from concern with production and its associated values to concern with and values appropriate to consumption. Although writing about the early stages of industrialization, Rodgers views in this regard can amply be applied to the post-Depression, post-war boom of the late 1940s and 1950s:

As industrialization shook the idea of the permanence of scarcity, as the measure of economic health turned from how much a society produced to how equitably and conscientiously it consumed, it became harder and harder to insist that compulsive activity, work, and usefulness were the highest goals of life. (Rodgers, 1978:29).

In the post-war culture of consumption, then, the right to

pleasure from possessions and to pursue the accumulation of possessions early and fervently was not only possible but encouraged. The values associated with this now inalienable right were in direct contrast to the traditional work value of deferred gratification. Along with the social ethic, the culture of consumption contradicted the traditional work ethic and, at the same time, reinforced hedonistic values that laid the foundation for further cultural transformation and effect on work values.

#### Contemporary Individualism and Emphasis on the Self

The 1960s brought challenges to the social ethic and the 1950's culture of consumption, particularly its seemingly unquestioned conformity to tradition and corporation, while at the same time transforming the culture of consumption into a principle of pleasure. Rose (1985:53) has identified components of what he calls the "post-bourgeois" culture of the sixties and early seventies, several of which are directly relevant to our discussion of mass culture and the work ethic. The counter-culture of the sixties and early seventies was not fully embraced by all members of American society and, in fact, was adamantly rejected by many. Regardless of the variable acceptance or rejection of these values, however, the cultural revolt left a tangible mark on American culture and had a pervasive and lingering effect on attitudes towards life, leisure and

work.

Based to some extent upon the work of Maslow (1954), a doctrine of self-actualization emerged which most directly challenged sublimation of the self not only to the needs of the organization for which one worked, but also to any demands which somehow inhibited an individual from reaching his or her own potential (Rose, 1985:54). Closely related to this component was a pursuit of personal pleasure or hedonism -- a state wherein liberation from middle-class inhibitions which deferred pleasure led to rich and fulfilling experiences (Rose, 1985:55). With this emphasis on the self and with near moral disgust for traditional social arrangements, the widespread notion of obligation to others and society was questioned. Instead of concentrating upon what one owed to the community and larger nation, focus was placed on what was owed to the individual and, thus, a sense of obligation was replaced with an increasing concern with and right to entitlement (Rose, 1985:56). Finally, while consumerism engendered hedonism through the pleasure of possession and, in some ways, contributed to the rise of the individual and the emphasis on self-fulfillment, during the post-bourgeois revolt, materialism and the frantic pace of production that it required to be maintained came under attack. With self actualization and fulfillment as the goals of the era, quality of life became more important than quantity of economic production (Rose, 1985:57).

Yankelovich describes the increased aspirations for self-fulfillment, which replaced traditional symbols of success and beliefs about the value of work, as arising more specifically because of:

...The sexual revolution, the effect of the women's movement on the family, the dying off of the generation scarred by the Great Depression of the 1930s, a growing disillusionment with the ability of our institutions to deliver the goods, the failure of the economy to live up to people's expectations of a steady annual increase in income, a questioning of whether the values of a consumption economy are worth the nose-to-the-grindstone way of life that pays for all the goodies, an almost subliminal awareness that energy shortages and environmental hazards call for a new orientation, and a further evolution of individualism into the quest for less conforming personal lifestyles. (Yankelovich, 1979:10)

According to Yankelovich (1979; 1981), these historical and cultural circumstances created a "New Breed" of individuals and workers. This New Breed is concerned with fulfilling their potential, in the Maslovian sense, and the need to grow psychologically and spiritually (Yankelovich, 1979:11). Their duty is to their self-actualization, their obligation is to fulfill the self. According to New Breed perspective, success is not to be found in a steady career in an organization, or in work itself for that matter. Success comes from within the self and therefore to succeed, one must focus on his or her own needs and desires, not the requisites of some corporation specifically or any economic prerogative in general.

The effect of this orientation on work values and

beliefs was, and continues to be, widespread. With self-fulfillment as the goal of the complete person in modern life, there was an insistence that jobs become more personalized so that the potential for self-actualization could be achieved in work activity as well as in other aspects of life. And where work could not or would not be humanized, there became an increasing emphasis on leisure evolved, prompting what has been called the leisure ethic (Neulinger, 1978). Because for many of the New Breed, traditional work depersonalizes the individual, self-fulfillment and actualization can only be attained in leisure or non-work activities (Yankelovich, 1979:12).

Growing individualism in contemporary U.S. culture has also been interpreted as being more extreme than simply an emphasis on self-actualization. Lasch (1985) suggests that the dominant American culture of competitiveness and individualism, closely linked to traditional work ethic beliefs as suggested previously, has been transformed into the pursuit of happiness and a preoccupation with self. Narcissism has become the ultimate American value and self-fulfillment, self-actualization, and self-absorption replaced the Holy Trinity.

Historically, Puritan beliefs were secularized by Yankees and the Protestant ethic, stressing hard work and the accumulation of wealth as a program for moral practice was transformed into a program of "compulsive industry" and



the "art of money-getting" (Furnham, 1990:227). As Lasch further explains:

The growth of bureaucracy, the cult of consumption with its immediate gratification, but above all the severance of the sense of historical continuity have transformed the Protestant ethic while carrying the underlying principles of capitalistic society to their logical conclusion. The pursuit of self-interest, formerly identified with the rational pursuit of gain and the accumulation of wealth, has become a search for pleasure and psychic survival. (Lasch, 1985:69)

Where work was historically a means of contributing to the community of others, in modern society it becomes the arena within which others are exploited for individual gain. Protestant self-improvement, through hard work and the accumulation of wealth, brought one closer to God. Contemporary self-advancement requires winning, and therefore surpassing others in one's program of achievement. Where the narcissistic ethic can be seen in part as a response to the increasing anxieties of modern society, it also ironically increases competition and isolation of individuals, thus escalating the reliance on the self for meaning and preservation. The narcissistic ethic not only radically transforms the traditional work ethic, it does so in a way that is self-perpetuating.

Regardless of the extent of individualism in contemporary American culture, whether it is seen as an emphasis on self-improvement via actualization or as a preoccupation with happiness and the self, the value or importance of work is likely to have been altered from the

traditional view provided by the Protestant work ethic. Instead of working for the sake of work itself, for the glory of God, or for one's community or family, a new work ethic, wherein the value of work lies in its contribution to the development or fulfillment of the individual, may have emerged. In this light, work is seen as one of many ways to realize the self -- a view which would be most prominent among educated workers with more critical and heightened expectations (Rosseel, 1986).

#### The Move Towards Professionalization of Occupations

While individualism as an aspect of mass culture in America has important implications for the contemporary work ethic, a more specific component of occupational culture, professionalization, also may lend insight into the modern ethic. The trend towards the professionalization of occupations and the commonly held definition of a "profession" may in effect counter the amoral emphasis, with regard to social obligation, on the individual.

The professions have been defined in different ways, either as containing certain objective features of organization or activity, or according to the praiseworthy moral stance of the profession's practitioners (Becker, 1971:89). Both definitions, however, include a moral component, either in the implied altruism of a professional or the explicit code of ethics which often governs

professional conduct. To be a professional, then, is to be motivated to serve others and society; it is to fulfill a duty or an obligation to use one's talents, skills, and training for the betterment of humankind.

To be a member of a profession is also to have achieved a certain status in the eyes of society. Professionals control areas of knowledge or uncertainty and therefore are afforded authority and prestige (Becker, 1971:95). In an effort to elevate the status, power, and pay of one's work, there has been a trend in some work cultures towards professionalization. In many cases then, particularly among what may be called the emergent professions or those who have not traditionally been regarded as professions, the requirement of expert qualifications (special education and training required to belong to the "profession") is the result of efforts towards collegial power and autonomy (Collins, 1975:287). In the search for such occupational power and prestige, therefore, the trend towards professionalization has become widespread.

While the process of professionalization involves many aspects, one important element for the discussion of the contemporary work ethic is the resocialization of the potential professional (Khleif, 1974:303). One objective feature of a profession is a code of ethics which delineates not only specific rules of behavior, but also an altruistic and service-oriented perspective on work. The process of

professionalization, therefore, involves the socialization of the initiate in the rules of the profession as well as in the proper moral commitment of the worker.

To the degree that a particular occupation has become fully professionalized, the moral obligation to serve the community will be well established. Members of these occupations may readily espouse the profession's socialized commitment to service or may rely on the assumption that the larger society holds of the moral value of their work. Members of occupations that are not fully professionalized, those for whom professional status is emerging, may be more likely to repeatedly reiterate the semi-profession's moral commitment. For an important part of attaining professional status is to convince others and the society as a whole that one's work is indeed professional -- requiring both specialized training and temperament. In either case, whether it be full profession or emergent profession, an individual's work ethic is likely to reflect a professional creed as well as whatever beliefs the individual holds independent of the socialized values concerning work.

Although there are certainly other aspects of culture which are likely to affect contemporary beliefs about work, the mass cultural impetus towards individualism and self-fulfillment will in all probability have an effect on the individual's work beliefs and ethic. The value of work may be seen in its ability or lack of ability to challenge and

fulfill the individual. Though with a different outcome, the trend towards professionalization among some contemporary occupations will also affect work beliefs. Because professionalization requires resocialization of the individual with regard to training and temperament, professions and emergent professions are likely to include professional ideologies in their discussions of their work beliefs.

Cultural changes such as these are not the only factors shaping the contemporary work ethic. Structural changes in the nature of work have changed the experience and therefore meaning of work for many individuals. Because culture is shared knowledge or understanding, when the meaning individuals attach to their experience changes, culture changes. In this way, structure affects culture. Before examining the relationship between culture and structure in more depth (as is done in the third section of this chapter), it is important to first fully describe changes in the nature of the structure of work and the economy in contemporary American society.

#### Structural Changes in the Nature of Work

In the much touted shift from industrial to post-industrial society and from a capitalist to post-capitalist economy, many changes in the nature of work have occurred. (While the use of these labels has been disputed, what is

most important to this discussion is the specific changes that the labels represent.) Eitzen and Zinn (1989:2-7) have identified the major forces transforming the economy as: technological breakthrough, the shift from manufacturing to services, globalization of the economy, and capital flight. Each of these general forces change the nature of work and consequently its meaning to the worker is also drastically changed.

### Advances in Micro-Electronic Technology

The relationship between technology and the human organization of work has been a pervasive theme in most industrial sociology, as in Marxist thought for example. It is significant, then, when the technological nature of work changes dramatically as was seen in the transformation of society during industrialization. Post-industrial society has been spawned to a great extent because of rapid technological advances in micro-electronics. The microchip is the heart of this economic and social revolution as it has enabled the storing, manipulation, and retrieval of information at a pace and magnitude never before imagined. Technological advances have also brought about increased potential and practice of automation. Robotics increase productivity, an inherent goal in any capitalist enterprise, while at the same time decreasing employment -- particularly in higher paying, semi-skilled positions (Eitzen and Zinn,

1988:2).

These advances in micro-electronics, have had two major effects on the worker. On one hand, unemployment and associated economic insecurity among certain sectors of the labor force have occurred. Automation has also contributed to the deskilling of labor -- a trend which has persisted through the various stages of industrialization. Braverman (1974) has modernized Marxist thought in this regard by showing that monopoly capital uses automation to deskill blue and white-collar jobs in a manner similar to early capitalists who used mechanization to deskill labor. Heightened by technological advances, the effect of this continued trend has been to enlarge the working class and the reserve army of labor by deskilling not only traditional manufacturing labor, but also clerical and professional workers (Benet, 1972).

#### Shift from Manufacturing to Services

Another aspect of the recent economic transformation that has affected the nature of work for many individuals is the shift from manufacturing to services. Not only has automation reduced the number of jobs and deskilled others, the types of jobs available have undergone widespread transformation. While it has been argued that deindustrialization has been brought about because of corporate disinvestment in domestic industry (Bluestone and

Harrison, 1982), the reduction in manufacturing has also been due to an increasing emphasis on services and knowledge production (Eitzen and Zinn, 1989:6).

Because of advances in micro-electronics, information processing and manipulation has become a booming industry and the United States, like other previously "industrialized" societies, has become an information society wherein data processing and services are predominant occupations (Dolbeare, 1986:73). Workers in these industries, however, earn less than workers in traditional manufacturing: jobs in the fastest growing industries pay \$5000 less than jobs in the industries that are declining or growing more slowly (Kuttner, 1983:62). In fact, all of the employment increase since 1979 has been generated by the creation of jobs which pay less than the 1973 median wage (Bluestone and Harrison, 1989:104). As another writer explains:

In 1971, some 80 percent of service workers and workers in retail trades did not receive enough pay to support a family of four above the poverty level. The same is true of at least 75 percent of all clerical workers and laborers. (Braverman, 1982:9)

The shift from manufacturing to services has, then, produced a proliferation of low-wage work, has polarized the labor force (with a few new jobs being higher paying and most new jobs being lower paying), and has, in effect, shrunk the middle class as well as transformed the nature of work that most Americans perform each day.



## The Globalization of the Economy

The globalization of the economy is related to and as pervasive in effect as advances in technology and the shift to services. Because of the technological revolution, communication has become instantaneous and capital has become incredibly mobile (Eitzen and Zinn, 1989:7). As a result, the boundaries of domestic markets have been erased leading to increased foreign trade. While advantageous for American companies as far as gaining access to foreign markets, globalization of the economy has also been disadvantageous for American corporations and workers with regard to foreign competition.

Prior to the 1970s and the onslaught of the economic transformation, the United States had been relatively free from foreign competition because of the insulation of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the size of the domestic market. Japan and some European corporations were not allowed to develop or produce militarily after WWII and, as a result, became preoccupied with rebuilding their domestic capacities. While the U.S., within its protected domestic market, spent vast resources on military industries, Japan and Europe invested their resources in research and development of non-military industries (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982:141). When domestic market boundaries were shattered in the 1970s, companies in the U.S. found themselves unprepared to compete with foreign companies

whose products were often less expensive and of better quality.

### Capital Flight

The response of American companies, which had become accustomed to high profit margins, was not to search for new markets, increase research and development, or invest in more efficient technology. Instead, American corporate response to foreign competition and shrinking profits has been to abandon competition by reducing investments and labor costs and avoidance of public taxes and regulations.

Capital flight, the fourth force transforming the economy and made possible by micro-electronic advances, not only led to disinvestment in domestic industries but also to increased investment in foreign countries. By the end of the 1970s, for example, a third of the overall profits of the largest U.S. corporations were from overseas investments and for some companies, the proportion was even greater: 94% of Ford's profits were from overseas as were 63% of Coca Cola's and 83% of Citicorp's (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982:42).

Capital flight has had several effects on work and the worker in the United States. For every billion dollars in overseas investment, approximately 26,500 domestic jobs are lost (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982:43). In addition to increasing unemployment, capital flight reduces domestic

wages for jobs which do remain in the United States -- for with the threat of flight, companies can more effectively negotiate agreeable labor contracts. Faced with lower wages or unemployment, many workers and unions have had to make concessions that would have never before been considered. Capital flight, then, is not only a corporate strategy to regain a foothold in a global climate of intense competition, it has also been a strategy to control labor. It has also reduced tax revenues available to local, state, and even federal governments. At the time when resources are most desperately needed for a social safety net for unemployed or displaced workers, funds from corporate taxes are either nonexistent because of complete local disinvestment or lessened because of tax breaks provided to discourage flight (Bell, 1976).

#### Effect of Structural Changes on the Nature of Work

The four forces which have transformed the economy have, for the most part, had negative effects on the quality and stability of work in contemporary society. While the birth of an information and service economy has created some well-paying, higher-skilled jobs, the majority of job growth in the service sector has been among jobs that are deskilled and low-paying. With global competition and capital flight, domestic employment has become increasingly insecure, sporadic, and often part-time. This economic

climate of employment instability and deskilled work is likely to have affected the meaning and value of work.

To some, contemporary work has become so degraded, automated, and unsatisfying, that meaning and value are pursued in other arenas of life (Neulinger, 1978; Buchholz, 1976; Furnham and Rose, 1987). As another writer explains:

With the dehumanization of work, the dominant ethos that has emerged from the industrial era is a distinctly modern contempt and avoidance of work, and we resent subconsciously the theft of our ability to create and our growing enslavement to the machines of the technological age. In short, our work no longer has a sense of meaning, of purpose. (Schleuning, 1990:5)

This view assumes the transformation of the economy has dehumanized work and degraded the worker and, in effect, may have created, in replacement of the traditional work ethic, a leisure ethic wherein fulfillment, satisfaction, and obligation (more to oneself than to others) is associated with leisure rather than work. From this perspective, the potential of modern work is so devoid of meaning and value that work should no longer be considered a central source of fulfillment. Work should be done, in order that we may also survive and sustain a standard of living to which we have become accustomed, but meaning and satisfaction is only available in non-work activities. This new "leisure ethic" can be defined as:

Work has no meaning in itself, but only finds meaning in leisure. Jobs cannot be made meaningful or fulfilling, but work is a human necessity to produce goods and services and enable one to earn the money to buy them. Human fulfillment is found in leisure

activities where one has a choice regarding the use of his time, and can find pleasure in pursuing activities of interest to him personally. This is where a person can be creative and involved. Thus the less hours one can spend working and the more leisure time one has available the better. (Buchholz, 1976:1180)

Obviously antithetical to the traditional work ethic, it may be that for some, work is a means to a goal and not valuable as a goal in and of itself. The pursuit of leisure, made possible by industrialization, automation, and generally increasing standards of living, may offer individuals in contemporary society a source of meaning and purpose not found in modern work. It may also be that because work is not as closely linked to survival, justifying and rationalizing it as an inherently moral and vital activity is not necessary.

While a growth in the leisure industry would certainly support the thesis that a leisure ethic has emerged, considerable research (which is reviewed in the next chapter) exists which suggests that modern work continues to have meaning and value for many individuals. In addition, if meaning was only found in leisure, then work would be nothing more than an instrumental activity. One author finds this problematic and unrealistic:

Men cannot spend eight hours per day, forty hours each week, in activity which lacks all but instrumental meaning. They therefore try to find some significance in the work they must do. Workers may take pride, for example, in executing skillfully even the routine tasks to which they are assigned... They may derive a moral satisfaction from doing "an honest day's work," even if they feel, as some do, that they are being exploited by management.

They may try to squeeze out some sense of personal significance by identifying themselves with the product, standardized though it may be, and with the impersonal corporation in which they are anonymous, easily replaceable entities. (Chinoy, 1955:130-1)

Even in work that is routine or considered unskilled, then, individuals often find meaning and purpose, whether it be in creating the optimum routine or in gaining the respect of significant others (Moorhouse, 1987:241). Because work, even deskilled and dehumanized work, persists in having meaning for the individual, it is essential to more specifically examine the possible relationship between the structure of work and the culture of work. Similarly, to understand the potential effects of the transformed nature of modern work, an examination of how culture is constructed within the structural context of work is necessary.

#### The Relationship between Work Structure and Culture

It would be easiest and clearest to explore the contemporary work ethic if the source of beliefs about work came either from mass culture or the structure of work. Human behavior and belief of all sorts could be more easily understood if they were was clearly determined by some external variable. Our task in the social and behavioral sciences would be, quite directly, the identification of these external variables and a categorization of their predictable effects. However, human behavior and belief are not clear matters of determinism, no matter how unfortunate

that fact may be to the yearning of social sciences to predict as readily and with as much confidence as the natural sciences, whose methods we seek to emulate and whose accumulation of facts we strive to equal.

### Structuralist Constructivism

In the attempt to understand and explain human behavior and belief, sociological paradigms have relied, with differing emphasis, upon deterministic or constructivistic assumptions. Macro theories, such as structural-functionalism and conflict theory, tend to focus more upon the structure of society and how it shapes or impinges upon human behavior and thought. Micro theories such as symbolic interactionism focus on the construction of meaning and social structure by individuals. Yet, neither approach seems to satisfactorily combine macro and micro influences on behavior. While structuralism tends to ignore the indeterminacy of the situation, symbolic interactionism ignores that interactions take place in a particular context (Turner, 1991). Pure structuralism is overly deterministic and assigns individuals the unenviable status of role robots. Pure interactionism, though, is astructural in denying that interpretations of the situation are constrained to some degree by existing structures.

A more realistic perspective and one attuned to the dialectical relationship between the structure of work and

work beliefs, I believe, is Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism which suggests that people use their capacities for thought, reflection, and action to construct social phenomena, but they do so within the parameters of independently existing structures (Bourdieu, 1989). These structures are not deterministic but are "materials which may be used in different ways by agents for social and cultural construction" (Turner, 1991:508). These structures "exist independently of agents and guide their conduct, and yet they also create options, possibilities, and paths for creative actions and for the construction of new and unique cultural and social phenomena" (Turner, 1991:508).

Based upon this perspective, in the simplest sense beliefs and values about work may directly correlate with certain conditions of work. Because occupational structure provides parameters within which beliefs are constructed, to the extent that the conditions of work are similar, they will provide similar constraints and parameters within which beliefs and values are constructed. For example, in situations where autonomy is a prevalent condition of work, individuals may stress the value of self-expression in work. In occupations that provide service to others or the community there may be a greater emphasis on contribution in work values. Variation in constructed meanings may appear within the common parameters of similarly structured occupations, however, because in addition to work



experience, socialization and nonsocial roles and experiences affect work values (Kalleberg, 1977:141-2). Yet, the construction or reconstruction of work values is interdependent with changes in the wider social structure, and is not simply a matter of socialization or nonwork roles (Rose, 1985:20).

Using a broader perspective of structuralist constructivism, Bourdieu regards social class to be one of the preeminent structures influencing cultural interpretation. He suggests that "definitions of situations are neither neutral nor innocent, but are often ideological weapons that are very much a part of the objective class structure and the inherent conflicts of interests generated by such structures" (Bourdieu, 1977). Objective class location, as a position in the larger social structure, provides parameters, creates interests, includes constraints that allow for different social constructions to be used for classifying and organizing the social world. Social class not only, then, influences social beliefs and values, it may also have economic outcomes.

The collective subject (the class) constructs an objective environment (the class niche) from the resources made available to it by the system as a whole. The niche's structure then provides a feedback to the class actor and confronts the actor with a set of complex challenges to which it must respond. In doing so, the structure delimits the social and economic possibilities within which every life operates. (Harvey, 1993:21)

Class is at once subjective as a collective construction

within a larger social system and objective as, once constructed, it creates its own parameters within which individuals interpret and give meaning to their existence. Though social class and occupational status are far from synonymous, occupation is one of the central determinants of social class. From this view, patterns of belief may vary not only according to occupational structure because of similar conditions of work, but also according to occupational status insofar as the members of the status share a common class niche.

#### The Work Ethic as Ideology: Legitimation Crisis

Within the framework provided by structuralist constructivism, beliefs and values about work may be viewed, as has just been discussed, as constructed meanings within structural parameters (whether those parameters be conditions of work or social class). From this theoretical framework as well as perspectives provided by general Marxian theory, Geertz (1964), and Habermas (1975), work beliefs and values may also be viewed as ideological justifications -- again, either on the level of the individual or from the broader level of social class or the social system.

On the individual level, beliefs about work may be viewed as justifications that enable the worker to continue participating in an activity which they might otherwise find

to be meaningless. Ideological justifications may take several forms, either stressing the silver lining of certain aspects (conditions) of work, or by embracing a more traditional and generalized work ethic. That is, those with the least to gain from their jobs, those with jobs having low pay, little security, or the unemployed, may be more likely to embrace an ethic stressing the inherent moral value of work and noting the importance of work as an obligation to the community. By embracing a traditional work ethic, these workers are, in a way, establishing a basis of worth in society that their occupational status does not otherwise provide. By believing work is a moral duty, and by working and answering that duty, workers are defining themselves as responsible and vital members of the society.

Ideological justifications on the level of the individual may also serve to create a basis of commonality in a social and economic climate of increasing confusion and fragmentation.

Individuals find purpose and identity through ideology. When individuals share an ideology, they also share an identity and have a common purpose. A shared ideological commitment brings collective energies into focus. (Buchholz, 1983:52).

Ideologies can, then, provide positive meaning, a basis of social worth, a sense of community, and clarity in otherwise complex or confusing situations (Geertz, 1964:63).

Ideologies can and are, of course, also viewed as more

than individual justifications and interpretations of existing conditions. Ideologies, on a broader scale, can be seen as frameworks of ideas that integrate and synthesize, systems of symbols that provide information and meaning to complex or confusing cultural situations (Geertz, 1964:63), and as "a system of shared beliefs expressed symbolically that are a response to cultural, social, and psychological strain" (Buchholz, 1983:52). In that ideologies serve to integrate and make sense of different aspects of society, a more direct function of ideologies is to legitimize the institutions of a society and, through the rationale provided in the ideology, to make the functions of these institutions acceptable (Buchholz, 1983:52).

Regarding historical beliefs and values about work, the Protestant Work Ethic has been considered by some to be an ideology which supports capitalism (which can be characterized by the control of labor, profitability, commodification, consumerism, and contractual relations).

As an ideology, the Protestant Ethic served to legitimize the capitalist system by providing a moral justification to the pursuit of profit and the distribution of income that are a part of the system. The Protestant Ethic not only had behavioral implications...it also had ideological implications in providing a moral legitimacy for capitalism. (Buchholz, 1983:51)

To the extent that the Protestant Work Ethic had behavioral implications has been debated, yet as a system of beliefs and values which made sense of and justified the requisites of capitalism can be clearly seen.

Following this perspective, the contemporary work ethic could also be viewed as an ideology which gives meaning and justification to current economic systems and related institutions. Contemporary ideologies of work may approximate the traditional Protestant Work Ethic because we remain, though in an altered form, a capitalist society. Yet, in order for the traditional work ethic to be pervasive in American society, it must, as a symbolic system integrating the various institutions of society, continue to provide meaning and legitimation to the contemporary form of capitalism. As Habermas (1975:70,71) explains, "cultural traditions have their own, vulnerable conditions of reproduction....Traditions can retain legitimizing force only as long as they are not torn out of interpretive systems that guarantee continuity and identity."

In order, then, for the Protestant Work Ethic to have persisted (assuming it once existed) as an ideology legitimizing capitalism, it would have to continue to provide meaningful interpretation of rapidly and widely changing social, economic, and political conditions of society. When writers and analysts suggest that the work ethic has eroded, what they may be observing and reacting to is (using Habermas' (1975) concept in a narrow sense) a "legitimation crisis." Traditional beliefs and values about work may no longer be providing meaningful interpretation of or justification for contemporary economic and political

conditions.

A legitimation crisis can be predicted only if expectations that cannot be fulfilled either with the available quantity of value or, generally, with rewards conforming to the system are systematically produced. A legitimation crisis -- that is a discrepancy between the need for motives declared by the state, the educational system and the occupational system on the one hand, and the motivation supplied by the socio-cultural system on the other. (Habermas, 1975:74-5)

And because cultural traditions, such as the work ethic ideology, remain "living" only as long as they take shape by hermeneutic consciousness, traditions or ideologies may not be constructed and imposed upon cultural agents (Habermas, 1975:70)

Commercial production and administrative planning of symbols exhausts the normative force of counter-factual validity claims. The procurement of legitimation is self-defeating as soon as the mode of procurement is seen through. (Habermas, 1975:70)

More simply, cultural traditions, and those which serve as ideologies justifying existing institutions and social arrangements, must be constructed from within, not imposed from without, if they are to perform the function of providing meaning, motivation, integration, continuity, and cohesion.

The contemporary work ethic can, then, be explored from a variety of perspectives provided by structuralist constructivism. Most directly, work beliefs and values may vary according to occupational conditions as the meaning of work is constructed within structural parameters. Secondly, work ethics may vary according to occupational status as a

component of broader social class because, like other "objective" structures, social class defines possibilities and limits for the individual. Thirdly, contemporary work beliefs may be viewed as ideologies, most simply and directly as justifications or rationalizations of work constructed by the individual to make work activity meaningful. Work beliefs in a broader sense may also be seen as ideologies legitimizing contemporary economic systems. From this perspective, the work ethic may be in a state of crisis in that as a system of beliefs and values it may not provide adequate meaning or integration of various aspects of society.

#### Summary

A wide variety of possible explanations exist for patterns of work beliefs. It is quite likely that no single perspective can explain the correlates and causes of a contemporary work ethic. Yet, even if several ethics or beliefs exist in modern American society, certain patterns and relationships to cultural or structural variables should be able to be identified. The contemporary work ethic might be shaped by the broad cultural trends towards self-fulfillment and self-actualization as well as the occupational trend towards professionalization. Work beliefs and values may also be influenced by changes which have arisen due to the transformation of the economy. With

a structuralist constructivism approach, we may examine how beliefs are constructed within certain structural constraints and parameters. From this perspective, it may be likely that beliefs and values vary according to occupational conditions and status. The contemporary work ethic may also be examined as an ideology legitimizing existing economic and political systems.

A review of the literature on the traditional work ethic, the work ethic in contemporary society, and variations of work beliefs will provide a preliminary examination of these possible explanations as well as the empirical context to which the present research will contribute.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONTEMPORARY WORK BELIEFS

While there has yet to be a current and comprehensive sociological examination of the American work ethic, past studies of work beliefs can be illustrative of various aspects of the contemporary work ethic. In this chapter, the existing literature on work beliefs and the meaning of work is reviewed in order that we may begin answering the questions and assumptions commonly made about the work ethic in the United States. From the findings of these studies we may address whether the work ethic has in fact declined, as has been asserted by some observers, whether it has changed form with relation to cultural and structural changes in society, or whether the contemporary work ethic is a multitude of ethics which vary according to such variables as age, gender, social class, and occupation. A review of empirical literature regarding work values will provide a foundation upon which to build a more comprehensive exploration and analysis of contemporary work beliefs.

Because it is most often the jobless who are thought to lack a work ethic, and some assert this is why they are jobless in the first place, in the first section of this chapter empirical studies examining the work values of the poor and unemployed are reviewed. On one hand, evidence of

a strong work ethic can be seen in the vehemency of the response towards the poor and jobless in contemporary American society. On the other hand, studies of the poor and unemployed provide evidence of positive work values (Goodwin, 1972; Levinson, 1970; Podell, 1968). Perspectives asserting the opposite, that the poor and jobless lack the proper motivation to find and maintain employment, tend to rely on individual-based analysis and downplay the influence of situational factors -- such as lack of opportunity and do not, therefore, offer a comprehensive analysis of work values. Finally, in this section, reflecting the stigmatization of the poor, fewer studies have been done on the middle-class unemployed. Some existing research does exist, however, and similar to their lower-status counterparts, evidence of positive work values is shown to exist (Newman, 1988).

In the second section of the chapter findings of studies which have examined the work values of the employed are reviewed. It is not only the unemployed which are often accused of lacking the proper will to work, but also much of the work force. In fact, this is the basis for the explanation some critics offer for the decreased prosperity of the American economy. Contrary to this view, however, research of contemporary workers shows positive work values, many time values reflecting a traditional work ethic emphasizing the importance and centrality of work

(Cherrington, 1980; Furnham, 1990). In a further challenge to these critics, who deride American workers in comparison to the workers in other nations (particularly Japan and Germany, the United States' main competitors in the global, post-industrial economy), American workers are shown to espouse as positive of work values as their British counterparts (Mann, 1986), who, in turn, are shown to have more positive work values than their European counterparts (Nichols, 1986). Among the employed as well as the unemployed, individuals in contemporary society hold positive work values. These work values contain elements of a traditional work ethic, such as the importance and value of work, and include aspects more specific to contemporary society, such as an emphasis on self-fulfillment.

Having reviewed previous studies of work values and having established that Americans hold positive views towards work, in the final section studies which have examined variations in work values and belief are reviewed. As was discussed in Chapter III, because individuals construct meaning within certain structural contexts, work values are likely to vary according to occupation. While there have been few comprehensive studies of this possibility, research has shown some difference in work beliefs according to occupational status (Friedmann and Havinghurst, 1977; Maccoby and Terzi, 1981; Mann, 1986). In the context of this framework, different types of beliefs

have also been shown to exist and these are summarized in this third section (Dickson and Buchholz, 1979). Finally, as with many social phenomena, variations according to other demographic variables, such as religion, age, gender, education, and political and economic conservatism have been empirically examined and will be reviewed.

A summary of previous research, as presented in this chapter, on the work values of the unemployed, the employed, and variations in beliefs about work contributes to this dissertation research in two ways. First, the findings of previous studies can be used to aid in the interpretation and analysis of the present study -- that is, they establish a context, a basis of comparison for the findings of this research. Secondly, a review these studies helps to more clearly identify the contribution this dissertation may make to the existing research on contemporary work values.

#### Do the Poor and Unemployed Lack a Work Ethic?

The most frequently cited examples of the evidence of the decline of the work ethic are the poor and unemployed. For if the work ethic were alive and well, would we find so many apparently able-bodied individuals living on welfare and without jobs? Examining the work values of those who are not working is a useful starting point, then, to the broader review of work values in contemporary society.

## Stigmatization of Jobless: Evidence of Work Values

The mere fact that the poor and jobless are accused of moral impropriety by the status of their worklessness is evidence in itself of the existence of traditional values about work. According to the traditional ethic, to work is to serve God, one's community, or simply to take responsibility for one's family or self. Not to work constitutes a shunning of these responsibilities, a shirking of one's moral duties or civic obligations, and implies that the character of the non-working is less than divine or socially desirable. The thesis of the work ethic creates the antithesis of nonwork. If work is a virtue and the means by which men and women earn their position in society, the poor and unemployed are without virtue and place themselves outside even the fringes of social righteousness. As Weber himself wrote of Protestantism and the work ethic:

(The) consciousness of divine grace of the elect and holy was accompanied by an attitude towards the sins of one's neighbor, not of sympathetic understanding based on consciousness of one's own weakness, but of hatred and contempt for him as an enemy of God bearing the signs of eternal damnation. (Weber, 1958:122)

And as if we needed reminding of the repugnance of worklessness, then President Nixon said of the work ethic:

[It is] so ingrained in the American character that most of us consider it immoral to be lazy or slothful. America's competitive spirit, the work ethic of this people, is alive and well on Labor Day, 1971. The dignity of work, the value of achievement, the morality of self-reliance --

none of these is going out of style.<sup>6</sup>

The stigmatization of the poor and unemployed by the nonpoor and employed in contemporary society represents such moral or civic indigence, which may indicate that the traditional work ethic, in all of its fervor, is alive and well.

#### Studies of the Work Values of the Poor and Unemployed

But do the poor and unemployed really want to work? During the 1960's War on Poverty and in the following assessment of social welfare programs, this was a hotly debated issue. Conservatives, in an attempt to show that Great Society programs actually accentuated the very problems they were designed to alleviate, were quick to assert that expanded welfare benefits decreased the motivation to work (Murray, 1984; Mead, 1986). According to this perspective, higher unemployment was the result of overly expanded welfare benefits since 1965. Yet welfare benefits actually dropped 20% during that period and rises in unemployment were due to an increase in the labor force and general economic recession, not the voluntary exit of individuals from the labor market (Katz, 1989:153).

Considerable research exists supporting the view that

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<sup>6</sup> *Time* magazine reported Nixon's speech to be full of "muddled logic" and a later article in an educational journal said of Nixon's pronouncement: "The calls from the White House to solve our problems by simply having everyone return to the good old American work ethic show no recognition of what the trouble is all about" (Smarr and Escoll, 1974:83).

the poor and unemployed do in fact hold positive work values. In a 1968 survey of recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), when asked "would you prefer to work or stay home", 70% said they would rather work (Podell, 1968:17). Another study asked a similar question in a nationwide study of women who had applied for or were currently on AFDC and found that 80% said they would rather work if they could find a steady job (Levinson, 1970:16). In the classic ethnography *Tally's Corner*, Liebow (1967) showed how apparently "lazy" street corner men may value work, yet because they only qualified for menial, unskilled jobs, they did not attach much self-importance to work and sought self-fulfillment elsewhere. The implication from this example is that "poor men probably do identify work with self-respect, but environmental circumstances stand in the way of their obtaining decent jobs, and they withdraw from extensive work activity" (Goodwin, 1972:5). This viewpoint and related value system arises out of a realistic appraisal of reality and may serve to lessen the impact and stigma of low-status and joblessness (Hyman, 1966:488). The apparently "lax" work behavior of the unemployed poor, then, is not necessarily antithetical to the work ethic, but may be influenced by situational factors such as the availability of self-respecting work.

Motivational studies of the poor and unemployed have attempted to explain work behavior with psychological

factors such as achievement motivation. One study did find a relationship between low achievement motivation and job hunting behavior of the unemployed, though it did so with a small sample size and questionable analyses (Sheppard and Belitsky, 1966). Another study analyzing the relationship between achievement motivation and the work activity of the unemployed was able to find only a low correlation even with "stacked" scaling (Indik, 1966:73). While psychological explanations of the causes of unemployment are usually attractive to society as simple "blaming the victim" explanations, they are not able to account for more complex environmental factors which may be affecting poverty and unemployment. Psychological orientations may reveal certain potentials and dispositions for work, but they do not determine action in the non-psychological environment. Situational conditions may provide the context for the potential realization of psychological orientations, but at the same time influence these orientations:

There is a complex and continuing interaction of orientations, actions, and changes in situations brought about by the actions. People experiencing different situational conditions can be expected to show certain differences in orientations.  
(Goodwin, 1972:9,10)

#### Ambiguous Relationship between Work Values and Employment

Despite the tendency to favor individual-based explanations of social problems such as poverty and unemployment, the issue of causality among the variables of



achievement orientation, environment and action remains unclear. Are individuals, particularly poor individuals, unemployed because of low achievement motivation or do they have low achievement orientation because they are unable to be employed? This causal ambiguity is compounded by the indeterminant relationship between orientations and actions. According to the feedback theory of action, "psychological orientations influence actions but are not the only determinants. Environmental conditions also affect action" (Goodwin, 1972:89). It is as likely that for the poor a "lack of work activity" among the unemployed is the result of a lack of availability of meaningful work and of people losing interest in work "when they discover that their efforts do not lead to success" (Goodwin, 1972:8). Regardless, then, of the appeal of blaming the individual in the case of poverty and unemployment, using lack of individual motivation as a primary cause for unemployment is weakened by the nature of the relationship between orientation, environment and action.

The relationship between individual beliefs and environmental experience has also been found to be ambiguous in sociological research. Several studies have found little association between work ethic attitudes and labor market success (Morgan, 1974; Duncan, 1979; Duncan and Morgan, 1981) leading one researcher to state that there is "little evidence that individual attitudes and behavior patterns

affect individual economic success" (Morgan, 1974:339). At the same time, other research has shown the opposite relationship between individual beliefs and economic behavior (Adams, 1976; Parnes, 1976; Kalachek and Raines, 1976; Andrisani, 1977). In a study of teenagers, those who perceived little payoff to hard work had lower earnings and longer periods of unemployment (Becker and Hills, 1980). Negative attitudes towards work have also been shown to be associated with disparities in occupational attainment and promotion (Andrisani, 1978). Findings from these studies are said to suggest "strong support to the importance of attitudes in labor market behavior" (Adams, 1976:74).

Similar to the causal conundrum of the relationship between psychological orientations and work behavior, the association between more general work attitudes and labor market experience is unclear.

The causal link between an individual's commitment to the work ethic and his or her economic success in the labor market is intuitively plausible. No less so is the belief that an influence may flow in the opposite direction as well -- that is, that favorable labor market experiences may encourage (and unfavorable experiences discourage) commitment to the work ethic. (Andrisani and Parnes, 1983:112)

While differences in various research findings may also be due to sample, method, or measurement procedures, the fundamental chicken and egg question of which came first, work attitudes or labor market experience, remains to be answered.

Yet there is some research that suggests labor market experience has a stronger affect on work ethic beliefs than does initial work attitudes on economic success. Using a sample of out-of-school youths with less than 13 years of education, who are most likely to experience employment difficulties, it was found that variation in work experience among comparable youths was systematically related to the strength or weakness of work ethic beliefs (Andrisani, 1980). More specifically, the number of weeks unemployed, number of weeks employed, wages, changes in wages, occupational status, and changes in occupational status have been shown to have effects on youth's commitment to the work ethic (Andrisani and Parnes, 1983:113). These and related findings have led researchers to suggest that the effect of work activity on work attitudes is substantial and may be becoming stronger than the impact of work beliefs on work activity (Stathan and Rhoton, 1981:166).

#### Work Values of the Middle-Class Unemployed

Interestingly, and indicative of the stigma of poverty in the United States, fewer studies of motivation and work ethic attitudes have been undertaken among the unemployed middle class. One study which included unemployed middle-class managers and executives shows that the experience of unemployment may be different for white collar and blue-collar workers depending on the extent of their belief in

"meritocratic individualism" and their ability to identify forces beyond individual control (Newman, 1988:65,76).

Although same forces transforming the U.S. economy are likely to lead equally to blue-collar and white-collar unemployment, they are also likely to be expressed and interpreted differently depending upon one's occupational status. Blue-collar workers are more likely to become unemployed because of plant shut downs. Their response to this situation offers an interesting modification of the American work ethic. While they are likely to adhere to the traditional ethic that hard work, especially steady hard work, brings success and security, they do not hold themselves responsible for their own fate (Newman, 1988:198). They may blame other individuals or racial/ethnic groups, but as long as they are working hard, they are not at fault -- their fate is determined by management.

Middle-status workers, on the other hand, espouse more of an individualistic meritocratic philosophy wherein not only does hard work and ability equal success, but they and they alone are responsible for their own economic well-being. Adding to this perspective is the business press and corporate culture. In the face of the same economic forces which shut down factories and laid off blue-collar workers, the business press conveys the message that layoffs are decisive moments of corporate agility:

They are not simply the unfortunate outcome of mergers, cost-cutting campaigns, or economic downturns. On the contrary, layoffs provide the opportunity for management to implement the Darwinian Maxim, survival of the fittest, and summon the courage to dismiss the incompetent....[The business press and corporate culture] steadfastly avoid the conclusion that the well-being of particular firms, or the free enterprise system in general is sometimes contingent on junking substantial numbers of loyal, hardworking employees -- that success for some is contingent on the hardship of others. Instead, layoffs must be treated as deserved (the result of deadwood, incompetence, and so on) (Newman, 1988:70-71).

Whereas a belief in meritocracy allows middle-class workers to revel in their individually accomplished success, it boomerangs when they face unemployment. For if their economic situation, as their values have instructed and the business culture has reinforced, is a result of their individual ability and effort and they now are unemployed, they have nothing to blame but their own incompetence and sloth. The idea of a meritocracy is "so deeply embedded in...beliefs and convictions that it leaves no satisfying refuge" (Newman, 1988:232). The result of this irony is that the middle-class unemployed hold steadfastly to the belief that hard work, in this case in searching for a job, will pay off. For even though this belief erodes their self-worth as their experience of unemployment wears on, it has been the basis by which they have defined themselves and their place in society.

Newman (1988:77) considers the fact that the unemployed, both blue-collar and white-collar, continue to espouse positive work views as a testament to the

"rightness" of this cultural view. Regarding the effects of pervasive and lasting unemployment or the often ensuing experience of downward mobility, she also warns that:

The hidden cost of downward mobility is reflected in diminished attachment to the job and erosion of loyalty to the firm. If employees truly embrace a free-market ideology, they will look out for no one but themselves, and treat the work place as a resource to be exploited just until a better job is found. (Newman, 1988:240)

This perspective and the evidence presented in this section suggests that currently blue-collar and white-collar workers seem to be maintaining some commitment to the work ethic despite their experiences with unemployment but if organizations continue to respond to increasing global competition with downsizing and shutdowns, the nature of the work ethic may change as workers respond in kind to changes in the structure of work -- namely increased unemployment and insecurity.

Because the motivation to work is often directly linked to one's employment and success, if an erosion of the work ethic had occurred it would be most present among the unemployed and poverty-stricken. However, the evidence presented in this section suggests the contrary, that the poor and jobless do hold positive values of work. In the next section, studies illuminating the work values of the employed are reviewed.

## Beliefs about Work among the Employed

The general assumption that workers of the past were more committed to work than the contemporary work force set the stage for questions about the relationship between motivation and employment and its affects on joblessness and poverty in the 1960s. One study of workers conducted in 1955 supports this general assumption by illustrating a high level of commitment to work. When asked if they would keep working if they didn't have to, 80% of respondents said they would (Morse and Weiss, 1955:192). Of those who would continue working, 32% would do so simply to keep occupied, 10% because work is considered to be healthy or good for people, and 9% because they enjoyed the work. Without work, 14% would feel lost and "go crazy" while 10% would not know what to do with themselves (Morse and Weiss, 1955:192). In addition, if the individuals did not work, 31% would most miss the people they worked with, 25% would lose a feeling of doing something and would feel restless, 12% would miss the work they did, and 9% would lose the feeling of being worthwhile and of doing something important (Morse and Weiss, 1955:194). Clearly, work fulfills certain functions, such as a feeling of being tied to the larger society, of having something to do, and of having a purpose in life, that cannot be as readily met in non-work activity (Morse and Weiss, 1955:191).

## Traditional Work Values among Contemporary Workers

Contemporary research of individual's commitment to work show notably similar findings. A study of American workers has found that traditional work ethic beliefs such as pride in work, the moral importance of work, and the inherent value of work regardless of external reward are pervasive in contemporary U.S. society. The moral importance of work was rated as very high: On a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), workers averaged the following responses: "a good indication of a man's worth is how well he does his job" (5.82), "working hard makes a man a better person" (5.46), "work should be one of the most important parts of a person's life" (4.92), and "rich people should feel an obligation to work even if they do not need the money" (4.08) (Cherrington, 1980:40). In very strong support of a belief in the traditional work ethic in modern American society, on the same rating scale (1-7) the importance of pride in craftsmanship was rated very highly. The average responses of workers were: "a worker should feel a sense of pride in his work" (6.61), "a worker should do a decent job whether or not his supervisor is around" (6.60), "even if you dislike your work you should do your best" (6.00), and "there is nothing wrong with doing a poor job at work if a man can get away with it" (1.51) (Cherrington, 1980:40).

The same study also found, in support of the



traditional work ethic, intrinsic features of work are regarded as more important than extrinsic ones (Cherrington, 1980). On a scale ranging from 0 (extremely undesirable) to 100 (extremely desirable), workers on average rated intrinsic rewards as more desirable than extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic rewards were rated: "feeling pride in work" (86.6), "feeling more worthwhile" (80.4), "being recognized and gaining the respect of others" (78.7), "being of service to others" (78.3); compared to the rating of extrinsic rewards as "getting more money or a larger pay increase" (81.2), "receiving more fringe benefits" (68.9), and "being promoted more quickly" (68) (Cherrington, 1980:40).

#### Work Values in Other Industrialized Countries

Studies in other industrialized countries have found similar results. In Britain, when some writers have lamented about the loss of the work ethic and have blamed worker values for economic difficulties, they have been accused by others of using a post-hoc explanation with little empirical support (Furnham, 1990:127). In one study, when asked if they would continue working even if they had no financial need, 72% of British workers responded that they would (Mann, 1986:2). In the same study of British attitudes, work was considered to be much more than just a means to earn a living by 70% of the sample (Mann, 1986:2,3). These findings have led one researcher to blame

poor management practices for the decline in British economic prosperity stating:

It has been seen that there is a tendency at work among students of labor productivity to implicate British workers in deficiencies that could sometimes just as well derive from management. High inventories are attributed to strikes. Lack of planning is attributed to the amount of time British managements have to spend on the shop floor; to no investment; to an anticipation of what British workers might do in the future, and to the idea that their level of effort does not justify the cost of further outlay....At the very least, it really is high time this possibility is given something more like equal prominence, and also the proposition upon which it depends, that British management maybe deficient in its organization... (Nichols, 1986:68)

As passionate as this defense of the British worker and attack on British management may be, it, like the argument to the contrary, is also without substantial empirical evidence (Furnham, 1990:12). Yet, in comparison to ten other European countries, the British have been shown to have more pride in their work, find more enjoyment in it, and it is more central to their lives (Abrams et al., 1985:173).

It is important to note, however, that while most workers in Britain and the United States report that they would continue to work regardless of economic necessity, the reasons they would do so vary. In addition, while their responses indicate generally positive beliefs about work, the specific beliefs and values of individuals differ. The meaning of work and associated beliefs about its importance is influenced by personality, socialization experience, and

the general type of work an individual performs (Morse and Weiss, 1955:196). Because of these factors, we may see variation of beliefs about work according to the following variables: occupation, degree of work satisfaction, social class, age, gender, religion, and political orientation. The next section reviews previous studies that have examined the relationship between these variables and work ethic beliefs.

### Variations in Beliefs about Work

Consistently, in studies of work behavior, the overwhelming percentage that reported that they would continue working is indicative of the meaning and value that most individuals associate with work. Yet while work has shown to be generally important to individuals and that most would work regardless of economic necessity, there is considerable variation in the reasons for working and the importance of work. In order to understand work values and the work ethic, it is vital to acknowledge the different meanings individuals attach to their work. Values and beliefs about work are associated with these meanings of work and establish the groundwork upon which the work ethic can be examined.

### Variations in Work Values According to Occupation

Research comparing the work beliefs of steel workers,

salespeople, coal miners, skilled craftsmen and physicians found differences in the meaning of work according to occupation (Friedmann and Havinghurst, 1977:173). Steel workers ranked money (28%)<sup>7</sup> and routine (28%) as most important while salespeople considered purposeful activity (26%), routine (21%), and association with others (20%) to be the most important aspects of work. Coal miners were most varied in their response with the following ranking of work characteristics: routine (19%), money (18%), prestige/respect of others (18%), association with others (18%), and usefulness (16%). Skilled craftsmen considered self-respect (30%) and purposeful activity (28%) as the central characteristics in the meaning of work while physicians ranked service to others (32%) and association with others (19%) as most important (Friedmann and Havinghurst, 1977:173).

In research comparing the broader categories of white-collar and blue-collar workers, differences were also found in what was considered important in work (Maccoby and Terzi, 1981:37). Blue-collar workers ranked good pay first, then enough help and equipment to do the work well, job security, ample information to do work, friendly co-workers and then interesting work as important. White-collar workers, on the other hand, ranked interesting work most important, followed

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<sup>7</sup> Numbers in parentheses are the percentage of respondents who ranked the work characteristic first in the importance of work.

by the opportunity to develop special abilities, then information, authority, help and equipment, and friendly co-workers. Good pay was ranked 10th, job security 12th, and fringe benefits 17th (Maccoby and Terzi, 1981:37).

In a study of British workers, owners and managers are more likely to believe work is more than just earning a living than are those in working class jobs. Eighty-seven percent of owners and managers agreed with this statement compared to 54% of semi- and unskilled workers (Mann, 1986:3). Sixty-six percent of owners and managers would do their best work regardless of pay while only 57% of semi- and unskilled workers said that they would. In another study, of those reporting that they would work even if they did not need the money (which was 80%), 61% of those in middle-class occupations and 68% of professionals would continue working in the same job compared to 40% of individuals working in the trades, 34% in working-class positions, and 16% in service occupations (Morse and Weiss, 1955:197). More specific than class distinctions, in work that offers autonomy, respondents were more likely to define work as an activity that was necessary but not enjoyed while individuals in jobs with little status or freedom defined work simply as scheduled or paid activity (Weiss and Kahn, 1960:150). Even within the same occupation with similar tasks, laboratory workers differed in work values depending upon whether they were professionals or technicians (Boggs,

1963:214).

Clearly, then, the meaning of work varies according to the type of occupation one has, the skills that are involved in it, and the status or position in the organization or society (Parker, 1983:29).

To the typical man in a middle-class occupation, working means having a purpose, gaining a sense of accomplishment, expressing himself. He feels that not working would leave him aimless and without opportunity to contribute. To the typical man in a working class occupation, working means having something to do. He feels that not working would leave him no adequate outlet for physical activity; he would just be sitting or lying around. (Morse and Weiss, 1955:198)

In middle-class occupations, work is defined as something interesting to do and as something that provides an opportunity to accomplish and contribute. Individuals in working class jobs defined work simply as activity (Parker, 1983:28).

Because "work" is not a monolithic term understood in the same way by all who perform it, the "work ethic" may also be defined differently and embraced differently depending upon occupation, occupational status, and satisfaction with work. The traditional work ethic may vary at different levels of an organization and in different types of work -- that is, according to status and occupation (Furnham, 1990:167). One study found significant differences in work ethics between blue-collar and white-collar workers, with blue-collar workers having lower Protestant work ethic scores (Peters and Rudolph, 1980:250).

It has also been found, in addition to job and status, that Protestant work ethic beliefs are positively correlated with satisfaction (Blood, 1969:457). Whereas middle and upper-status work has been shown to provide greater sources of intrinsic satisfaction, lower-status work is more often reported to offer extrinsic sources of satisfaction (Gruenberg, 1980). Because measures of the traditional Protestant work ethic include primarily intrinsic characteristics of work, that work is valuable and satisfying in and of itself, white-collar workers will consistently be shown to have stronger work ethics.

However, this perspective is not only limited in scope, it is not supported by other research. If different types of work ethic beliefs are included, we find that values about work differ in kind, not simply in strength.

#### Different Types of Work Ethic Beliefs

Dickson and Buchholz (1979:238-9) included 5 different belief systems in their study of work values:

*Traditional Work Ethic* -- Work is good in itself. It gives a person dignity and makes them useful to society. By working hard a person can be self-reliant. Success is directly linked to effort and wealth should not be wasted. (Weber, 1958)

*Organizational Belief System* -- Work has meaning only with regard to the group or organization and to the extent

that it directly contributes to one's status and career advancement. Work is a means to meet organizational or personal interests. Success is dependent upon the ability to conform to group norms and knowing how to play the game, not effort and hard work. (Whyte, 1956; Galbraith, 1967)

*Marxist-related Beliefs* -- Productive activity is central to human fulfillment and potential. Man needs to work in order to fulfill physical needs as well as the deepest human need to produce. Through work, man creates self and contact with others. Presently, man is exploited in work and workers are alienated. (Bottomore, 1963; Coute, 1967)

*Humanistic Belief System* -- Work is how man discovers and fulfills himself. Individual growth and development on the job is more important than productivity. Work must be made meaningful and fulfilling and must allow individuals to discover and reach their potential. (Fromm, 1968; Maslow, 1954)

*Leisure Ethic* -- Work has no meaning in and of itself but only with regard to leisure. Jobs, though necessary for producing goods and providing wages, cannot be made meaningful. Fulfillment is found in leisure activities which, unlike work, are chosen freely by the individual. Work is to be performed only to enable leisure. (Bell, 1970)

Based upon these groupings of work beliefs, the authors



compared the scores of blue-collar workers and managers in the United States and in Scotland (Dickson and Buchholz, 1979:244). Contrary to findings of other research, blue-collar workers in the United States had significantly higher scores on the traditional work ethic than did top managers, though it is possible that differences in results are due to sample differences or operationalization of traditional work ethic beliefs. Top managers had significantly greater belief in the humanistic belief system than did blue-collar workers in the United States. As has already been discussed, middle or upper-status work offers greater intrinsic satisfaction and therefore is more likely to provide avenues for personal fulfillment and growth than is lower-status work. Consistent with equity theory, then, low job rewards (low participation and high exploitation) lead to low value placed on hard work and more emphasis on fulfilling needs away from the job (Adams and Jacobsen, 1964). While blue-collar workers in the United States scored higher on the leisure ethic than did top managers, the difference was not statistically significant, as it was between workers and managers in Scotland. The authors explain this finding as a result of the perceived opportunity of mobility in the United States, whereas workers in Scotland do not as readily link work and success and are instead more likely to view work as a means for greater leisure enjoyment (Dickson and Buchholz, 1979:247).

In both Scotland and the United States, blue-collar workers scored higher on the Marxist belief system than did top managers, who are less likely to feel alienated and exploited. "Greater feelings of exploitation and lack of participation are associated with...a lower value placed on hard work and independence" (Dickson and Buchholz, 1979:246). Yet managers and blue-collar workers alike in both countries placed the highest endorsement on the humanistic ethic and the lowest endorsement on the traditional work ethic (Dickson and Buchholz, 1979:246). So while specific occupational, and in some more subtle instances, national differences can be found, there appears to be a universal (trans-occupational and trans-national) trend towards viewing work as a means of self-fulfillment and less as a matter of diligence, sacrifice, and obligation.

#### Other Bases of Variation in Work Values

Although occupational variation in work values and beliefs is the focus of the present study, previous research has found other important variables to be associated, though not always consistent, with work ethic beliefs. These variables include: religion, age, gender, education, and political and economic conservatism.

Some research has shown religion (more specifically, religious self-identification, ethnic background, religious

beliefs, and church attendance) to be significantly positively related to Protestant work ethic beliefs (Beit-Hallahmi, 1979; Ray, 1982). Yet another study concluded that there is no difference in work beliefs or values between Protestants and Catholics and, in fact, there is more variation within each religious group than between them (Greeley, 1964). Similarly inconsistent results have been found regarding age. While in some studies age has been shown to be positively correlated with traditional work ethic beliefs (Aldag and Brief, 1975), in others no significant relationship was found (Buchholz, 1978; Furnham, 1982). Studies of differences in belief according to gender have been equally ambiguous and inconclusive (Albee, 1977; Furnham, 1982). So, "although there is a tendency for older, lower-middle class people, with a conservative outlook to endorse Protestant work ethic beliefs more than younger, middle-class or radical people, many other variables mediate this relationship" (Furnham, 1987:95).

Education and professional training has also been shown to be associated with traditional work ethic beliefs. Formal education is negatively associated with Protestant work ethic beliefs (Furnham, 1987:97). While these beliefs and values are strongly influenced by socialization experience, despite early socialization in traditional Protestant work ethic, increased education may modify or reduce these values. Political and economic conservatism,

primarily the belief in the free enterprise system which stresses individualism, is positively related with the Protestant work ethic (Furnham, 1987:97). Though voting preference is not significantly correlated, a pattern existed wherein more right wing, conservative voters endorsed the Protestant work ethic more than leftist, socialist voters. In addition, and related to general characteristics of blue-collar and white-collar work, those with an internal locus of control had significantly stronger Protestant work ethic beliefs (Furnham, 1987:97).

Though research findings are not entirely consistent, probably due to the subtlety of the variable relationships and the conceptualization of work ethic beliefs, the typical Protestant work ethic believer could be characterized as:

Conservative in his or her views, have an internal locus of control and to be concerned with self-control. He or she is likely to hold values that are concerned with achievement and ambition, but be against pleasure and relaxation....The believer in the Protestant work ethic is self-reliant, hard-working, socially, morally and economically conservative, and therefore believes in the importance of laws and authority enshrined in rules, duties and obligations. (Furnham, 1987:95,103)

Yet can it be concluded that those who do not fit this characterization or who do not score highly on Protestant work ethic beliefs lack a work ethic?

#### Summary

Previous research has illuminated many patterns of contemporary work beliefs and has shown that a variety of

beliefs about work exist in contemporary society. While previous studies have examined correlates of work beliefs such as age, gender, and general occupational status, they have not attempted to link individual work beliefs to cultural and structural change in society or more specific, yet related, changes in the nature of work. In other words, while the research on work beliefs has been informative and, as is discussed in a previous chapter, the theories analyzing such beliefs are insightful, the two have seldom been linked in a single research project, making analysis sometimes haphazard and incomplete. In addition to exploring the nature of the contemporary work ethic, then, in this dissertation I will attempt to make such a link. The next section describes the research procedure of the study.

## CHAPTER V

### METHOD AND SAMPLE

In order to examine the possible effects of cultural and structural change on beliefs about work as well as variations in work beliefs, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted and 177 open-ended questionnaires were collected. In the following sections of this chapter, an explanation of the interview guide and questionnaire is provided with reference to the specific research questions. In addition, the strategies used for selecting a sample and a description of the sample is included. This description consists of a list of all the occupations included in the sample, a listing and explanation of the occupational groupings that are used for analysis (status, type, degree of professionalization), and sample frequencies according to demographic variables (gender, age, marital status, race, region, union membership, education, and number of years in occupation). Finally, the strategy used for analyzing the qualitative data collected in this research is described. This strategy provides a framework for the interpretation of descriptive findings which is presented in the following three chapters. An analysis of these findings, a reporting of individuals' descriptions of their work values, is conducted in Chapter IX.

## Method

An examination and analysis of contemporary work ethic could be done in various ways. One could conduct a survey of a national, representative sample of workers, perform a statistical analysis of their Likert-scale responses, and generalize from statistically significant relationships. Such deductive research requires, however, the detailed and specified operationalization of concepts and ideas. That is, conceptions of mass culture, of work structure, and of potential beliefs about work would have to be approximated accurately in order to devise an appropriate and useful measurement instrument. Deductive methodology of this kind is best, then, when there is prior knowledge of the area of study and when concepts can be appropriately represented by a set of standardized questions.

On the other hand, an inductive methodological approach is best suited for research which is, by nature, more exploratory and when the concepts involved in the study cannot easily be translated into standardized measures. Feminist theory has brought attention to this approach by highlighting the value of "letting the material speak to you" (Keller, 1982:601). Qualitative methods allow for the emergence of agent-based meaning and interpretation rather than the sometimes imposed theoretical and interpretive framework of deductive research. Qualitative research has advantages and disadvantages:

Such an approach tends to shy away from the sweeping generalization, the big statement; but it is also in its power to puncture inflated or overstated ideological points of view, to bring to the surface hidden or obscured meanings, and to offer images, interpretations, and facts that, if nothing else, will allow an informed debate. (Kunda, 1992:23)

The ability to generalize is limited with qualitative methods because of the necessarily small and statistically non-representative sample size. If generalizability is a goal of the research, quantitative studies which can achieve representativeness are best to use. But when the goal of the research is to explore the deeper or fuller meanings and to represent the depths of these interpretations, then inductive methods are more appropriate.

Because it is the focus of this research to explore such meanings, behind and underneath the beliefs about work in contemporary society, more than it is to generalize and make statistically significant statements about the pervasiveness of certain beliefs among the population of American workers, qualitative methods are herewith used. More specifically, in order to explore the nature of contemporary work beliefs and the possible link between the structure of work (division of labor and hierarchy of occupations) and the culture of work (beliefs about the meanings of work) as well as the general nature of the contemporary work ethic, I gathered data through in-depth interviews, supplemented by open-ended questionnaires. (See Appendix A for a copy of the interview guide and Appendix B



for a copy of the questionnaire.) Open-ended questionnaires do not providing as much in-depth information, but allow me to speak with greater certainty regarding patterns of work beliefs as well as create a larger sample, that is, a larger context for understanding, to facilitate non-statistical generalization.

### Sample Selection

Interviews were obtained and questionnaires distributed in a variety of ways. In most cases, "cold" contacts were made by approaching places of work of the selected occupation and requesting interviews and/or the distribution of questionnaires. For example, to gather information from doctors, nurses, and office support workers, I visited seven medical offices and with permission of the office manager left a letter describing my research and copies of questionnaires (as well as individual envelopes to assure anonymity). I also asked for people to contact me if they would be willing or interested in being interviewed. I then returned to the offices two to three weeks later and collected any questionnaires that had been completed. In most cases, this approach was successful for gathering completed questionnaires. In some cases, particularly for lawyers and doctors, this method also led to several interviews. (When this was the case and an interview was conducted, the questionnaire was not used.)

In order to attain some regional variation, I also spoke with the public relations officer of organizations in the northeast and the midwest. In some cases, permission was given to me to mail questionnaires to their organization for individuals in selected occupations to complete. Police officers and manufacturing workers in the midwest completed questionnaires as did secondary and elementary teachers and nurses in the northeast.

In all other cases, I used contacts of acquaintances for certain occupations, seldomly using the same contact for more than one interview per occupation. Snowball sampling, though effective for identifying possible participants, was infrequently used because of the small number of cases within each occupation. If the sample were collected using this procedure, it would be likely that values and beliefs would have been affected by personal associations as much as the research variables in question. Instead, a mixture of quota and available subjects sampling methods was used. In filling certain occupational sampling categories, I made contacts with individuals in the occupations included in the sample through other contacts or acquaintances.

While these techniques have created a relatively diverse and appropriate sample (the representativeness of which is discussed in the next section), other considerations must be taken into account. Even though all research involves voluntary participation, willingness to

complete a questionnaire or especially to be interviewed about beliefs and values about work may be related to those very beliefs or values. That is, those who agree to express their views concerning work may do so because they have positive thoughts about work in general. Recounting their attitudes, beliefs, and values about work is therefore not an unpleasant experience.

On the other hand, as seemed to occur with unionized manufacturing workers in the midst of a nasty contract negotiation, the opportunity to express one's views about work may be interpreted as and taken as an opportunity to reiterate union concerns and demands. The implications of these considerations are that the sample is likely to be overrepresentative of people who feel either positively or extremely negatively about work or their jobs. The sample does not, then, perfectly represent all workers. These data collection considerations, however, do not render the information gained useless nor could another sampling procedure have eliminated them. The considerations should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings and will be kept in mind when discussing the implications.

#### Interview Guide and Questionnaire

To review from Chapter 1, the interview guide and open-ended questionnaire were designed to provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1) How might the contemporary work ethic be characterized? How is it similar to or different from the traditional work ethic?
- 2) Do beliefs and values about work vary according to occupational status, type of work (blue collar or white collar), or conditions of work?

Questions 1 and 2 in the interview guide and questions 1-9 in the questionnaire provide background information and demographic variables, some of which are specifically used for analysis (occupation, gender, age, length of time in occupation) and others which are used to describe sample characteristics (education, income, race, region of residence, and union membership). Education and income are also used in addition to occupation to determine the occupational status of the respondent. Responses to these items will be used to address research question 2.

Questions 3 in the interview guide and items 10-13 in the questionnaire are designed to measure basic conditions of work. Since it is the workers' experience of the conditions of work that influence the meaning of work for them, it is important to seek and understand the worker's perspective rather than "objectively" discussing the conditions of their work. For example, custodians may be more likely to report having autonomy than doctors because of the way the work is structured: custodians have certain areas to clean, but they may do so according to their own routine whereas doctors working in a practice with other doctors perhaps have little to say about what work they do

and when they do it. These more specific descriptions conditions of work. in addition to the respondent's description of their daily routine, are used to respond to research question 2.

Sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are included in items 4 and 5 in the interview guide and items 14 and 15 in the questionnaire. Besides offering a clearer definition of work, responses to these questions also indicate what is most important to the individual about their work. These perceptions are also important with regard to the availability and constraints of the meaning and value of work. What is considered fulfilling is often an aspect of work that is important and available to workers. What is considered unfulfilling or unsatisfactory may be an aspect of work that is important but not available. Previous research has suggested a link between satisfaction and work values and has shown that job satisfaction is positively related to Protestant work ethic beliefs (Blood, 1969:457). Responses regarding sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction do not directly relate to any specific research questions, but they do provide deeper understanding of an individual's view of work as well as an indication of some of the important conditions of work, which are most likely related to their work values.

The remaining items on the interview guide (6-10) and the questionnaire (17-20) are designed to measure work

values and beliefs. Because a work ethic involves a set of related beliefs, as opposed to potentially unrelated views, no single question could adequately address an individual's work ethic. The questions combined, however, allow for a potential integration of beliefs and values about work which may approximate a work ethic. (It may also be, as has been mentioned, that no integrated set of beliefs about work exists and that the contemporary work ethic is instead an ethos or series of unrelated views, values, and beliefs. This issue, and the possibility of creating a composite of individual work values is explored in the discussion chapter.)

Besides more direct questions asking the importance or "goodness" of work which provided some straightforward responses about work beliefs, participants were also asked more indirect questions in order to more fully assess and understand the complexity of their work values. All were asked whether they would keep working if they did not have the financial need to do so (in the form of a lotto win). Because most people work because they need to make money for survival, however basic or luxurious that survival may be, removing this economic factor was useful in isolating other reasons for working. This isolation made it easier to identify and describe more deep-seated reasons for working - - which for the most part were directly reflective of a person's work values.

In the interviews, after asking whether or not work was good or good for people, respondents were asked if everyone who is capable of working should work. While this question often solicited a critique of the American welfare system, it also led to responses which expressed peoples' values about work in a broader framework and one separate from their own experience. Since a work ethic implies a set of beliefs with a degree of moral overtone, asking questions about what others should do helped clarify the degree of morality involved in respondents' statements. Responses to these sets of questions regarding work values and the work ethic were used in addressing all of the specific research questions listed above.

An item concerning the importance of leisure was included on the questionnaire and was part of the interviews (in the discussion of whether people would continue working if they had money). This single item was not used to specifically measure leisure attitudes but more as a clarifying contrast to work-based responses.

In both the interview guide and in the questionnaire respondents were informed of the general nature of the research. I identified myself as a student working on dissertation research which addressed peoples' beliefs and views about work. I assured them, either in writing in the case of questionnaires or verbally before the interview, that they nor their place of work would be identified in my

research report and that whatever they said to me would be kept confidential. I reiterated that their participation was voluntary and would in no way effect or reflect upon their place of work. If they had no further questions, we proceeded with the interview.

In most cases, interviews were conducted at the participant's place of work and lasted an average of a little more than an hour. (Questionnaires took an average of 15 minutes to complete, ranging in duration from 5 to 20 minutes with obvious variation in detail of expression.) In some cases, I would meet the participant at a restaurant or coffee shop. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed in all cases but two, when the respondents preferred not to record the conversation. In these cases, field notes were instead taken and transcribed.

#### Sample Description

The previously described quota/available subjects sampling procedure resulted in the following interview sample according to occupation:



Table 1: Interview Sample

| <u>Occupation</u>   | <u>N</u> | <u>Duncan*</u><br><u>SEI</u> | <u>Prestige**</u><br><u>Rank 1989</u> |
|---------------------|----------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Doctor              | 2        | 92                           | 82                                    |
| Lawyer              | 4        | 92                           | 76                                    |
| College Professor   | 4        | 84                           | 78                                    |
| Engineer            | 2        | 85                           | 65                                    |
| Teacher (elem/sec)  | 3        | 71                           | 62                                    |
| Org. Middle Manager | 3        | 62                           | 55                                    |
| Nurse               | 3        | 44                           | 62                                    |
| Tradesperson        | 3        | 44                           | 49                                    |
| Secretary           | 3        | 43                           | 46                                    |
| Police              | 3        | 40                           | 48                                    |
| Retail Sales        | 3        | 39                           | 29                                    |
| Custodian           | 3        | 13                           | 16                                    |
| Laborer             | <u>4</u> | 10                           | 18                                    |
| Total               | 40       |                              |                                       |

\* (Hauser and Featherman, 1977:17)

\*\* (*General Social Surveys*, 1989:685-698)

The questionnaire sample is very similar and in most cases parallels the interview sample, though has greater numbers of respondents in certain occupations. In other cases, some occupations that were in the interview sample are not in the questionnaire sample while some that are in the questionnaire sample are not in the interview sample. The occupations that are included and the numbers of respondents in each is represented in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire Sample

| <u>Occupation</u>     | <u>N</u> | <u>Duncan*</u><br><u>SEI</u> | <u>Prestige**</u><br><u>Rank 1989</u> |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Doctor                | 14       | 92                           | 82                                    |
| Lawyer                | 28       | 92                           | 76                                    |
| College Professor     | 8        | 84                           | 78                                    |
| Teacher (elem/sec)    | 17       | 71                           | 62                                    |
| Org. Middle Manager   | 6        | 62                           | 55                                    |
| Social Worker         | 14       | 57                           | 52                                    |
| Nurse                 | 7        | 44                           | 62                                    |
| Coach                 | 8        | 45                           | 51                                    |
| Skilled Manufacturing | 19       | 44                           | 49                                    |
| Secretary             | 13       | 43                           | 46                                    |
| Police                | 13       | 40                           | 48                                    |
| Retail Sales          | 17       | 39                           | 29                                    |
| Hair Stylist          | 6        | 13                           | 33                                    |
| Food Service          | <u>7</u> | 10                           | 20                                    |
| Total                 | 177      |                              |                                       |
| Northeast             | 25       |                              |                                       |
| Midwest               | 31       |                              |                                       |
| South                 | 116      |                              |                                       |
| West                  | 5        |                              |                                       |

\* (Duncan, 1955)

\*\* (General Social Surveys, 1989:685-698)

Approximately 385 questionnaires were distributed and with 177 completed forms returned, the response rate was 46%. This rate can be misleading, however, since cooperation was acquired through selected workplaces prior to distribution.

While representativeness has been attempted through this interview and questionnaire sample selection, since only a few workers from each occupation could be interviewed or surveyed, more general categories are necessary to construct in order to analyze findings. Categories of analysis will be based upon the following:

- 1) occupation
  - occupational status (upper, middle, lower)
  - general category of work (white-collar, blue-collar)
  - conditions of work (autonomy/control, challenge/creativity, sources of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, degree of professionalization)
- 2) demographic variables
  - age
  - gender
  - marital status

The general occupational groupings, combining the interview and questionnaire samples, are as follows:

Table 3: Occupational Groupings

|                | White Collar:   | Blue Collar:   |
|----------------|---|--|
| Upper Status:  | Doctor<br>Lawyer<br>College Professor   |  |
| Middle Status: | Engineer<br>Teacher<br>Org. Middle Manager<br>Nurse<br>Social Worker<br>Coach | Police<br>Tradespeople<br>Manufacturing              |
| Lower Status:  | Secretary<br>Retail Sales   | Custodian<br>Laborer<br>Food Service<br>Hair Stylist |

While the sampling techniques are not random and the sample cannot, therefore, be considered statistically representative of the larger population of working individuals, it does approximate representativeness according to the variables that are most relevant to the study, including the analytical variables (occupational status, occupational type, gender, age) as well as more

general sample demographic variables (race, region, union membership, education, length in job).

With regard to occupational status, Table 4 shows the number of individuals in each occupational status category in the interview sample. Likewise, Table 5 indicates the distribution of occupational status of the respondents in the questionnaire sample.

Table 4: Interview Occupational Status

| occstat | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|---------|-------|---------|--------|
| upper   | 10    | 25.00   | 25.00  |
| middle  | 15    | 37.50   | 62.50  |
| lower   | 15    | 37.50   | 100.00 |
| Total   | 40    | 100.00  |        |

Table 5: Questionnaire Occupational Status

| occstat | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|---------|-------|---------|--------|
| upper   | 50    | 28.25   | 28.25  |
| middle  | 84    | 47.46   | 75.71  |
| lower   | 43    | 24.29   | 100.00 |
| Total   | 177   | 100.00  |        |

A greater balance of each occupational status group was attained in the interview sample than in the questionnaire sample. Yet both samples include enough of each occupational status in order to make some basic comparisons.

Regarding the variable of occupational type (white-collar, blue-collar), Table 6 shows the distribution for the interview sample and Table 7 indicates the distribution of the questionnaire sample.

Table 6: Interview Occupational Type

| occtype      | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| white-collar | 27    | 67.50   | 67.50  |
| blue-collar  | 13    | 32.50   | 100.00 |
| Total        | 40    | 100.00  |        |

Table 7: Questionnaire Occupational Type

| occtype      | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------------|-------|---------|--------|
| white-collar | 132   | 74.58   | 74.58  |
| blue-collar  | 45    | 25.42   | 100.00 |
| Total        | 177   | 100.00  |        |

In both samples, many more blue-collar workers than white-collar workers were interviewed and surveyed. The sample distribution of this variable, particularly with the increase of service-oriented employment, is not wholly disproportional to the distribution of white-collar and blue-collar work in the American economy. Even though the differences in the numbers of each interviewed and surveyed may limit comparisons made between the work ethic of white-collar versus blue-collar workers, the type of work may also be used as one of the several components of the conditions of work.

Apart from specific occupational variables, gender is also used as an analytical category. The distribution of gender is even in both the interview sample (Table 8) and in the questionnaire sample (Table 9).

Table 8: Interview Sample Gender

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 20    | 50.00   | 50.00  |
| male   | 20    | 50.00   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 40    | 100.00  |        |

Table 9: Questionnaire Sample Gender

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 89    | 50.28   | 50.28  |
| male   | 88    | 49.72   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 177   | 100.00  |        |

While in each of the samples, gender is evenly distributed, yet generally there are more men in upper status occupations and more women in lower status occupations. It is important to break down the distribution of gender within occupational status because it has been suggested that gender variations in definitions of work may be the result of occupational differences and not gender differences alone (Ghidina, 1993). Table 10, then, shows the distribution of gender according to occupational status for the interview sample and Table 11 illustrates it for the questionnaire sample.

Table 10: Interview Gender by Occupational Status

Upper Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 4     | 40.00   | 40.00  |
| male   | 6     | 60.00   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 10    | 100.00  |        |

Middle Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 8     | 53.33   | 53.33  |
| male   | 7     | 46.67   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 15    | 100.00  |        |

Lower Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 8     | 53.33   | 53.33  |
| male   | 7     | 46.67   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 15    | 100.00  |        |

Table 11: Questionnaire Gender by Occupational Status

Upper Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 14    | 28.00   | 28.00  |
| male   | 36    | 72.00   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 50    | 100.00  |        |

Middle Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 41    | 48.81   | 48.81  |
| male   | 43    | 51.19   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 84    | 100.00  |        |

Lower Status

| gender | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| female | 34    | 79.07   | 79.07  |
| male   | 9     | 20.93   | 100.00 |
| Total  | 43    | 100.00  |        |

Although gender differences exist in the samples according to occupational status, these differences approximately represent the gender differences which exist in the American labor market. Generally speaking, higher status occupations are filled primarily by men while lower status are filled more often by women (Roos, 1985:50-52). The variations in the distribution of gender according to occupational status will have to be kept in mind when making gender comparisons.

Another demographic variable which is used to analyze differences in individuals' beliefs about work is age.



Unlike other sample variables and characteristics, the distribution of age is not even nor representative, particularly for the interview sample. Table 12 illustrates the age distribution for the interview sample.

Table 12: Interview Age

| Variable | Obs | Mean     | Min | Max |
|----------|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| age      | 38  | 40.52632 | 20  | 55  |

The average age of the respondents in the interview sample was 40.5 with the youngest being 20 and the oldest 55.

Further, 8% of the sample were between the ages of 20 and 30, 44% of the sample were between 30 and 40, 34% of the sample were between 40 and 50, and 14% were 50 or older.

The age distribution of the questionnaire sample was more even and representative. Table 13 shows the mean age and the range of ages of the respondents.

Table 13: Questionnaire Age

| Variable | Obs | Mean     | Min | Max |
|----------|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| age      | 176 | 39.14205 | 20  | 69  |

The average age of questionnaire respondents was 39 and the youngest respondent was 20, the oldest 69. More specifically, 20% of respondents were between 20 and 30, 40% were between 30 and 40, 27% were between 40 and 50, and 13% of the respondents were 50 or older. While the distribution of age in the questionnaire sample is more even and

representative, because there is not an even distribution in the interview sample, analyses based on age must be done carefully and the findings interpreted cautiously and with some hesitancy.

The variable of marital status was included in interviews. Table 14 illustrates the proportion of respondents who were either married, married with children, or single with children (married) as compared to those who were not married and without children (unmarried).

Table 14: Interview Marital Status

| marital<br>status | Freq. | Percent | Cum.   |
|-------------------|-------|---------|--------|
| unmarried         | 11    | 27.50   | 27.50  |
| married           | 29    | 72.50   | 100.00 |
| Total             | 40    | 100.00  |        |

Besides analytical variables, the sample can be described according to race, region, union membership, education, and length in job. Regarding race, 92% of the interview sample and the questionnaire sample are white, 6% of the samples are African American and 2% of another race. Because most of the data were collected in the South, the sample is disproportionately representative of individuals living in the South. Yet those who were interviewed were asked in what region of the country they grew up or where they had spent most of their lives. Because many of the interviewees in the South had recently moved to the area, a

greater regional variation resulted. In the interview sample, 65% of respondents were from or had mostly lived in the South, 22% from the north, 10% from the midwest, and 3% from the west. In the questionnaire sample 66% were from the South, 14% from the north, 18% from the midwest, and 2% were from the west. While for race and regions the sample is not representative of the nation as a whole, these are not variables which are thought to have a significant effect, apart from interaction with other variables, on beliefs about work. However, race and region distributions should be kept in mind when interpreting results.

Other variables which were included for sample description but not specifically for analysis were union membership, education, and years in job. Similar to the distribution of white-collar and blue-collar workers, 24% of the questionnaire sample were members in an union and 76% were not union members. In the interview sample, only 6% were union members compared to 94% who were not. This distribution not only reflects the type of work distribution, but is also a result of the greater proportion of respondents being in or from the south, where union membership is low. Regarding education, 19% of the questionnaire sample had a high school degree, 26% had some college, 11% had a college degree, and 44% had more than a college degree. In the interview sample 37% had a high school degree, 5% have some college, 21% have a college

degree, and 37% have more than a college degree. While this distribution is also not directly representative of the country as a whole, it is reflective of the sample selection of occupations and as a variable is somewhat analogous to occupational status and will be include in the analysis accordingly.

The length the respondent has been in a particular line of work, not only in their current employment position, is also included in order to describe the sample. For questionnaire respondents, the average length in a line of work was 11.7 years and ranged from 1 month to 43 years. In the interview sample, the average length in a line of work was 10 years and ranged from 1 to 27 years. The length of time in a particular career is likely to be related to occupation, education, and particularly occupational status. Thought not consistently the case, occupations with higher status usually involve longer periods of training and higher amounts of pay. This general pattern can be seen in Table 15 which shows the distribution of length of job according to occupational status.

Table 15: Questionnaire Job Length by Occupational Status

| occupational status | Summary of job length |           | Freq. |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------|
|                     | Mean                  | Std. Dev. |       |
| upper               | 14.04                 | 11.035583 | 50    |
| middle              | 12.60241              | 8.0261611 | 83    |
| lower               | 7.3511628             | 7.1972671 | 43    |
| Total               | 11.727841             | 9.1276326 | 176   |

As can be seen in this table, the average length in a line of work for upper status workers is 14 years, compared to 12.6 years for middle status, and 7.3 years for lower status workers. Even though differences in years in a particular career may affect beliefs about work, this influence is inherent in other occupational variables (occupation, occupational status) and is included in the analysis.

A description of the data collection process and instruments, the sample selection process, and the sample demographics provides a basis upon which to evaluate analyses and findings. Though the sampling technique was not random and therefore the resulting sample cannot be regarded as technically representative of the population as a whole, sample characteristics do approximate the American labor force on the most important and relevant variables, with the exception of age. The ability to generalize is limited with a non-probability sample, yet since it is the goal of this research to explore contemporary work beliefs and to generally characterize beliefs and how they might vary according to occupation, statistical generalizing is not necessary.

#### Data Analysis Strategy

The data for this study are based upon interview transcriptions and the written responses to open-ended questionnaire items. Because of the exploratory nature of

the research, these data were analyzed qualitatively. Responses to questions were not coded and quantified as doing so would certainly obscure the more in-depth and descriptively full information which was sought in this study.<sup>8</sup> Instead, data were analyzed, within the general framework of grounded theory, using the qualitative strategy of analytic induction (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975). Analytic induction involves the process of identifying emergent themes and patterns in qualitative data, creating a classification scheme or a categorization of these themes, and then returning to the data to "test" or refine the scheme or categorization. Because the data were not quantified, a statistical description of the prevalence of these themes and patterns can not be calculated. Yet, by using analytic induction, the prevalence of the patterns are considered reliable because once the themes are identified and the categorization is constructed, both the themes and their relation (the categorization or the classification scheme) are re-examined in the context of the raw data.

Using this process, several themes emerged and could be classified into three categories. The first category

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<sup>8</sup> Initially, I intended to code and quantify questionnaire responses. While certain patterns of beliefs and values did exist, coding these responses nevertheless would have imposed an organizational framework on the data that was not clearly quantifiably existent. In order to, then, maintain the integrity of the data and the exploratory nature of the study, questionnaire responses were analyzed using the same qualitative strategies that were used for interview data.

involves general trends in contemporary work values. Within this category, the themes included are: memories of parent's work, the self as a central work value, and balancing work with other aspects of life. The substance of these themes is discussed in Chapter VI through a presentation of respondents' perspectives of these issues. The second and third categories of patterns and themes involves variations in work values according to occupation, occupational status, and/or occupational type (white-collar, blue-collar). One of these categories involves the work values that speak to the relationship of work to others. In this case, "relation to others" is a general term used to represent the specific orientation of those in different occupations. For upper-status, fully professionalized workers, relation to others referred to contributing to society as a whole. For middle-status, semi-professionals, relation to others involved helping individuals more directly. For lower-status, non-professionals, relation to others included the importance of teamwork and pleasing the boss. Respondents' descriptions of their views concerning these themes is presented in Chapter VII.

The third category in which several emergent themes fit into involved occupational variations of belief about the purpose of work. Similar to the occupational patterns that emerged with relations to others, upper and middle-status workers were more likely to cite the purpose of work as

providing mental stimulation, learning and growth, and contributing to societal advancement. The theme which emerged from the responses of lower-status workers was that the purpose of work was to ward off boredom, provide structure to their lives, and to give them something to do. Respondents' comments relevant to these themes are presented in Chapter VIII.

### Summary

As a qualitative study of contemporary work values, data were collected in this research using 40 in-depth interviews and 177 open-ended questionnaires. The sample was selected using quota, available subjects, and snowballing. Though a non-probability sample, representativeness was sought according to occupation, occupational status, and occupational type as well as the more demographic variables of gender, age, race, education, marital status, and region. Tables describing the frequencies of each of these variables is included in this chapter. Finally, the data collected is analyzed using the inductive process of analytic induction.

The results of this process, the findings which comprise the empirical component of this dissertation, are presented in the next three chapters. An analysis, applying the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapter III to the empirical findings, is conducted in Chapters IX and X.



## CHAPTER VI

### GENERAL TRENDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORK ETHIC

As an exploration of the contemporary work ethic, this chapter reviews some themes regarding general work values found among the respondents of all occupations, occupational statuses, gender, and ages included in this study. As was discussed in the previous chapter, based upon interviews and surveys (see Appendices A and B for a copy of the interview guide and open-ended questionnaire), individuals' responses to questions regarding work values were gathered. Using the procedure also discussed in Chapter V, these responses were analyzed according to emergent themes and values. In this chapter, the first set of themes is illustrated through a presentation of respondents' statements in this chapter.

When asked questions about their work values, respondents frequently recalled relevant childhood memories and experiences. This theme is discussed in the first section of this chapter through the illustration of three patterns. First, respondents told of their parents' work habits and of the effect these had on the development of their own work values. Secondly, as children many had chores and responsibilities which emphasized to them the importance of work. Thirdly, while growing up with a particular perspective of work, some respondents spoke of

how their own work values have changed from those of their parents. These childhood perceptions and images of work are included since they may have, as socializing experiences, provided the foundation or roots upon which present beliefs about work may be based.

Secondly, the importance of fulfilling the self in work emerged as a prevalent theme in many of the respondents' comments about the importance or value of work. Self-fulfillment through work was achieved, in part, through the realization of goals defined by traditional work values: contributing to society, helping others, and doing one's best. A second pattern which emerged as part of the theme of self-fulfillment was the importance of work in directly contributing to the individual's self-esteem, worth, and identity. In addition, some respondents, who had been raised with a more traditional work ethic, spoke of how their values have changed to what seems to be a more contemporary work ethic of self-fulfillment. Finally, while emphasizing the importance of self-fulfillment, many respondents also spoke of the ways in which the structure of work interfered with this value. The general theme of self-fulfillment, and the patterns that relate to it, is discussed and described in the second section of this chapter.

A third theme which emerged in respondents' discussions of their work values had to do with the relation between

work and other aspects of life. Similar to the case of Brian Palmer in *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, et al., 1985:3-8), respondents spoke of the need to balance work. One pattern that existed among responses involved putting work in its proper place in relation to other aspects of life. Though a source of seemingly endless self-fulfillment, individuals described the need to control or limit the time and energy they spent at work. A second related pattern had to do with the relationship between one's work and family. In some cases, individuals spoke of the importance of constraining their work activity in order to spend more time with their families. In other cases, work was seen as an avenue for creativity and contact that could not be provided by the family. A third pattern within the theme of the relation of work to other aspects of life emerged and regarded work as a compensation for those who felt other parts of their lives were problematic. For some, then, the balance of work was reversed and it was viewed as a salvation for, not a distraction from, other aspects of life. Comments regarding the theme of the relation of work to other aspects of life are presented in the third section of this chapter.

The themes discussed in this chapter, because they represent the views of people of all occupations, provide a general description of what could be called the contemporary work ethic. Patterns related to these themes, childhood

memories, emphasis on self-fulfillment, and balancing work, are now illustrated through a presentation of individuals' responses.

### Childhood Experiences and Memories of Parents's Work

In the general discussion of the origin or central influence of contemporary beliefs and values about work, it would be erroneous to ignore or deny that early socialization experiences play a very central and influential role. Many people, when speaking of their values and beliefs about work, referred to their childhood experiences of work or of memories of their parents' work habits or perspectives. In some cases, the individuals interviewed reported that their beliefs arose directly from how they were raised. Others stated that their beliefs and values about work were in contrast to their parents or have changed considerably from the views of their families.

### Memories of Parents' Hard Work

Of those who indicated a belief in hard work and in doing a good job, many recalled particularly hard-working parents. When talking about why work was important, a police officer stated:

It is as much cultural as it is religious. My family, from the time I was little, it was impressed upon me that you work for a living. You do not take anything from anybody unless you have worked for it. My grandfather worked until he was 88 years old. My father is 70 and he just started his third business.

My mother worked until the day she died....That is what you do. You work. You don't take anything unless you've worked for it.

In discussing how he would feel not working, a carpenter referred to his upbringing and his father's work habits and views:

I couldn't live with myself if I didn't work. Partially due to my upbringing. My dad was a good man when he was bringing us up as kids. I'm 32 and he's still a better man than me....There was always a garden to do and fencing, things to be done. And he saw to it that he had help....He's still a toughie, works 6 days a week, sometimes 10 to 12 hours a day.

Relating a similar memory, a young doctor talked of how his upbringing, particularly his parent's work habits and the emphasis on work in his family, influenced not only his values about work, but also his decision to become a doctor:

I had felt a need to be in some sort of service profession, I'm not sure where that came from. Part may be religious and part from the ethic I grew up in....What I was brought up in was probably a situation where work was just about as important as anything else. My father worked at least one job, usually two jobs at any given time. Most of the time when I was growing up he worked second shift at the textile mill and then part time during the day as a mail carrier. Only time he was home when we were awake was a one week vacation during the year and on Sundays. ...My mother worked part time when we were really young and once we got in school she worked full time in various secretarial positions. As soon as my sisters got old enough to get a job, they got a job. I started cutting lawns at age 8...and the first more or less official job at 15 as a janitor at the library....It was a work-oriented family.

As one of the earliest and most pervasive socializers, then, parents' work habits shape a child's work values as well as their potential occupational preference.

## Childhood Experiences of Work: The Instillment of Values

Not only did parents' work behavior influence some work values and beliefs, the childhood experience of work itself also left lasting impressions upon the views of some individuals about the importance of work. A secretary recalled:

From the time I was 4 or 5 years old, I was taught to help. I had chores. I can remember standing on a stool ironing tea towels when I was 4 or 5 years old and as I got older, I had more and more chores added and just was taught to always do a good job, and to think that was my responsibility and not to complain about it. It taught me responsibility so when I went out into the workforce, I didn't have to be reminded to do things on time or to do them well. I already knew how to do that. When I was given a job, I just knew to do it right.

A laborer, in talking about why he likes to work and has to keep busy, said he, like the secretary, always had chores to do around the house:

I was raised in the household where in the evenings and on the weekends I done my share of the work, as far as the outside work. If I didn't, I heard about it. That's just the way I've always been. That's why I have to stay moving.

Not only were these individuals given chores as children, which seem to have left lasting impressions upon their views of the value of work, many also remembered performing work in particular ways. In other words, it was not only that they performed some measure of work as children, they also recall a certain standard of work being taught by their parents. An engineer described his early work experience as having instilled a work philosophy of

sorts:

The only thing I can tell you is that the ideals that were instilled by my parents were very, very strong. My dad, basically, said if you are going to do something, you had better do it right. It didn't matter what we did. As an example, before weedeaters, when we would cut grass, we had split post fences and all the weeds grew up around it. Well, it didn't matter that we didn't have weedeaters or anything else, all grass was cut, including around the post. So we would get down on our hands and knees with sheers and cut it until it looked good. It was that kind of philosophy.

Clearly, then, not only did seeing parents work have an effect on the development of work values, performing chores and having responsibilities while growing up also shaped how individuals think and feel about work.

#### Questioning Learned Values of Work

Although many of those interviewed recalled early work experiences and values of work expressed by their parents, not all individuals readily adopted the views with which they were raised. In some cases, respondents recalled their childhood experiences and then explained how they feel differently or how they raise their children differently. The same secretary who ironed tea towels when she was 4 or 5 described more of her childhood experience and how she has chosen to treat her children a little differently:

I was raised very poor. We had an outhouse. My brothers had to haul water from a pump before we went to school in the morning. We didn't even have a furnace in the house I was brought up in, this was in the north. We just had a coal stove in the dining room to heat the whole house. So everybody worked hard....We, at least I didn't, think of it

at that time as a hardship. I think now looking back on it maybe I had to work too hard for my age. But it certainly didn't hurt me. And I think it prepared me for life in the hard, cruel world...I wasn't quite so hard on my kids, but they had chores. My daughters didn't get out of the house on Saturday for a date until their rooms were clean, the laundry was done and they had helped with the dishes. If their boyfriends had to wait, then they just had to wait. That's just the way it was. They didn't go until their work was done.

Though some may equate having to make a date wait with hauling water on a cold, winter morning, this woman reflected upon her childhood experience and found it to be somewhat harsh. While still clearly inculcating the value of work in her own children, she did so in a way that she considered less burdensome.

An engineer remembered how his father, who worked for a church, was always helping others but he was also rarely at home with his own family. His father's work habits may have suggested the importance of helping others and contributing to one's community, but the experience left this individual with a firm conviction to not be away from his own family, regardless of his work or work values. The experience also seemed to lead him to re-evaluate the role and importance of work in his life.

I was raised thinking that working hard was important so that is part of my belief system...My father worked for the church and he worked a lot. He was always doing worthwhile things for people and was gone a lot. ...I can look back now and say I don't want to do that to my kids....I don't feel like work is good just for work's sake...and I've realized that it is not... And I've realized other things are important....There's a lot to life and work is one of the things we have to do. It's part of life, born out of a need to be



productive in order to survive. But it's grown into more than that.

It is apparent, then, that childhood experiences do not necessarily determine one's beliefs and values about work. Further, beliefs and values may directly contrast with those views with which one was raised or may change as later life experiences shape and influence our perspectives. One doctor, who was raised with a traditional work ethic and continues to describe his values of work accordingly, subtly indicated a questioning of those values:

When I think of the term "work ethic," I always think of Protestant work ethic, and I am not sure of the classical definitions of it, but my understanding of it is if you can work, you should work and you should make the most of your abilities and do the best job you can. And at some level, work should not just be for yourself, but for others, the global benefit of society. I don't know if that's the definition of the Protestant work ethic, but that's how I see it. I guess if I had to describe my own work ethic, I'd use that sort of definition. To make use of the capabilities that you have and to do it the best you can and not to do it just for your personal gain, financial gain, or even self-aggrandizement, but for some greater benefit. That's a pretty tall order. It's a lot to dump on people....I wish I could be easier on myself, that sometimes it would be easier to say no. To do something for yourself.

Another doctor, who had recently completed medical school and residency, spoke even more strongly of such a shift in work values:

I was raised that you were put on the earth to be productive. And that you were put here to contribute to society in general and to make something out of your life and try and give something back to the people who got you here. You're always thinking, if I won the lottery, would I still work? It used to be my answer was yes, but the answer's getting to be less and less yes now that I have been working awhile. My views

about work have really changed. Especially because of this delayed gratification business where you have to keep going to this school and that school and jump through this hoop before you finally get to do what you want to do. Now I am finally doing what I want to do and I'm so tired now that I want to go do something else! You know, now I'm like, God, there are so many things to do and I don't want to spend my whole life and never have explored other parts of life, especially literature, other creative things -- travel, music, politics, and all these other interesting things -- and wake up one day and say, God, you've spent your whole life and what did you really do? How have you grown?

Although raised with one perspective of work, a view seemingly similar to the traditional work ethic, this individual, after having completed an apparently grueling training period, has begun to question maybe not the value of work, but certainly the role and importance of work in her life. So, while certainly childhood experiences are influential in shaping the individual's values and views about work, more current experiences also may have a tremendous effect.

Besides illustrating how views and values can change from the experiences of childhood, the previous quotation also introduces two other general trends found in the contemporary work ethic: first, the importance of the self in work values, whether it be for self-esteem or self-worth, personal accomplishment, or a source of identity; and second, the importance of balancing work with other aspects of one's life, whether it be family or other interests.

### The Self as a Central Work Value

In discussing how she would go about writing a poem for the 1992 presidential inauguration, Maya Angelou said, "I will write for the President. I will write for fellow citizens. Finally, finally, I must write for myself."

Angelou's concern with realizing the self in her work was echoed in many of the voices of those interviewed for this study. Though some people spoke of working to help others or to contribute to their families or society in some way, the overwhelming majority stated that work was a source of self-esteem or fulfillment. That is, the central value in work for most people is that it provides a means to build and maintain self-esteem, identity, and self-worth. The contemporary work ethic, if it can be characterized at all, can be best characterized as an ethos of the self. It is less an ethic, involving a system of values with moral significance, than it is simply a set of beliefs that have psychological relevance. Individuals work hard and do their best not because they believe it is their moral duty to do so, for God or others, but because it is a requisite to their psychological well-being.

### Self-Fulfillment through Traditional Work Values

Interestingly, however, some of the ways people are able to achieve self-esteem and to feel good about themselves are to contribute to society, help others, or do

a good job -- all aspects of the traditional work ethic. Reflecting a combination of the contributive aspect of the traditional work ethic with a more contemporary work ethos, a police officer described his values about work:

I believe in work as part of a person's life. That he or she can only be satisfied, can only achieve self-esteem through work. And we are obligated to society, or to God if you choose to believe, we are obligated to the basic moralities that have come down through history to work towards the betterment of everybody. Work is simply something that everybody should do in some fashion, for themselves and for society.

Also remarking on the importance of self-worth and contribution to society, a teacher's aide said, "I think being able to work keeps your self-worth in perspective and makes one feel that they are not just taking from society but giving as much as you get." A college professor added, "If a person understands what they do contribute in some way to a bigger picture, I think it [work] makes most people feel good about what they do. I think feeling good is good for you."

Besides contributing to society as a whole, the traditional work ethic also emphasized the importance and value of helping others. Some respondents seemed to combine this aspect with a more contemporary emphasis on working to feel good about oneself. A doctor wrote, "For me, there has been a drive to serve others. Work helps fulfill that while giving a sense of accomplishment."

An elementary school teacher also cited the importance

of helping others in work and in feeling good about herself:

It [work] makes you feel better. I do. I don't know about other people, but it makes me feel good. It makes you feel like you are contributing to somebody ...I feel good if I can help. I feel better when I am working.

In addition, another doctor indicated the value of self-sufficiency as well as self worth in work: "Doing any job ...gives a person a sense of self-worth and justifies a position in society. We value the self-reliant person as much as the team worker because we admire someone who is active."

Working hard or doing one's best is also an aspect of the traditional work ethic that can be seen in contemporary values of work, yet the explanations respondents gave for working hard or trying to do good work differ from traditional reasons. Similar to their explanations of why it was good to work to contribute to society or to help others, many stated they did the best they could in work, not because of a moral prerogative, but because that was how they felt good about themselves, how they achieved and maintained good self-esteem.

When asked why it is important to do your best, a factory machinist stated:

Because that's what you're being paid to do. Plus it reflects back on your reputation. I come from a very dysfunctional family and I have tremendously low self-esteem. But in my job if I feel like I know what I'm doing, I'm going to do the best I can. Because somehow that boosts me up, that makes me feel better about myself.

A retail sales clerk similarly explains why she works hard:

I bust my butt everyday. Because I feel like I have to do that for me. Because I wouldn't feel good about myself if I was ripping somebody off. And I choose to work there, and if I choose to work there, then I had better do a good job. No matter where I work, I always do a good job....If I didn't do a good job...then I would lose respect for myself. I know I would. Then I think that does a lot to your esteem. I wouldn't feel real good about myself.

And waxing a bit more philosophically, an engineer explained why it was important to do a good job:

For your own self-worth, and better to do something well than to do it badly or poorly. There is something inherently nice about doing something well...It gives you a good feeling to look back and see what you have produced...It's something intrinsically beautiful about something that's done right.

Finally, some respondents stated that they worked hard, but that they did not really know why, other than they would not feel good if they did not do a good job. A lawyer said, "Personally, I'm not going to do something unless I'm going to do a good job." When asked why, he replied, "I don't know why. Everything I've done I've done that way....Personally, I don't feel good about doing it otherwise. I think that's just something you're born with." Others who were interviewed shifted uncomfortably in their seat when asked why they did good work. Their silence was broken only by short spits of laughter -- unspoken requests to move onto the next interview question.

Whether or not working hard or doing a good job is something we are born with, a connection between doing work

well and positive self-qualities seems to be prevalent among those interviewed or surveyed. They are linked, not to issues of morality, but, in contrast to the traditional values they apparently represent, to the desire to feel good about oneself. One way self-fulfillment could be achieved, then, was through the attainment of the goals defined by the traditional work ethic.

#### Work for Self-Esteem, Self-Worth, and Identity

Another way the self could be fulfilled was, however, much more direct. In discussing the value or importance of work, individuals much more frequently responded that they worked and worked hard because, apart from helping others or contributing to society, that was how they felt good about themselves, maintained self-esteem or worth, felt a sense of accomplishment, or defined their identity. That is, the most common work ethos described by people in varying occupations was one in which work was important or valuable because work allowed them to be psychologically self-fulfilled.

The importance of working for the self, apart from any other value, was most clearly expressed by a hair stylist who said, "People should work if for no other reason than themselves. It gives a person self-esteem, motivation, pride."

A social worker added, "I think people need to work."

It gives them self-esteem in that they can be successful and earn a living. People who don't work are not as fulfilled and seem less alive."

The view that work provides self-esteem and that without work people are negatively affected is supported by other respondents' statements as well. However, in order for work to be fulfilling and to boost self-esteem, it must be enjoyed and successful. In talking about how he would feel if he did not work, a groundskeeper said:

I think my self-esteem would go down quite a bit. When I lost my job in Texas in '86, I was unemployed for ten months. I didn't quite make it to the point of being Mr. Mom. My wife was working two jobs to make up for what I had lost. So I did do all the housework and the cooking, I took over all of that. But I was not a happy camper. It got to me. I didn't realize how much it had gotten to me. I can look back and see that I had a personality change, I got very antagonistic.

Another hair stylist emphasized the connection between enjoyable work and self-esteem: "I think it helps to build your self-esteem, especially if you like your job and are good at it and you succeed at it." A police officer, who had worked, unhappily, in the insurance business before being employed in law enforcement, also describes the importance of work that is enjoyable to self-esteem.

Work keeps people alive, in my opinion. It gives them a feeling of self-worth. It gives them self-esteem....In the insurance business, I became very frustrated. And I felt like I had lost a lot of zest for life. I became complacent. It affected my whole attitude. It affected my relationship with my family. Within six to eight months after I had been with the [police] force, I was whistling and my wife said, "it's nice to have you back."



This police officer and several others respondents also indicated that besides working for general esteem or to feel alive, the value in work and the reason they worked was because it gave them another good feeling closely related to esteem, that of self-worth.

One teacher stated, "Work is what gives each of us a sense of worth. Knowing you are doing something for yourself makes you feel good." A legal secretary added, "Work is good for people...as it gives them a personal satisfaction of being somebody, a sense of self-worth." Similarly, a retail sales clerk spoke of how, after being a housewife and mother, work has affected her sense of worth and esteem: "Work has helped my self-esteem since I was a housewife for 19 years and had never worked in public. Now that I pay my own bills and can be out and meet people, I feel better about myself."

A college professor of art also described the importance of work to having a feeling of worth, though going far beyond a "work for self" value orientation into a discussion of the basis of humanity and the need to realize a creative, productive force. He stated:

[Without work] I just have trouble feeling any worth. There's no value in my existence. If you are not producing, why are you alive? If you're not, I mean what are you here for? You're like a vegetable, you're like a tree....It's something that has to do with, it's not a contribution thing. It's about the whole way I have defined being human. Being human has to do with the use of your intellect and emotions to shape your existence, your past, present, and future. It's an interaction of all that you are and

all that you know in such a way that there is something here that says you've been here so you're just not a weed....It's related to a need to always validate my sense of worth.

Beyond a sense of esteem and worth, work was also considered to be valuable insofar as it contributed to a person's identity or self-definition. In describing what she thought the most important aspect of work was, a social worker stated:

Giving people an identity....I work with a lot of unemployed people who are very disenfranchised, lonely, and isolated. I think working not only helps materially, but also with self-esteem.

Another social worker, perhaps because of similarities in work experience, also considered work to be important source of self-definition. He replied, "It seems as though work contributes a great deal to one's identity, i.e., what you do says a lot about who you are." A college professor of English, who said that outside of academics she feels like a martian, similarly believed that work is closely related to one's self-concept. She stated:

Work gives you a sense of identity. It's who you are or it feeds into it at any rate....It's definitely a part of self-identity and that's why people have trouble with their self-concept if they can't work or if they can't work at what they like to do.

Clearly, then, for many people, the importance or value of work lies in its ability to provide esteem, worth, and identity. In addition, work may help people feel good about themselves by giving them ways in which to accomplish various goals or tasks. Sometimes accomplishment provides

personal pleasure simply in the fact that something has been accomplished. A lawyer talked about his "other" work of lawn mowing in this regard saying that getting things done is good. When asked why, he replied:

They need to be done because you feel better about yourself and because they need to be done. I feel better about myself when I've mowed the lawn and the lawn needed to be mowed anyway, so I've accomplished both of those things. Whereas if I delayed and don't do it, I feel bad about myself and the lawn doesn't get done.

Another lawyer also spoke of accomplishment and self-fulfillment, but in a larger context of one's life's work. When asked about what was most important about work, again blending some of the traditional work ethic of service to others with a contemporary ethic of fulfillment of the self, he stated:

I think it's most important that people find work which is personally rewarding and which fulfills their needs, whether they be financial, spiritual, emotional or otherwise. I believe we all will want to look back on our lives and feel a sense of accomplishment through personal success, achieved financial security, contribution to community or society, or something of that nature.

A doctor, who was raised with a traditional work ethic which defined work for work's sake as valuable and important, talked about how he has begun to change his views and value personal fulfillment and accomplishment more. When asked about the general value or importance of work, he said:

That's probably a concept that is in flux at this point...at some level for a long time, work for work's sake has been important. Working to be

working, to be recognized as working. Some of that comes from my family experience, the work value that was inculcated there. That only goes so far because external recognition is never sufficient to justify what you have to do to get it, almost never. So that something that faded significantly in terms of a reward. Work for the personal sense of accomplishment for doing something, for achieving a goal, non-tangible goals...that's probably one of the more driving forces in the importance of work for me.

While some may have changed their more traditional work values to values which represent the importance of personal accomplishment and identity, others indicated that personal fulfillment had become less of a central value of work. A nurse described this change in perspective when asked about what was most important about work:

Personal growth, personal satisfaction...when I feel good at my jobs and have accomplished, I feel good as a person. It's not my only outlet. I think that in the earlier years when I was first in nursing I would say it was. But now that the family has come about, there's less importance in that. I know who I am now, I feel very confident. That's partly because of the positions I have had. I know what I can accomplish. ...It has its own growing experiences.

Apparently, having already accomplished and been fulfilled by work, this nurse's values about the importance of work have changed from reaching self-actualization. Though indicating that doing good work and accomplishment is still important, she also added:

I am proud of my accomplishments so I don't do anything halfway. I want to do a good job. I just want to be able to walk away and feel satisfied that the output was good. I'm proud of that and I like to have those types of accomplishments.

The extent to which individuals are driven to fulfill

their esteem, worth, or identity in work may vary, yet continues to be a pervasive theme with regard to work values.

### Conditions of Work that Impede Self-Fulfillment

Having cited the importance and value of gaining self-esteem, worth, and identity as well as the ability to achieve accomplishments which made workers feel good about themselves, several individuals were also quick to point out that their actual jobs do not always allow them to reach these goals. These views may indicate possible problems for engendering positive work values in many post-industrial jobs, particularly the unskilled and low-paying. As a manufacturing worker of 28 years put it, regarding the importance of work, "Work should be an activity that gives a person self-esteem. This should be the real reason for working, but unfortunately this is not the case in most instances." Similarly pessimistic about the ability of work to fully fulfill people, a social worker stated that work "gives a person a sense of accomplishment and a feeling of being needed or important, or theoretically it should anyway." An attorney thought work was good for people because "it helps people feel good about themselves," however, she also added, "assuming, of course, they are doing well and are not in fear of being fired."

Others remarked that conditions of work, such as

insecurity and low pay, affected the ability to fulfill these values in work. Work was considered to be good for people, to offer them esteem and accomplishment, but certain conditions of work could also undermine the realization of these self-based work values. As a college professor explained:

In general I think work is good for people. However, some work situations are harmful to people: prolonged stress or pressure, distaste for one's work without the opportunity to change jobs, careers, etc. This harm negates any benefits that a person gets from working.

Speaking more specifically about the conditions of her work and how they affected her work values, a secretary remarked about her career:

The only thing that bothers me about being a secretary is that I am making at 46 what I was making at 20. And that's depressing...that's frustrating. It's not only frustrating, it can affect my work if I let it.... There's no incentive any longer, no financial incentive anyway. There's no incentive period, unless you get it with an individual or with your own self-satisfaction. The money is not there. The freedom to change jobs is not there economically. You're scared. You've got a job so you'd better keep it.

A social worker thought that work was good for people, but only when it was "purposeful, meaningful, and makes them feel valued." Work, however, is not good for people when it is "mundane, degrading and dystonic to who people are." The social worker also added, "I think that people should work as often as possible doing what they love -- although this can be difficult in a capitalist society."

Specific conditions of work, then, can be detrimental

to an individual's self-fulfillment in work, a situation that is problematic in a society where self-esteem and personal accomplishment characterize work values. Though as the last quote illustrates, work that is unfulfilling may be unavoidable to some extent because of the nature of work in modern, capitalist, post-industrial societies. A college professor discussed real and ideal forms of work:

I've always thought that the ideal situation would be that a person's life, that what we do with our lives is our work. That it's not going out and getting a job that is separate, but a more integrated thing. I keep looking back to the 19th century when, like a farmer's life. What we do with our lives is we try to live so we have to raise food to eat, clothing, to shelter ourselves and our families. That seems to be a more ideal way that human beings should do with his or her life, to do what's natural and necessary for survival and if that can be pleasant, if one can enjoy that, all the better. And to make that more enriching and rewarding, all the better. The way our society has gone now, in many cases people's work is separate. You go away from what is considered your life, your home, and do work that is in many cases considered separate. ...That to me seems not ideal.

While a central work value in contemporary society involves self-fulfillment, at times the conditions of work interfere with the attainment of the goals defined by this value. Nevertheless, the drive to fulfill the self remains central to individuals' work values.

#### The Relation of Work to Other Aspects of Life

Besides the view that work in contemporary society is sometimes unpleasant and therefore not fulfilling of what seems to be a modern work ethos of the self, the idea and

reality that work has become a separate sphere of activity from life has also raised the issue of balance -- of the relation of work with other aspects of modern American life. In addition, then, to remnants and changes of a more traditional work ethic and the emerging ethos of self in work values, another trend in beliefs and values about work involves balance -- the belief that one must balance work with other aspects of life or, in some cases, use work to "balance out" or compensate for those aspects of life which are inadequate or unfulfilling.

#### The Proper Place of Work in Life

One day in July of 1993, White House deputy counsel Vince Foster left work early, drove to a nearby park in suburban Virginia, and took his life. Upon hearing of his lifelong friend's suicide, President Clinton spoke to the White House staff encouraging them to "remember that we're all people and that we have to pay maybe a little more attention to our friends and our families and our co-workers, and try to remember that work can never be the only thing in life."

Though not necessarily having similar tragedies to prompt them to reflect upon the role of work in their lives, many respondents, especially those with families, spoke of the difficulty of keeping work and other aspects of their lives in balance. Further, though women have traditionally



been most closely linked to the family and therefore are more likely to talk about the need to balance work with home life, middle-aged and younger men also questioned the predominance of work in their lives. Older male workers, those for whom traditional roles continue to prevail, were least likely to remark about balancing work with family or other aspects of life.

Even those citing the good graces of work for self-esteem or identity remarked about its proper place and time. For example, a tennis coach stated, "Work is another way we learn about ourselves and our world. To not work is like not having friends or family. It's essential to one's mental health, but must be kept in perspective." A married college professor with a child, whose chair commonly tells her that she is spending too much time at work and that she needs to develop other aspects of her life, remarked about the balance of work and life, "When people spend a lot of time working, they spend a lot of time ignoring other aspects of their life." For her, work is central to self-esteem and identity, yet even with this perspective, she wonders about the role work has taken in her life. She said, "Work is real tied to everything about my identity...For me I think it has gone too far that way. I'm not sure that's too healthy, but generally it defines who I am." She further commented on both her fear or not working and her concern about the proportion of work in her life:

Not working would be a major problem for me emotionally. I don't think I would do well with no structure at all...it's real closely tied to how I feel about myself, so it's a major thing. Maybe at this point in time it's too big. I mean I think I am definitely in a phase where it is out of proportion -- it really seems like it has sort of taken over my life ...of course I do come up for tenure in a year.

A young male doctor, who had been raised with a traditional work ethic and is more recently finding that ethic to be "a lot to dump on people," said of the need to balance work with other aspects of life and the difficulty of doing so:

When I talk to students, to residents and talking to people about the medical profession I always talk about balancing and the balancing act. That you've got to balance your career, your time, your devotion to that with something. For me, I need to do that and that just keeps things in perspective and keeps things healthy....[But] there's always a push and pull, I don't think things are ever comfortable.... Just balancing all of that work-related stuff with the rest of life. I have 2 kids at home...my wife is going back to school...we just bought a house... Balancing the time spent there, the time needed there, with the time needed for a career is difficult. Just putting in my hours...it's a constant challenge. There's not enough time in the day...it's a very tenuous balance. I'm not doing a particularly bad job with it, but I wouldn't say I'm comfortable with it. You know a juggler who can juggle 6 things can do it, but I'm not sure that any time during his juggling act that he's perfectly comfortable and at ease. He's keeping them all in the air and they haven't fallen yet. But there's always the potential of calamity.

Many, like this doctor who is also a husband and father as well, acknowledged the importance of work and also the need to balance the demands of work with family, friends, or leisure.

## Balancing Work and Family

One of the other aspects of life cited as important to those interviewed and surveyed was the family. The need to consider the relation of work and the family was expressed by many in the sample, particularly those who had their own families. A nurse described her own views about balancing work with family as well as how she has seen others use work to avoid their families:

Why do most people work? Because you have to pay bills. I have to pay for the mortgage, buy groceries and clothes. I guess you need to balance your need for work with still being able to meet your family's needs. As a physician, you can cater your practice...or you can work 20 hours a day if you want. I guess in my mind, if you have a family or a wife or husband, it is irresponsible because you are totally ignoring them. I've had doctors sit at the desk and say, "Well, she's probably got them in bed now so I'll wait a few more minutes and then I'll go home." So they use their work to make it easier on themselves. And that I don't think is right. I think you need to balance your work with your family responsibilities. I just think you need to help with your kids...So I think a balance between work and paying your bills and meeting your family responsibilities is important.

Another nurse with a family, who had more strongly emphasized work and accomplishment in the past, has more recently achieved what she considers a more reasonable balance. In speaking of her work and why she has chosen a more administrative position, she said:

Now it [work] takes more of an even balance in my life. Before the type of positions that I had were high pressure and I'm the type of person who gives 100%, so the family came second. I don't want that so that's the reason I went into something that I would have an even balance.

While those with families often spoke of the need to rein the hold work had on the rest of their lives, others with or without families thought of work and the "balancing act" in a wholly different way. Instead of remarking about the importance of making sure work does not dominate one's life, some said that work was good in that it compensated for shortages in other aspects of their lives. On the one hand, it was seen as necessary to limit work in order to have time with one's family, yet work was also seen as good because it gave people a sphere of activity and interaction outside of one's family, something that was particularly important for women who have been traditionally restricted to the domestic sphere. When asked what was most important about work, a female lawyer commented:

The self-esteem it engenders. I think it gives people a "second" life away from their personal lives which allows for personal growth, for self-esteem, for an objectivity to develop, and for a more worldly perspective on life....Also, in relation to being home with small children every day, it allows an adult to remain a person, an "adult" and allows the person to have a life away from the living through children and their activities.

Similarly, a female nurse said that work, "improves self-esteem, makes them [people] feel useful, gives them a different role in life other than family."

Beyond a role and a life outside of the family, work was also thought to give opportunities that family life or self-absorption could not provide. A male lawyer remarked about work, "It gives people a focus away from themselves

and family. It also gives them an outlet for creativity, time with others and is interesting."

### Work as Salvation and Compensation

While some acknowledged that work could take away from otherwise overly full lives, it was also thought to add to lives which were otherwise lacking or problematic in some respect. As one teacher who was recently divorced and thus newly single expressed:

Right now my work, work is sort of your salvation in a lot of ways. You've probably heard other people say that. I've been through divorce and I know other people who have, and other things and going to work is a relief. Sort of like work saves you, distracts you from other things that are sort of screwed up in your life.

Another teacher agreed saying, "Work in most cases provides an important balance in one's life and for many people it is also a possible escape from or time away from problems."

And a single, retail sales person added, "For a person that lives alone, it [work] may fill an empty space in their lives."

The balancing act of work and other aspects of life, then, seems to swing on a pendulum. For some, particularly the married, it is important to limit work and the energy and time it consumes so that they have something left over for family or other non-work pursuits. On the other hand, work seems to serve as a salvation or at least as pleasant compensation for people who need to expand their lives

beyond the personal realm. A job can be either as a distraction or diversion from personal problems, or a means to meet and mingle with others. Either way, it is clear that work is a separate sphere of life and is an arena of activity and devotion that many workers believe must be balanced with other arenas of life. It is also a realm in which some find fulfillment when other aspects of their life offer little.

### Summary

In this chapter some general trends in the contemporary work ethic were highlighted and discussed. While several respondents spoke of being raised with and seeing their parents toiling according to a traditional work ethic, many also commented on how their values and beliefs about work have changed. A central trend of belief among workers of all occupations was that the greatest value in work, the reason they worked and worked hard was because work provided them with self-esteem, worth, identity, and a feeling of accomplishment. From these views, the contemporary work ethic could, then, be characterized according to the ethos of self-fulfillment. Many also found contemporary work to be structured in such a way that this ethos could not consistently be realized. And, even though work was thought to provide esteem and personal meaning, many regarded work either as something to be balanced with other aspects of

their lives or, where individual lives were problematic, as an activity which provided them solace and meaning.

While these general trends concerning the contemporary work ethic were found, there were also some variations in perspective. In the next two chapters, differences in beliefs and values according to occupation, occupational status, type of occupation, and certain conditions of work are discussed.

## CHAPTER VII

### OCCUPATIONAL VARIATIONS: WORK IN RELATION TO OTHERS

While several trends in the contemporary work ethic could be found among people of different occupations, genders, ages, and other variables, other beliefs and values about work are linked to occupation, occupational status, degree of professionalization, occupational type (white-collar, blue-collar), and certain occupational conditions. Two themes within which variation according to occupational variables could be seen involve the relation of work to others and the purpose of work. These themes, and the specific patterns of responses which illustrate occupational variation, are discussed in this and the following chapter.

Clearly, the occupational variables included in this research are related and overlap. Because of the overlapping of categories, the discussion of the variation of patterns of values will include an explanation of the basis of the occupational groupings. For instance, while those in upper-status occupations are also likely to be professionals and blue-collar workers are likely to be in middle or lower-status occupations, conditions of work may span all three general occupational status categories -- for example, the conditions of service to others may exist for doctors, police officers, and retail sales people.



A detailed description of the frequency distribution of sample variables is provided in Chapter V. To briefly review the distribution of occupational variables, of the 40 individuals interviewed in this study, 25% worked in upper-status occupations, 37.5% in middle-status occupations, and 37.5% in lower-status occupations. Regarding the questionnaire sample of 177 respondents, 28% worked in upper-status occupations, 47% in middle-status occupations, and 25% in lower-status occupations. In the interview sample, 67% of respondents worked in white-collar occupations and 33% worked in blue-collar occupations. In the questionnaire sample, 75% were white-collar workers and 25% were blue-collar workers. Although the distribution of these variables is not perfectly balanced, there are enough respondents within each category to analyze according to occupational variables. (The specific occupations included within each category and the number included in the sample is detailed in Chapter V.)

With an understanding of the overlapping of occupational variable categories and with a review of the sample in relation to these variables, findings regarding occupational variation in work values can now be presented. In addition to the general theme of self-fulfillment in the contemporary work ethic, themes regarding work values did emerge that were more specific to the occupational variables of status, type, degree of professionalization, and

conditions of work.

In this chapter, occupational variations within the general theme of work and its relation to others are discussed. While individuals working in a variety of occupations refers to others in some way in describing their work values, the "others" they spoke of and referred to differed according to occupational categories. More specifically, and providing the framework for this chapter, individuals working in upper-status and traditionally professional occupations more often cited contributing to society as an important work value. This pattern may result from an aspect of the process of professionalization -- the internalization of the creed of service to society. Responses by upper-status workers and those in traditional professions illustrating this pattern are presented in the first section of this chapter.

Secondly, those in middle-status, emergent or semi-professions more often cited simply helping others as an important work value. Not having attained full professional status, the acknowledgement of their service to society is less universal so that the value of service is more directly tied to specific others. Relatedly, those in occupations where helping or serving others in some way is a central condition of work were also likely, as a result of this experience, to cite helping as an important work values. In the second section of this chapter, then, the responses of

middle-status, semi-professionals and workers in occupations directly serving others are presented in order to describe this pattern.

Thirdly, two patterns emerged, with regard to the general theme of work and its relation to others, among individuals working in lower-status, non-professional occupations. First, and discussed in the third section of this chapter, individuals within this occupational category were likely to cite teamwork as an important work value. Also reflective of a potentially more localistic orientation, workers in low-status jobs also reported that pleasing the boss or clients was something they valued and a goal they sought to achieve in their work. This pattern in the responses of those who work in lower-status occupations is discussed and described in the fourth section of this chapter.

Within the general theme, then, of work and its relations to others, variations in work values can be seen according to occupational status, type, degree of professionalization, conditions of work. Responses of workers which illustrate this occupational variation are presented in this chapter.

#### Contributing to Society

It should not be surprising that people in upper-status occupations and those in traditionally professional fields

of work were most likely to cite contribution to society as an important value of work. In order for an occupation to even be considered a profession, its members must convince society that their work is vital and important to society. That is, without their work, the smooth functioning and well-being of society would be greatly impaired. Secondly, it is suggested or assumed, then, that those working in the professions do so, at least in part, for the love of the work and the willingness to serve society and not for personal or selfish reasons. To assure this proper work orientation and to maintain the professional standing of the occupation, the successful training of new members includes the internalization of a professional creed -- a creed that reaffirms one's commitment and service to society. In contrast, however, few lower-status occupations require such oaths of service and commitment. Few retail salespeople or maintenance laborers are led to feel that their work contributes to the betterment of the world.

Beyond professionalization, however, upper-status workers and professionals may be more likely to cite contributing to society as an important and valuable aspect of work as a result of education. Since upper-status and professional occupations generally require higher levels of education, individuals who choose these occupations are increasingly likely to develop a more universalistic orientation as opposed to a localistic one. In thinking

about the importance or value of work, then, those in higher-status occupations are more likely to refer to society whereas those in lower-status occupations are more likely to reflect upon their more immediate surroundings.

Responses to questions regarding values in work revealed a range of related ideals about the importance of contributing to society as part of one's profession or as one's duty as a citizen. A recently professionalized doctor, as a good example<sup>9</sup> of someone working in a traditional profession, spoke about community responsibility:

I would be unfulfilled if I didn't feel like I do something productive for the community...Sure everyone has this dream of going off and living on a big farm, living all by themselves and being secluded. But then you wonder if you could still do something for the town, the community, the church, or whatever.

Another doctor simply said that "contributing to the betterment of society" was the most important thing about work. While a college professor, combining some of the new "self" work ethic with the more traditional "other" ethic said that the importance of work meant, "To be happy and enjoy doing it [work] and try to do it well...and to feel that you are contributing something positive to the world."

Another college professor said that she did not think everyone should work and did not mind when people chose not

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<sup>9</sup> The newly converted, whether it be to religion or to a profession, often most adamantly espouse the creed of the chosen community.

to. She was, however, more adamant that people should do something that contributes to community or society, whether it be paid or volunteer work:

It doesn't trouble me at all when people choose not to be employed...I don't think I look at work as something everyone must do...I'd be hard pressed to make any moral judgment about the role of work...On the other hand, I do feel pretty strongly about volunteer work. It seems to me that people at least have an unwritten obligation to the community to do things that benefit people...I do have more of a moral feeling about that than I do paid work. I do have a sense of morality about that issue, especially if you profess for a living, that you do something of an action nature, to play some role in the community.

A physician indicated that, although he had interest in other occupations, he chose to become a doctor because of a belief in benefitting others:

At the time that I was selecting a profession, I could not have justified the indirect benefits to humanity enough to make me feel comfortable in going into becoming a geologist or archeologist or forest ranger.

Similarly, a lawyer said that even if she had all the money she needed or wanted, "I would definitely do exactly what I am doing now. I wouldn't change anything except I would do considerably more work for less or no charge." She believes that everyone may have legal problems but not everyone can afford a lawyer to take care of them. As a matter of fairness and as an issue of equality, she thought that lawyers should contribute more in this way and that, "Everyone has an obligation to society to give to society in some way." In describing how she contributes and what is

important about her work, she said:

When I do employment, adoption, etc., cases, I believe I am doing a valuable service to my clients who need help sorting out complicated laws as well as counseling and reassurance. When I handle insurance defense cases, I have the opportunity to contribute to capping insurance costs for everyone by successfully defending frivolous cases and settling meritorious cases for a reasonable amount.

Whereas upper-status workers and those in traditional occupations were most likely to refer to the importance of contributing to society, that value was also shared by some in semi-professions. A social worker, for example, said that among other things, what was most important about work was "feeling like a contributing member of society."

Similarly, a police officer said about his work:

It seems to me an individual must have a purpose in life and must contribute to society. I don't believe you can do this by not working. Particularly in my line of work, I hope to improve my community by my work....I am performing an important task in the general scheme of things concerning law enforcement. Helping citizens is the most important task. That can amount to protection from criminals to giving someone a ride home.

It is not only upper-status workers and traditional professionals, then, who believed contributing to society was important, but also those in semi or emerging professions. This may be so because contributing to community or others is an important aspect of professionalization and one that must be clearly embraced in order for an occupation to be considered a full profession (and be, therefore, deserving of increased status and income).

## Helping Others

Part of professional status and professionalization also includes the commitment and willingness to help others. Though not as universalistic or "grand" as contributing to society, this belief and value about work is related to occupational and professional status as well. Whereas upper-status workers and those in traditional professions were most likely to speak of societal contribution as important in work, middle-status workers and those in semi-professions were more likely to simply cite helping others as a valuable aspect of work. Helping others is part of a professional creed and is a belief and value that must be recited and internalized for full professional standing -- an important consideration for emergent or semi-professionals.

This creed and belief is consistent with professional standing, yet it is also closely tied to conditions of work. In addition, then, to the semi-professionals who spoke of the value of helping others, those in middle or lower-status occupations that involve helping others as a condition of work were also more likely to cite this as important.

Further, women, who are traditionally defined in reference to their nurturing of others, often referred to helping others as a valuable aspect of their work. Yet because many women are concentrated in traditionally "female" occupations, the distinction between gender and



occupational conditions as two possible influences on work values and beliefs may be difficult to discern.<sup>10</sup>

Beginning with middle-status workers and semi-professionals, individuals working as police officers, teachers, social workers, and nurses most frequently reported that helping others was an important and valuable aspect of work. Two different teachers spoke of the importance of helping students (and also shared dissatisfactions). One remarked about the importance of her work, "Being able to help a student solve problems related to their personal and academic growth. This has a lasting effect as compared to paperwork or administrative tasks." The other teacher similarly replied, "Being able to help the children connect some of their problems and help them learn.

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<sup>10</sup> Whereas findings, of previous studies as well as the present one, may show women to be more other-oriented and thus concerned with helping, and men are more task-oriented and are less likely to cite helping others as important, these variations are interrelated with occupational conditions. Because women are predominantly employed in traditionally female occupations and because many traditionally female occupations involve helping or serving others, women are more likely to find helping others important--not because of gender socialization per se, but because of the conditions of work in which they are most often concentrated. Many traditionally male occupations, on the other hand, involve tasks that are not other-oriented and men, then, may be less likely to report helping others as a central value of work. Again, this belief may not be because of gender differences, but because of the conditions of work of traditionally male occupations. To distinguish between the influences of gender and conditions of work, as well as to acknowledge and integrate variations of female and male employment and traditional and nontraditional gender-based occupations, a larger sample with greater representative occupational variation is needed.

The other aspects of the job such as paperwork are very time consuming and much less productive."

Helping students grow academically is clearly a central condition of work for teachers and was reported to be important and fulfilling. As a female teacher explained:

The most fulfilling part of my work is watching a student "get it." When you see someone struggle, such as with reading, and he can't remember how to work out words then one day things just fall in place and he understands. The eyes light up -- there is such excitement.

Besides contributing to students' academic achievement, teachers also cited the importance and value of helping students to grow personally. Regarding what was most fulfilling and important about her work, a teacher said:

Educating young adults on "life issues" and the importance of valuing oneself and others is the most fulfilling. Listening to their fears and concerns and believing that you are reaching many young people and providing a safe place for them to get support and share their concerns.

Another teacher said that making a difference in student's lives was important to her:

Feeling good, feeling like I am making a difference. Feeling that I'm important, that I'm making a difference in the lives of the children. And it feels good when the kids come back and say "Will you teach the next grade?" Really making a difference. When I've done my best, I don't have any regrets at the end of the day.

Clearly, for teachers, helping students is an integral component of their profession as well as a central condition of their work. It is not surprising, then, that teachers frequently cite helping others as important and valuable.

Nurses and social workers, also traditionally female occupations, are in very similar occupational positions. As semi-professionals, part of their work involves serving or aiding others, physically, mentally, or both. In addition, and probably even more directly relevant to their expression of work values, helping others is a clear condition of nursing and social work. It is, in fact, the most basic premise of each of their occupations. Nurses and social workers were, then, likely to cite helping others as an important and valuable aspect of work.

A female social worker said that "helping women obtain jobs and or housing to help improve their lives" was most fulfilling and important. Another described the most important aspect of her work as: "Helping people reach their highest potential in several aspects of life and help[ing] them accomplish goals that they want to achieve." A nurse, sounding more like a teacher, explained what was most fulfilling and important about her work, "Helping someone newly diagnosed with a disease understand the pathophysiology in easy terms so they may better care for themselves. I love it when people 'get it'."

When asked if and why she liked her job, a natal nurse said, "Apparently I get something from it. We sit around at work sometimes and ask why we do it." Regarding the importance of helping others, she said, "I feel the best when I leave work when I have helped someone." As an

example, she told of a woman whom she helped through a difficult and premature labor:

Last week I took care of a woman in labor and delivery. She had tried to get pregnant, this was her sixth pregnancy. She had miscarried all of them. She wanted more than anything to have a child. She had spent untold dollars to get pregnant...and she came in dilating at 19 weeks, that's half, and if you couldn't stop her, these babies [twins] weren't going to make it. And she was, she had the most incredible attitude. She was the most gracious human being I have ever met. And it just killed me because I knew that we weren't going to be able to stop it. I knew it. It's not a good sign at 19 weeks if you are already doing this. The babies weren't even in the ballpark, of being viable...And I just could see her expectations, her hopes, her anxieties, that she knew that it was also possible although until the very end she clung to just a little bit of hope and I've never been, gotten so involved emotionally with anyone, because she was so incredible. It was very hard. It just killed me because I knew what expectations she had and how much she wanted it. And she's lost six babies, now seven because these were twins....Everyone who took care of her wanted her on their shift...and everyone fell in love with her because she was a wonderful woman. So that was in a way very fulfilling because I felt like I did meet a need for her, like I was important to her. That felt good, though it was an awful experience for me. I was never so moved by her strength and her courage...knowing that I made it a little easier for her...I was in premature labor too...I was scared to death...so as soon as I got her I knew we had to do some things to make her more comfortable...So I did a lot of that because I knew that would make it easier for her. That was a rewarding experience because, even though I knew it was going to end up not a good outcome for her, but she would at least be more comfortable.

Although much more was involved in this experience, such as the bonding with and respect for the woman in premature labor, it was clearly important to the nurse that she felt able to help her patient. While helping others is part of many professions, it is most clearly a condition of work for

nurses and is therefore often expressed as an important and valuable part of work.

Not only middle-status, white-collar workers report helping others as important, however. As a critical and central condition of work, police officers also frequently cited the importance of helping others. As one male police officer, in speaking about the fulfillment and importance of helping, most simply explained that, "helping others, however minimally, and having that person acknowledge your effort," was central to his work fulfillment and values. Another police officer, who said if she weren't in law enforcement, she would be in some kind of counseling, said, "It's real important to me to help these people find other answers to things, other than jail."

Even a police officer working in an administrative position in the accreditation department cited the importance of helping people. Asked if he would continue working if he had all the money he needed or wanted, he said he definitely would. He explained the importance of work in his life:

I have spent most of my life, most of my adult life, helping people in one fashion or another. And that's probably how I will spend the rest of my life. I'm too old to change it. I have fun enough on my own, I don't have to be hedonistic about it. There's plenty of enjoyable things that I do. But its very important morally and ethically to me that I give somebody else a chance to make better of what they can of their lives.

He added:

I don't think I would stay in this business if it were not for the ability to help someone. If it weren't for the fact that sometime in my career, and hopefully more than once, sometime in my career that I could make a difference in somebody's life, then there would be little reason for me to be in this business. The satisfaction in this business doesn't come from putting people in jail. It doesn't come from the fights you have to get into every once in awhile. At least to me, the satisfaction in this business comes from ultimately being able to make a difference both to the community and to the people.

This particular police officer was a respiratory therapist for premature babies for 10 years before he entered law enforcement (for the money). Helping others is so important to him that if he won some sort of lottery, he said he would open a clinic for indigent people simply because something needs to be done for them.

Another police officer said that anyone in law enforcement had to like working with people and enjoy helping people. In speaking about what was most important in his work, he replied:

To be there to help people when they are really in need. We find that a lot. Whether it's the fact that they have been assaulted or if whether I just go out there and happen to pick up a street person and find him a place, even if it has to be jail sometimes, at least he's out of the cold.

Although "blue-collar" workers and mostly male, these police officers are clearly as committed to helping others as are those in middle-status, white-collar occupations. This would suggest, then, that the value of helping others in work is more a result of conditions of work than it is occupational status, degree of professionalization, or type

of work.

Supporting this perspective are statements by workers in upper and lower-status occupations that involve serving or helping others in some way. Although the common characterization of lawyers in contemporary society might suggest otherwise, many lawyers spoke about the importance and value of helping others in their work. Similar to teachers, one lawyer referred to the most fulfilling and important aspect of his work as:

Helping people and receiving their thanks. The other aspects of my work, paperwork, computer work, learning and applying the law, don't provide the same personal feelings of fulfillment.

Another lawyer defined his work on the basis of helping others. He said, "assisting people and companies with their legal and business needs" was important and valuable because "I earn a living by helping others."

Because those in traditional professions often possess knowledge and expertise in areas which lay people do not, some lawyers found particular fulfillment and placed particular value on helping people sort through legal problems. A lawyer of 25 years described the most fulfilling and valuable aspect of his work as, "Helping people who have legal problems which are confounding and troubling to them. It is a nice feeling to be able to help someone in need." Similarly, a lawyer of 32 years said he was fulfilled by helping others with complicated legal problems. In speaking about what he enjoyed about his work,

he said, "Helping folks who have hard problems but little knowledge of law or procedure. Many times this is for little or nothing. I also enjoy helping older folks who need help with day to day financial matters."

A male doctor said that "giving comfort for patients with chronic medical problems" was fulfilling and important. Further he said, "As a neurologist I don't often cure, but can usually offer amelioration of symptoms and provide psychological support."

Certainly it is not only upper and middle-status workers who, as a condition of their work, serve and aid others and who may therefore believe in this as a central work value. Many lower-status and blue-collar occupations, in fact, also involve helping others and individuals in these jobs may cite helping others as an important work value as well. A unionized manufacturing worker involved in a bitter contract dispute, for example, explained that the value and fulfillment of his work involved improving working conditions for others: "When we reach an agreement that is fair for both parties -- an agreement that is able to help the people I was elected to help."

A retail salesperson also spoke of the importance of helping others. He said about his work:

I enjoy working with people, helping them, and seeing them satisfied. I don't mind doing displays, stock, inventory, etc. -- but it takes time away from my customers. I am not able to notice them or assist them as well when other things are taking my attention.



And finally, one secretary working in an academic environment said she felt like she was contributing and helping students when she did her work.

I feel like I am contributing to the kid's education even by helping their professors be prepared. I kind of take pride in being involved in the kid's education in an indirect way. And I think there's a lot. I deal with the public, I have people coming in off the street occasionally, people from other colleges who visit, people who bring their kids here to look at the college. And I just feel like being friendly and open with them and willing to take a few minutes to talk with them...I am also promoting the college... in a small way, but I think it's important.

Clearly, then, it is not only middle-status semi-professionals who believe helping others is an important and valuable aspect of work, as reflected in their responses regarding their work values. Those in upper and lower-status occupations for whom serving or aiding others in some way is a central condition of work were also likely to report that helping others was part of their work values. Status, degree of professionalization, and conditions of work are all, then, related to this particular work value.

#### Teamwork

While upper-status workers may embrace contributing to society as a central work value because, they are more likely, as a result of higher levels of education, to have more universalistic orientations. Lower-status workers, by virtue of their generally lower educational levels, are more likely to have localistic orientations. Members of lower-

status or blue-collar occupations may reflect this orientation in work values which stress the importance of the more immediate work environment. Where upper-status workers and traditional professionals, then, stress contribution to society and middle-status semi-professionals stress helping others, lower-status and blue-collar workers are more likely to stress teamwork as a central work value. This is particularly accented in occupations where the conditions of work do not directly include service to others. It was also more prevalent among males, either as a result of socialization or as a result of the conditions of work in which men more often find themselves.

Describing the importance of teamwork, a laborer spoke of the people he worked with:

I've got two other guys that I work with. They're real good guys to get along with. We work together like a team. Just like a motor. All of us fit together like one big unit. If one of us is out, the others just pick up the load and go with it. These past couple of days we've been one guy short because he has problems with his body. But it's just like he's still here. I pick up the extra load and just go with it.

A groundskeeper, who said the thing he liked most about his work was the freedom and autonomy, still found teamwork and helping his coworkers to be very important. Describing this view and how he also helps cover for sick or injured coworkers, he said:

Even though each of us is really autonomous, we still work as a team. We have a fella who has been out ill and I have worked the past two days in his area to try and help keep up his area.

That kind of stuff goes on all the time. I've got a big project coming up that will probably get started sometime within the next month and I will probably have one or two people that will need to help me with it.

He added about himself:

I've always been very much a team player, even in sales. Everything that I've ever done, I've always tried to be a team player. I'm not saying I'm a company man, but I am a team player. If there's something that I can do to help someone else out, I am more than willing to do it. I don't expect somebody to come back and repay me. I've just always been that way.

Not only is working together significant to many lower-status or blue-collar workers, being able to depend on others and being dependable to others was also reported as being important. Another groundskeeper, who works with a partner who is a friend, said about working together:

That means a lot. It makes things go a whole lot smoother. You don't have to worry if he is going to steal from me today or not. I can always depend on him. If I need him to do something, I know he can do it. And that means a lot...And he can depend on me. I know that he can.

A custodian also thought that teamwork helped make work tasks go more smoothly. He said:

I believe if you work as a team, you get along better, and you get to know everyone and it's just nice being together and working together. It just works out better that way...Being united, it works out beautiful. Divided it doesn't work out, but united works out beautiful.

Not only manual workers cited teamwork as important and helpful. Regarding what was most important about work, a secretary said, "Being able to work together as a 'team' and be most productive with everyone involved in that same

work."

Working as a team was also considered important in relation to several conditions of work. As mentioned previously by a groundskeeper, certain tasks sometimes require several workers. Being able to depend on others and having them available for such tasks makes the work easier. A craftsman talked about this aspect of teamwork and the importance of good relations with coworkers.

It seems that if you don't have any kind of teamwork or camaraderie among your fellow workers, you're going to have a hard time of it. You're going to be doing a lot of work by yourself with little interaction among your fellow employees. They can give you a lot of help, a lot of little pointers, a better way of doing something.

He added:

It's better to have someone with you. By all means, having someone with you that you can get along with and have things in common with, of course, makes everything go better. You get used to working with someone, whenever they're out you're kind of lost in the woods. Sometimes you don't tend to tackle two-man jobs quite so readily. You wait because maybe the guy is sick or something and is coming back the next day. Because really you spend more time with your fellow worker than you do with your wife or husband. And it's just as important to get along with them at work than it is with your husband or wife. You might not kiss and hug on the job... but you joke and cut up.

In jobs where workers seldom feel appreciated or rewarded by their supervisors for work well done, teamwork and good relations with coworkers can serve as compensation. A retail manager of a card shop, in speaking of how she and her fellow workers managed the busy holiday season, said:

It's more of a team effort. Everybody kind of

pitches in together and gets us through it. And I have a philosophy that even though our boss doesn't necessarily treat us that greatly, that doesn't mean that I'm not going to respect the girls...I care about them, I care about them as a person.

In jobs where freedom of movement or autonomy is greatly limited by close supervision, teamwork and good relations facilitated a more pleasant work environment, as well as brief and sometimes necessary bathroom and smoking breaks. A skilled manufacturing worker explains the importance of good coworkers and teamwork:

If I worked with two other people that'll help me and cover me and let me go, because we had to ask permission to go to the bathroom, we're tightly supervised, that type of situation, if you're in a good working environment and you know your people are going to do a good job and watch what you're supposed to be doing, you know, you can run to the bathroom for ten minutes without asking or run and grab a smoke...and that was a good feeling knowing that I could take their position and let them go do something or they could take my position and I could go do something.....Teamwork is really important if you're in a situation where you have to work with other people. It's the only way you can really perform and do a good job I think.

Lower-status and blue-collar workers may, then, cite teamwork as an important work value because of a more localistic orientation, as related to lower levels of education. They may also believe teamwork is important because of the conditions of their work. Much manual work requires more than one person to be successfully or easily accomplished. Lower-status workers who do not feel adequately appreciated by their supervisors instead find

recognition among their fellow employees may also embrace group cooperation. In addition, in jobs where freedom of movement is impeded by the nature of work or by tight supervision, teamwork allows workers to "cover" for one and another without task interruption or supervisor reprimand.

### Pleasing the Boss or Clients

Consistent with a localistic orientation, lower-status and blue-collar workers were also more likely to say that they worked hard and did a good job in order to please their bosses or customers. Supervision is a common condition of lower-status work and pleasing the boss can serve several functions. First, since it is often the supervisor who passes judgment on work done by his or her subordinates, recognition and approval by the boss may serve as a source of satisfaction for work well done. As a laborer explains:

Every six months we have what they call a report, where we sit down with our supervisor with stuff they had set for us to do and stuff we had set for ourselves to do...If I've exceeded what I have done the last time that makes him say, "You're doing great, you're doing consistent work. Keep up the good work"...That makes you feel great. That's just like a student coming home with a straight "A" average. You take that student, you pat them on the back, try to give them five dollars or whatever. That makes them feel good. Them telling me that makes me feel the same way.

He added:

I try to keep myself to where my bosses will be proud of me...I've tried, in the last two years, I've tried to make myself where people can be proud of me and respect me for myself...If I can keep myself, my nose clean and out of trouble, that's

better than anything.

Satisfying the boss or pleasing customers is also a way to achieve greater autonomy. If the supervisor is happy and does not receive complaints from the people being served, then the worker is less likely to have a boss breathing down his or her neck -- a condition most workers prefer. A laborer explained why it was important to please those for whom he worked:

The most important thing about the job is to satisfy all the people in this school community ...that's my main goal most of the time I look at every morning is try to do my job where they don't call down and say so and so didn't do this or do that or didn't show up on time or whatever ...If I keep them happy, that keeps them off of the people down here [where his bosses are], that keeps the people down here off of me. That and keeping the people down here [supervisors] satisfied where they look and sit back and say you guys are doing great, don't bother them.

From a similar perspective, a custodian described why she liked to do a good job and please those for whom she cleaned:

I try to get done what I am supposed to because it gives me a feeling of satisfaction, keeps the supervisor off my back. I enjoy pleasing the people I work with in the building. When they say I've done a good job, it makes me feel proud. They sent a letter to the physical plant that said I was doing a good job. We had a meeting and the supervisor read the letter. I just about fell out of my chair.

Many people working in lower-status occupations say they work hard in order to please their bosses and the other people for whom they work. This gives them greater autonomy and pleasure in being recognized as doing good work.

Yet, because supervisors and customers cannot consistently be relied upon for acknowledging or being appreciative of good work, some workers were wary of depending on others to feel good about their accomplishments. A groundskeeper told of how he preferred to rely on his own judgment of good work and commented upon the dangers of relying too heavily on the approval and recognition of others:

In doing things to the best of your ability, then you don't have to worry and you don't have to wonder if your supervisors recognize it because they know it. Because if you've done right and you know you have done it to the best of your ability, it doesn't matter if you're recognized for it, you know it's that way. And if each new thing you do that way, you know some people sort of strive on the encouragement, you know, you keep encouraging them and they keep doing well. You quit encouraging them and they start falling off. Well, I like to please myself so that I know personally that I did right. Then I don't have to worry about it.

Although not a lower-status worker, a doctor also spoke of the dangers of working just for the recognition and appreciation of others, even while at the same time he, at least in part, did so. With regard to why he worked hard and tried to do a good job, he said:

In some sense it is a personal sense of achievement and in some sense it is...a search for recognition. "Oh, he's done a good job, that was good, he's a good teacher, a good doctor, he has this award or recognition." As much as I hate it, it is something that I was raised with...So in part I do what I do for external reward or recognition....It's not a good way to do things because you are unlikely to ever get enough back to justify what you have to put into getting it....If you rely on that to keep you going, then you are going to burn out.



While working hard in order to achieve recognition from others, particularly those who have the power to make one's life pleasant or miserable, was frequently cited by lower-status workers as an important reason to do good work, others found that relying on the acknowledgement and approval of others was too inconsistent to be a source of work motivation and drive. It may be because those in lower-status occupations have fewer sources of self-fulfillment, that they are more likely to consider an external source of work, such as the recognition of their efforts by others, to be an important aspect of work.

#### Summary

In this chapter variations of beliefs about work and work values according to occupational status, degree of professionalization, occupational type, and general conditions of work were discussed. Upper-status workers and those in traditional professions were most likely to have work values which stressed the importance of contributing to society while middle-status semi-professional and those for whom serving or aiding others was a central condition of their work were more likely to stress simply helping others. Lower-status and blue-collar workers were, on the other hand, likely to emphasize the importance of teamwork and pleasing supervisors or clients as a central work value.

Although a full analysis of the data presented in each

of the three findings chapters is conducted in Chapter IX, some preliminary comments regarding the specific findings of this chapter seem relevant at this point. From these various and seemingly differing statements about important, fulfilling, and valuable aspects of work, a more general pattern can be seen. Although inconsistent with the common ethos of working for the self as discussed in the previous chapter, members of all occupations continue, though in various forms, to consider others, whether it be the larger community or immediate others, as an important factor in why they work, why they work hard, and why they want to do good work. That is, work itself is good when it contributes to society, when it allows people to help other people, when it allows for teamwork, and when it enables workers to please others.

A lingering value in work, then, and one more reminiscent of the traditional work ethic rather than the more contemporary work ethic discussed in Chapter 6 lies outside of the self. How far from the self this value lies, with regard to self-esteem, worth, identity, and accomplishment, seems to vary according to occupation. The higher the status of the occupation, with its accompanying higher degree of professionalization, the further from the self the value of work is thought to be (i.e., in society). The lower the status of the occupation, the closer to the self the value or importance of work lays (i.e., in teamwork

or supervisor recognition).

In the next chapter, the second theme which indicates occupational variation in work values is discussed. While many workers in all occupational categories reported that work was good because it provided purpose in life. The particular purpose it was reported to serve, however, differed according to occupational status and occupational type. In addition, lower-status and blue-collar workers, along with some middle and upper-status workers, were most likely to believe that everyone who is physically and situationally able should work. The reasons why they should work did, however, vary according to occupational status and conditions of work. The content of these variations are presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

### OCCUPATIONAL VARIATIONS: THE PURPOSES OF WORK

In this chapter, as in the previous one, occupational variations within a more general theme regarding work values is discussed and described. Specifically, a theme which emerged from the responses of workers in different occupational statuses (upper, middle, lower) and occupational types (white-collar, blue-collar) was that work served an important purpose in their lives. While the purpose of work was cited as a central work value by individuals in a variety of occupations, the particular purpose it served differed according to occupational status and occupational type. Following the analytical framework of previous findings chapters, the patterns of occupational variations within the more general theme of the purpose of work are illustrated in this chapter through a presentation of the responses of workers in different statuses and type of jobs. The analysis of these findings is conducted in the following chapter. (For a detailed description of the number interviewed and surveyed in each occupation and for the bases of the occupational groupings, see Chapter V.)

In the first pattern discussed in this chapter, lower-status workers and individuals working in blue-collar occupations tended to report that the value and purpose of

work as being more a matter of providing something to do, keeping them from being bored, and giving structure to their lives. Beyond this structure, younger males in low-status jobs, in particular, often said that work helped keep them out of trouble while females, particularly those who had families, reported that an important purpose of work was simply to provide the opportunity to interact with others. Workers' responses illustrating these patterns are presented in the first section of this chapter.

In contrast to lower-status workers, upper-status workers and middle-status workers, both professionals and semi-professionals, more often cited learning and growth, stimulating the mind, and contributing to societal advancement as the specific purposes of work. The responses of doctors, teachers, business managers, social workers, and other representatives of this category of work are given in the second section of this chapter to fully describe the nature of these purposes of work.

Further, related to the purpose of work were responses regarding individuals' attitude about whether capable people should work. Lower-status and blue-collar workers were more likely to believe that all capable individuals should work to do their fair share and, relatedly, to be self-sufficient. When middle-status workers stated the view that all people should work, it was more often based on the perspective that work was good for the individual with

regard to mental stimulation and reaching one's potential. These patterns of beliefs and values that are linked to occupation are discussed and described in the third section of this chapter.

### The Purposes of Work

As much as we as a society complain about working, seemingly longing for more and more leisure time, when faced with the opportunity of a "workless" life, either through imagined financial windfall or actual retirement, many individuals sing a different song. While we may feel that we work too much, few people interviewed or surveyed said they would stop working entirely if they had the opportunity to do so. Instead, they indicated they might work fewer hours, but would continue to work at their present job or another. Work, with whatever trials and tribulations it entails, is also a source of meaning and purpose. In other words, and more directly relevant to work values and a work ethic, many people work because it fulfills a vital purpose in their lives and without work, they felt there would be an irreplaceable void.

### Working to Fill Time, Provide Structure, and Fight Boredom

Many lower-status and blue-collar workers believed that work was important because it gave them something to do and kept them active. The responses presented in this section,

made primarily by members of lower-status, blue-collar occupations illustrate this perspective.

Regarding the purpose of work, a food service worker said, work "keeps your mind and body busy." A retail salesperson also said that without work, "My mind and body would become stagnant." A manufacturing worker thought that "people need to work and stay occupied in order to stay healthy." One police officer, also speaking of others, said work "gives them purpose and keeps them active." Another officer similarly stated:

Work helps keep people going, it gives us something to do. I see people retire and just quit and then it seems like a short time later, they're dead because they don't have anything to do. I've often thought that even after I retire, that I'll retire to something else.

Clearly, then, for many of these workers there is a belief that having a job and working keeps them healthier as it keeps them occupied.

Related to offering activity, work was seen by other individuals as an outlet from boredom. Without work, they envisioned a life of stagnation and boredom. Retail salespeople, whose work some might not define as highly invigorating, frequently spoke of the importance of work in keeping them from being bored. One said that she would continue working even if she did not need the money because work helps "to break up the monotony of being bored." Another said work is important in "breaking the regular routine of watching TV and sitting around."

When asked if he would keep working if he had all the money he needed, a retail stock associate who had completed three years of college said:

I would still probably work just to keep from going crazy and being bored to death....Work is good for people because it keeps their minds fresh and in some ways it can be good emotional, physical and mental exercise.

A police officer also thought that work helped stave off an otherwise bleak existence. He said:

Without a job people tend to get in a bad physical and emotional rut because what else is there to do except to go to work, then get off sometime and socialize and then go to bed and start over the next day?

A carpenter had a similar, yet more optimistic, perspective about work and an explanation of why he worked. He said he would continue working because it "keeps your spirit alive." Besides offering something to do, working to stay healthy was more important to those who, like the carpenter, rely on their bodies in work. With regard to the importance of work in keeping his health the carpenter explained why he would keep on working even with a financial windfall:

It keeps my health...If you don't have your health, you don't have anything. Work keeps your health. I'm all the time climbing with things, all through the day....What would my life be like without work? Dull. Very dull...I'm the type of guy, I have to have something to do. Constantly. If I come in, I might sit down for a few minutes all day. I might try to wind down, take a break in the rhythm. I might take a shower or what not. But after that, I've got to be doing something constructive...I just can't sit still...physical labor period is something that I enjoy.



Work may help fight boredom and maintain psychological or physical health not only by providing activity and exercise, but also, as another retail salesperson suggested, because it provides interaction with others. (The importance of interaction with others at work is discussed in more detail in the following chapter in the section on gender differences.) She said that work "keeps life from getting boring and gives people a chance to meet new people." Further, as a secretary explained, work can simply be a source of change in our lives and change itself is good because "it alleviates boredom." She added, "Boredom can break the spirit and cause us to lose interest." Another secretary also thought that in addition to fighting boredom, an important purpose of work was to provide social interaction with others:

Although money can buy you a lot of things, it can't give you the sense of accomplishment that some types of work can give you. Also, it would be boring to not have any specific purpose to your life. By having a career, I feel that I am actually accomplishing something....Work is also good for people in terms of socialization with people and in giving them a set "routine" or "purpose" to their day. By working, you come into contact with various types of people with, for the most part, some type of similar interests.

Besides giving people something to do, fighting boredom, and being a good way to meet and interact with others, work, as this secretary suggested, also provided workers structure in their lives. Without work many felt that they would not know what to do or would not be able to

organize their lives in healthy ways. Valuing work's provision of structure was a pattern that was prevalent among lower-status and blue-collar workers, but was also evident in some middle and upper-status workers. Seeing work as a reason to get up in the morning was more clearly prevalent, although not exclusive, among lower-status workers.

A secretary said that the most important thing about work was a that "it gives me a reason to get up in the morning." Others who agreed also thought work provided the additional traditional virtues of avoiding idleness and being productive. A laboratory technician said work was good for people because it "gives us a reason for getting out of bed in the morning and making the most of the day instead of wasting it away." Similarly, an office worker replied, "Work is good for people because it gives them a reason to wake up in the morning and fills their time constructively to make themselves better and help society to become better." Combined with countering the simple inertia of rising from bed, work also offered these workers an opportunity to contribute and to be productive, values of work that are in line with the more traditional work ethic.

Lower-status workers were not alone in believing that a central value of work was that it offered a reason to roll out of bed everyday. A middle-aged college professor who has been teaching for two years also said that work is good

because "it provides an appropriate reason for living (i.e., getting up in the morning." Also, reflecting a traditional work value, however, he said that producing something of value to society was an important aspect of work.

Many other individuals interviewed or surveyed also said that work provided structure to their lives. A police officer said, "I think work is good for people not only is it a source of income, but it puts some type of structure to your life." Another police officer, as cited previously, wondered what there would be to do if there was not work.

It is not only or exclusively lower-status and blue-collar workers, however, who rely on work to provide meaning and structure, some upper-status workers cited this as a value as well. When asked if he would continue working if he did not have the financial need to do so, a college professor remarked:

Initially, I think I would not work. I have a wide variety of interests. I would fill my time reading, golfing, travelling, etc. However, I feel that I might eventually feel a lack of purpose, direction, and structure in my life. At that point, I would return to teaching.

A lawyer said that earning a living was one of the most important things about work, yet he also added, "The regimentation of time, the regularity and dependability of schedule in providing service is very important." Another lawyer had an interesting commentary on the importance and value of work. Providing potential fodder for those who thrive on lawyer jokes, he said work was good because, "it

keeps us from being barbarians."

Along these lines, some of the younger lower-status and blue-collar workers said that work was a way to stay out of trouble. Without the responsibility or time it took to maintain a job, some said they might be more likely to get into trouble. One craftsman said, with a laugh, if he did not work, "I wouldn't be just sitting at home. I'd be doing something, be it illegal, immoral, or socially unacceptable." He felt that work keeps him in check and keeps people out of trouble in general. A teacher who works in a middle school in an economically depressed neighborhood, said of her students, "You need to be productive, to feel like you are doing something. If you are idle, you're more likely to get into trouble or cause trouble."

A twenty-year old groundskeeper said that work, "Gives me something to do...If I didn't work, I don't know where I would be. Prison probably." Although he might be the first to acknowledge the seriousness of his remark, the belief that work gave people something constructive to do was a prevalent one. He elaborated on the importance of work in staying out of trouble, as well as commented upon causes of criminal behavior:

It [work] keeps my mind on track, more or less keeps me out of trouble. If I didn't have something to do, if you look back on where I might be today, I could be here, I could be in trouble there. That's the biggest problem with criminals, I think. Somewhere down the line they lost a job, they got hungry and thought,

"Well, I'll steal this just this time. But I'm going to get a job tomorrow" and then tomorrow they don't get a job and steal something the next day to get something to eat. That's a big problem. Where if they had done right and kept their job along the way, there wouldn't be a problem.

For many younger people, work replaced the structure that school and home life had previously imposed. With this structure and the responsibility and time commitment it requires, some younger workers felt less likely to "get into trouble" whether they mean trouble to be crime or more general mischief.

Many women, by contrast, said that work served a different purpose for them. Women working in lower-status occupations often cited interacting with others as an important purpose of work. For some, the social relations were more important in defining work than the tasks involved in a particular job. A factory technician said about her work:

It wasn't the work that I like the best, I liked the people. The people that I work with are, on the whole, generally some of the nicest people that I've ever worked with. Just real good people.

A similar view was expressed by a secretary who said work was important and fulfilling because it gave her the chance to work with others, to be around people. She said:

Maybe it's not even my work, maybe it's just being there, being around people. Doing and dealing with people. I just enjoy that...I like working where there is a variety of people. Working with the different people, what they bring into work, how you interact with all of that.

In addition to interacting with others, work provided

some women with an outlet of creativity and activity outside of their homes. The purpose of work for these women was to be integrated with the world around them. As a nurse said, "Without work, one gets dimwitted, can't even talk to people...without work you aren't aware of what's going on around you." A secretary with children spoke of how work served to connect her to the world and to others. When asked if people should work, she replied:

Absolutely. They should do something to be creative in this world and be part of this world. Sometimes I get like, in this little corner of the world, I am tired of it. Let me move on to a different corner and do something different and be a part of the world. That's when I think, usually when people are just hanging out...what are they doing with themselves and you're like, why don't you be a part of it.

For lower-status and blue-collar workers the purpose of work could be primarily characterized as providing activity and structure as well as fighting boredom and keeping out of trouble. It could be that for most of these workers, as well as for those of other occupations, work is a highly structured activity. Rather than fighting this seemingly inevitable reality, workers may have become somewhat dependent upon it. In other words, the inevitable routine of daily, weekly, and yearly toil may have lessened workers' abilities or opportunities for alternative ways of living. Without plausible alternatives, individuals increasingly rely upon the routine and structure provided by their work. The conditions of work for many lower-status and blue-collar workers, then, seems to influence their beliefs about the

purpose of work.

For women, particularly those who had spent time at home rearing children and who then later returned to the workforce, work provided a means of interacting with other adults. Work was seen as a way to integrate with others and with the world outside of their homes and families.

### Learning, Personal Growth, and Mental Stimulation

Middle and upper-status occupations, for the most part, are more likely to offer autonomy, creativity, and flexibility or control of one's work schedule. Because of these conditions, and because those in these occupations generally have higher levels of education than those in lower-status occupations, the purposes of work are different for middle and upper-status workers. Members of these occupations more often reported that they believed the purpose of work was to provide an opportunity for learning and personal growth as well as mental stimulation.

A physician of 32 years said the most important thing about work was "helping others and being challenged intellectually and interpersonally to always be growing and learning new things." A social worker also thought mental and personal growth were important aspects of work. She said, "Work is good in that, besides financial incentives, it provides for possible personal and intellectual growth, and lends a structure for that growth."

Others focused more on personal growth and reaching one's potential as important aspects of work. Teachers, for whom a central condition and purpose of their jobs is facilitating personal as well as mental development, often cited this as a central work value. One said she would continue working even with all the money she needed. She explained, "I feel the challenges of a job provide the opportunity for personal growth." Another teacher thought the purpose of work was to help people reach their potential: "My work has helped mold me as a person. I think the most important part of work is how it helps one to live to their potential."

Teachers were not the only ones citing growth and potential as an important aspect of work. A personnel manager at a medium-sized organization also said work was important in this way:

I think all of us have talents and skills that we bring to the party that unless we go out and try to market and use those skills that we'd never know if they're going to be there or not...If you don't have an opportunity or you don't take the opportunity to show yourself what you can do in addition to others, I'm not sure how fully fulfilled every human being would be. If I just sat home everyday, and didn't come to the office and didn't do something, whether work with my brain or with my hands, I would just have this huge void...I don't know what would be there.

The view that work challenged people to learn, grow, and reach their potential was not exclusive to members of middle or upper-status occupations. A police officer of 12 years also regarded this as an important aspect of work.



She said:

I think it is important to expand yourself. When you get to do that, you get to find things out about yourself that you normally wouldn't if you didn't have to get out here and deal with a lot of things. And I think that is important for education...you can stay healthy longer if you can do that.

And regarding people who did not work, she added:

I think they are slowly dying inside. I'm sure they may travel and see a lot of things, but they are not stopping enough to educate themselves a little further and take in feelings...and I think that is real important...to sit down and really take in things takes a lot of work, a lot of discipline.

This officer said she had lived a very sheltered life before entering law enforcement and that working in the child abuse investigative unit was a transition into reality for her.

Related to learning and growth, both intellectual and personal, many middle and upper-status workers reported that work was important because it was a central source of mental stimulation. Similar to some blue-collar workers who found work to keep them physically and emotionally healthy, these workers thought work helped keep them intellectually alive and healthy. As a teacher explained:

Work keeps you young. Humans need the physical and mental involvement to keep the aging process at bay. Physically, the body needs to be "worked" to keep a high level of ability to perform and mentally, the mind needs to be engaged so basic functioning doesn't become impaired (i.e., memory, reasoning, etc.).

A social worker most simply phrased this view: "It [work] keeps the mind alive and stimulated; makes life more interesting!" Related to helping others and society, a nurse said that work:

Energizes us, develops and enriches our mind. It keeps us in touch with current issues and allows the opportunity to "bounce off" ideas and think about ways we can become involved in helping improve conditions around us.

An engineer also offered an elaborate theory and perspective about the importance of work in keeping the mind alive and stimulated.

I think...it makes you think, it exercises you both physically and mentally and I think that is important for an individual or else you wither away. It's like someone who is handicapped. You can't live in the past. If you can't get a job, then they suffer because there is probably minimal interaction. There's not the ability to really exercise what you are capable of doing. I don't know, I just think this thing up here [the mind] is very important nourishment for you.

Further, he explained how, much like Freud's reality principle, work creates a baseline upon which the highs and lows of life may be more clearly experienced and realized:

I think the problem with a life of leisure is that you don't experience the ups and downs of life. You don't have a baseline. Your baseline is a life of leisure. So if you experience something very good above this, how can you tell? You've always been at one level. You haven't experienced any downs. If you know what hell is because you've been depressed or the job is killing you or whatever, it is going to be much better when you have a high because you've done something good or whatever, it will leave a much deeper impression on you because you will be able to see the difference.

When asked if work is related to that baseline, he replied:

I think so because it gives you, I mean it's not everything, but I guess so because you are going to experience good days and bad days that give you that baseline.

Work, then, not only keeps the mind alive and provides mental stimulation, according to this individual, it is also

an important bases for evaluating life's experiences.

Members of middle or upper-status occupations, similar to workers in other occupations, believed work had a purpose but the purpose they reported it serving, however, differed from lower-status workers. The provision of an opportunity for learning and personal growth as well as stimulation of the mind were important aspects of work. This pattern of views may result from higher educational levels, and thus greater emphasis on mental activity and expansion or it may be a result of general working conditions such as greater opportunity for creativity, autonomy, and flexibility. Likewise lower-status occupations frequently do not include conditions of work that engender creativity and learning and lower-status workers may then be more likely to stress structure and fighting boredom as central purposes of work.

#### Work for Self-Sufficiency or Self-Actualization

As one of the several measures of work values and beliefs, individuals were asked whether they thought everyone who is able to work, physically and situationally, should work in some way. Although this question often unintentionally invited commentaries on the current welfare system and its recipients, the responses to it also reflected possible moral dimensions related to work beliefs and values. Similar to differences in the purposes of work and the orientation to varied others (society, team, or

boss), members of different occupational statuses and types had varying views about an imperative to work.

Lower-status workers and those in blue-collar occupations were more likely to believe that everyone should work whereas white-collar workers of middle or upper-status, while thinking work provided opportunities for learning, creativity, and reaching potential, were less adamant about the work habits of others. Lower-status workers believed everyone should work in order to "do their part", to "pull their own weight", or to be self-sufficient.

One custodian, in speaking of the importance and pleasure of teamwork, talked about the difficulties of working with some others. He said:

You always get a few wise guys that are kind of duds...They don't do too much. They're being carried by other people. It's just a shame. I kind of don't like that because it means I have to do all of the work. They just stand in the corner watching. It's not right.

Although this statement was with regard to working together, it indicates the general importance of every person doing their part, whether in a team of workers, for a community, or in society as a whole.

A craftsman also spoke of the importance of each worker doing their part, pointing out that society has different roles to be filled and that people have different talents and abilities:

I think everyone should contribute what they can, however they can. We all can't be Einsteins so there has to be a ditch digger and there has to be

rocket scientists. So all those points in between somebody's go to fill them, whether it's flipping burgers or whatever. There's people to fit each one of those slots.

A groundskeeper offered several reasons why people should work, among these was the importance of doing one's part. He said:

If everybody works, people are happier, they're healthier. They're more content because they know they are doing what they are supposed to. And they're not putting the load on someone else. Everybody carries their own load...I mean, there are times in life that you can't foresee where you can't be self-sufficient, but as a rule you should try to be.

This was the same individual who had been unemployed for a long period of time and who, during this time, felt a loss of self-esteem. Clearly having experienced a period of being unable to be self-sufficient may have softened his beliefs about working, yet the experience did not change his values about self-sufficiency. A retail salesperson, who did not speak of a period of unemployment but who has struggled to support herself through low-wage employment, expressed a similar value about working and also acknowledged that work is not always an option available to all people:

Everyone who is able should work....I think it is getting harder for people to do low-wage jobs and get off welfare. It isn't worth it for some. They need childcare and health insurance provided to make it worthwhile. But we should all take care of ourselves if we are able.

In addition to doing one's part or contributing to a larger effort or community, self-sufficiency was also an

important reason why everyone should work, according to lower-status workers. But as long as people could take care of themselves and were not relying on others in any way, many people no longer felt there was a moral imperative to work. For example, when asked whether she thought people should work if they were able, a secretary replied:

I do, or at least be in the preparation stage for working. I think temporary welfare, food stamps is fine for people who are getting training for a better position or something. But I certainly don't believe in letting people stay home all day and watch television on my tax dollars. If they're going to college and preparing to earn money, then that's fine.

When asked whether people should work if they already had enough money and were not relying on her tax dollars for support, she replied:

Not if they don't want to. Let them free up a job for somebody that really needs a job. If they're happy not working and aren't living off my tax money, that's their business. But I couldn't be happy doing that.

Though clearly preferring work herself, this individual did not believe work was required in any moral sense, as long as those who were not working were not depending unfairly upon the work of others.

Having work values which emphasize the importance of work yet not imposing those on others was most common among middle and upper-status workers. As a nurse most clearly and simply explained when asked if others should work, "I think that if they don't have to work and they can take care of themselves and their families, then I don't care if they

don't." A college professor further added a secular perspective:

I don't see any moral value in work in and of itself. I think there is psychological value in work and there may be some social value in work, but I don't think God is going to love us any more if we work.

While feeling less adamant, then, about the work activities of others, many middle and upper-status workers at the same time cited important aspects of work which were lost through a non-working life, such as psychological health, learning, and reaching one's potential. A another college professor explained, more specific to mental health and self-esteem than out of some duty to others, why she thought people should work.

Everyone that I have known who was no longer capable of work has really felt diminished by not being able to. So I think people should work. I think one problem that segments of our society have is that they don't see a way to work...We tend not to value ourselves if we don't think we are working. Even when I was working on my dissertation, I had a lot of trouble for a few months when my husband was working and I was not...but we define ourselves that way. We lose self-worth if we do not work.... People would be psychologically healthier if they worked. Work gives you a sense of identity, it's who you are or it feeds into it at any rate...It's definitely a part of self-identity and that's why people have trouble with their self-concept if they can't work or if they can't work at what they like to do.

One reason people should work, then, according to middle or upper-status workers, is simply so that individuals have access to the self-enriching experiences that many middle and upper-status workers find in work activity.

Self-esteem and identity were cited as important as was the opportunity to reach one's potential. Some respondents thought that people should work because it was a means through which they could use their talents and capabilities. A doctor described the difficulty he has with some patients who are not working:

I have a pretty strong ethic that makes it more difficult for me to work with patients that are trying to get on disability and I don't find any medical evidence that they need it...people who are not functioning and who I think should be able to function...It is challenging for me to deal with people who seem to be trying to avoid work. To see wasted potential.

A teacher, who thought people should work to be self-sufficient and to contribute their part, also said that people should work as a way of utilizing their abilities and potential. When asked whether those who were able should work, she replied forthrightly and resoundingly:

Yes...when I see students who are capable of doing things in class and don't, who sit on their butts, it makes me go nuts. Because I worked in a hospital for severely and mentally retarded and I've seen a cerebral palsy kid spend a half an hour trying to get a block in a hole, just trying to get the block into the hole. And then you see these kids who are perfectly capable of doing things, sitting there and when you say you need this paper to pass and they say "I lost it" or "it's in my book" my feeling is, what right do they have to let the rest of us take care of them? What right do they have to not take care of themselves and to not be self-sufficient and not be productive? I don't know why I feel that way but I feel very strongly that way. I feel like we should all contribute. It's not any feeling of supporting society or anything, it's an individual thing to me. It's like, who do you think you are that you have the right to sit on your rear while the rest of us are out here chugging away -- a lot of people chugging against handicaps and things that we all don't have.



She further explained her belief:

I think I am very impatient with people, I can't relate to it, cannot relate to somebody having the ability to do something well and then not doing it. ...I have a hard time understanding why somebody won't push themselves to work to potential. I have a very hard time with that.

While clearly not expressing the same laissez faire attitude about whether others should work or work hard as some other middle or upper-status workers, this teacher believed that people should work and work hard in order to use their abilities and reach their potentials. This view involves a sense of fairness but differs from the sense of fairness expressed by many lower-status workers. Instead of fairness being defined as doing one's part, as most lower-status workers expressed, fairness is defined according to not wasting what one is given.

Learning and reaching potential were expressions of mostly middle and upper-status workers but were also mentioned by a few lower-status workers, indicating that although patterns of belief can be found to vary according to occupation, these variations are not absolute. Accordingly, a police officer believed everyone should work so that they could learn and grow. When asked if others should work, she said:

Yea I do. Because I think it is important to expand yourself. When you get to do that you get to find things out about yourself that you normally wouldn't if you didn't have to get out here and deal with a lot of things. And I think that is important for education...you can stay healthy longer if you can do that.

A manufacturing worker strongly believed able people should work because they should help others, be productive, and feel good about accomplishing something. When asked whether others should work, she replied:

Absolutely. Work, but not necessarily be stuck in a forty hour work week. Work in some capacity even if it's only 10 hours to be productive doing something. Because there's so much that can be done in this world to help people out. I mean if it's nothing but going to help senior citizens buy their groceries. I think everybody should be productive in some way.

This individual felt that the purpose of work was:

To make you feel good about yourself, feel like you have accomplished something. And maybe help somebody out along the way.

So, while middle and upper-status workers were more likely to believe others should work to reach their potential, learn, and accomplish, they were not exclusive in these views.

Many individuals expressed the belief that everyone who is able should work. The adamancy of this view and the reasons for this belief, however, varied according to occupation. Consistent with the importance of teamwork, individuals working in lower-status occupations felt that all able people should work in order to be self-sufficient and to do one's fair share. Individuals in middle and upper-status occupations were less imposing about whether others should work, but when they indicated that others should work, it was in order to gain self-esteem, be productive, and reach potential. An imperative to work,

then, seems to be stronger among those in lower-status and blue-collar occupations and the belief that everyone should work rested upon the issue of fairness -- each person should support themselves and should not rely on others. The work imperative among those in other occupations seems to be more of an imperative to the self. That is, it was reported that people "should probably" work because it helps them achieve esteem, create a positive identity, and fulfill their potential.

#### Summary

In addition to discussing beliefs about whether and why people should work, this chapter discussed occupational variation in the purposes of work. Individuals in middle and upper-status occupations more often cited the purpose of work as providing mental stimulation, opportunity for personal and intellectual growth, and general learning. Those working in lower-status or blue-collar occupations were, on the other hand, more likely to define the purposes of work as providing something to do, helping to fight boredom, and giving structure to life.

In the next chapter, the various beliefs and values about work that were discussed in the findings chapters are integrated to provide a possible composite of the contemporary work ethic. This composite, as well as occupational variations in work values, is, then, analyzed

using a cultural-structural explanation in Chapter IX. In addition, in the conclusion of this dissertation, Chapter X, the analysis of the contemporary work ethic is linked to the socio-historical analysis of the traditional work ethic.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CONTEMPORARY WORK ETHIC IN CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to examine possible cultural, structural, and cultural-structural correlates of the contemporary work ethic, the contemporary work ethic must first be defined. In this chapter, based upon the findings reported in the previous three chapters, the values and beliefs discussed by workers are integrated, relying upon common patterns of responses, in an attempt to construct a composite or create a characterization of the contemporary work ethic. Within this first section of this chapter, definitions of ethic, ethos, and values are initially discussed. The work values which emerged in the responses of those interviewed and surveyed (40 and 177, respectively, individuals of varying occupations) in this study, self-fulfillment, relation to others, and purpose of work, are integrated into a composite which represents the contemporary American work ethic.

This composite is then analyzed according to a cultural-structural perspective as discussed in Chapter III. A brief review of the structuralist constructivist perspective is provided in the second section of this chapter and serves as the foundation for a two-part analysis of the empirical findings: a national or macro-level

analysis of the rise of the culture of individualism and an institutional or meso-level analysis of the work values of self-fulfillment, relations to others, and purposes of work.

In the first part of this analysis, using the more general composite of the contemporary work ethic, the relationship between mass culture and economic structure is examined in a national, decade-based context. Here, the culture of self-fulfillment, which is apparent in work values, is linked to economic abundance and the value of the relation of work to others is considered in light of economic decline and uncertainty. The nature of this broader relationship between culture and structure is analyzed in the third section of this chapter.

Many variations of belief were also found to exist, particularly with regard to occupational status and type of work. In the fourth section of the chapter, then, the relationship between culture and structure in reference to work values is analyzed in a more specific way. Again using Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism (1977; 1989), where culture is seen as arising out of a particular structural context, differing values about the relation of work to others is analyzed. In addition, by linking occupation to class, variations in values about the purpose of work are also examined.

## A Composite of Contemporary Work Values

The traditional Protestant work ethic is a concept which rests somewhat neatly in our minds. History has eroded the rough or potentially contradictory edges of this notion and has allowed us to obscure its actual prevalence among individuals. That is, as a concept which is historically applied, the traditional work ethic has been excised from its empirical context and has, in the process, been freed from the ambiguities and contradictions that empirical realities persistently impose upon conceptual or theoretical frameworks.<sup>11</sup>

By contrast, in exploring contemporary work beliefs and values no such historical relief is available. With empirical realities ever present and apparent, conceptual characterizations of a phenomenon, such as the contemporary work ethic, have greater potential for conceptual incongruence and chaos. Chaos, however, may be viewed simply as that of which no order has yet been discovered. It is with this perspective that contemporary work values and beliefs, though far from random chaos, are viewed.

Based upon the various statements of work values and beliefs presented in previous chapters, how might we characterize the contemporary work ethic? It is important

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<sup>11</sup> Further, it has been suggested that the Protestant work ethic is an exploratory concept of modern times invented to explain the past and used to inspire the present (Kelvin and Jarrett, 1985:121).

to begin answering this question by reiterating and further discussing the differences between ethic, ethos, and single values or beliefs. This differentiation is as important as discerning the nature of contemporary beliefs as it delineates the relationship between these beliefs and, in doing so, highlights the extent to which work beliefs are integrated with and affected by other cultural entities and processes.

#### Definitions of Ethic, Ethos, and Values

An "ethic" involves a set of related beliefs that rests upon moral principles or value judgments. According to the language of the present research, it can be said that an ethic is a related set of beliefs and values which most directly includes some assessment of moral goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, or righteousness or sinfulness. An "ethos", similarly and contrastingly, involves a related set of beliefs, but beliefs that do not necessarily include pronouncements of morality or judgment. Separate beliefs and values may, then, be part of an ethic or an ethos or, if unrelated, are simply separate beliefs and values. Work values, as opposed to attitudes about work more generally, involve beliefs about the meaning or importance of work or the meaning that an individual attaches to his or her work role (Wollack et al., 1971). Contemporary beliefs and values about work may not be



appropriately considered to be an ethic or ethos but may instead simply be beliefs about personal and social conduct or the pursuit of happiness and personal welfare that may not have moral overtones.

The specific substantive nature of contemporary values must first be explored and examined in order that we may discern whether contemporary work values can be characterized as separate and unrelated, as related but lacking in moral overtone, or as related and involving moral overtone and judgment. This substantive exploration will, then, allow us to determine whether contemporary work beliefs comprise an ethic, ethos, or simply are a set of work values. As reviewed in previous chapters, the meanings most individuals attached to work centered on three major themes: work as a source of self-fulfillment or esteem, work as it related to others, and work as providing purpose.

One of the most pervasive patterns in peoples' responses and comments was that work was important to fulfilling their self-esteem, identity, or self-actualization. Although the specific ways in which work helped fulfill the self varied according to occupational variables, almost all respondents reported that work was linked very closely to their self-conception. In this regard, one aspect of contemporary work values is clearly non-traditional. Whereas the Protestant or more secular

traditional work ethic based the value of work in relation to God, the community, or others, this aspect of contemporary beliefs oppositely directs work values towards the self, towards the person in isolation, standing alone, linked to the market more than the community; in other words, it individualizes them.

Another aspect of contemporary work beliefs, that work is important in that it is related to others in some way, however, is seemingly similar to more traditional values. Whether it is through contributing to society or to a team of coworkers, many individuals cited working for others, in behalf of others, as being important in some way. Though apparently contradictory to work values emphasizing the self, the belief in the value of work as it relates to others is linked to the "self ethic." That is, when asked what about work provided them self-fulfillment, workers said because it helped or was related to others in some way -- either through societal contribution, direct aid, teamwork, or pleasing the boss or clients. While individuals said work was important for self-fulfillment, what fulfilled them in work was its relation to others: Life is with people.

A final aspect of contemporary work values involved the importance placed on work as providing purpose in life. Work, though again in varying forms, offered individuals a source of meaning to their existence. For some, the purpose of work was external to work itself -- work simply provided,

or imposed, a structure and routine to their daily lives. For others, the purpose of work was inherently linked to the opportunity to fulfill the self or to relate to others in some way. In either case, work was primarily responsible for fighting off existential crises since for many people it defined a reason for living, a vaguely-discerned link with the cosmos, with existence. This view is in some ways a muted version of the Calvin-inspired Protestant ethic, wherein work provided meaning, as an indication of salvation and God's favor. It differs from traditional views, however, in that the meaning work offers is secularized and individualized.

#### Contemporary Work Values as an Ethic

Clearly, these three areas of belief constitute work values since, in each case, the beliefs are associated with the meaning or importance of work in modern times. These values or set of beliefs are related to traditional work ethics. The Protestant work ethic, for example, defined the purpose of work as reflecting salvation, the traditional work ethic defined the purpose of work as useful, a contribution to society. In both of these cases, beliefs about the purpose and meaning of work were linked with spiritual values and community values. The meaning of work was related, in fact interrelated, with definitions of spiritual destiny and community service -- that is, with

more existential issues, with the purpose of life as linked with the divine and with responsibility to fellow human beings.

Similarly, though certainly different substantively, contemporary work values can be seen as part of a larger system of belief about the meaning, not only of work, but also of modern, and especially post-modern, life. The primary importance and meaning of contemporary work in post-industrial society seems to be the pursuit of self-fulfillment. Contributing to, the helping of, or working with others is considered important, not as a separate value, but only to the extent that it aids in the attainment of self-fulfillment. Work is not meaningful simply in relation to others, but only to the extent that working in relation to others contributes to one's self-esteem or self-actualization (modernity means the self is at the center of existence). The purpose of work is also directly related to the pursuit of self-fulfillment. By simply providing structure to time or by providing intellectual challenge, work allows individuals to satisfy the demands of an actualized self, however varying those demands may be among different individuals.

Contemporary work values, then, may be interrelated and thus comprise an ethos. But do they involve a set of beliefs based upon moral principles about right or wrong? We know that traditional beliefs about work were moral in

nature in that they included judgments about right and wrong. It was **right** according to the Protestant work ethic, to work hard and accumulate wealth and it was clearly **wrong** to be idle and poor. It was **right** according to the traditional but secularized work ethic to work and be useful to one's community and it was **wrong** to be lazy and depend on others. In one case, God's will served as the basis of judgment and in another, the good of the community was the foundation for moral evaluation.

In contemporary society, with its expanding secularization, the will of God, if not greatly lessened, is increasingly open to different interpretation, not only as the result of varied religious traditions, but also because of ranges of belief within traditions. Other segregating forces, such as class, race, ethnicity, and gender to name only a few, have fragmented "the community" as a central bearer, distributor and enforcer of moral principle. Rationalization in modern society has also contributed to the erosion of religion and the community as bases of morality and meaning. As the supreme Western ethos, rationalization (Weber, 1978) essentially means the demagicalization of life, that is, the liberation of human affairs from the weight of the divine, ultimately the restriction of God to a special day of the week or to special occasions, the break-up of the Medieval Catholic ethos of seeing existence as a unitary sphere permeated with

the idea of the holy (cf. Rudolf, 1958).

The erosion of tradition and community and the growing emphasis on individualism has likewise erupted from the culmination of the forces of modernization. In the shift from mechanical or organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1984) and from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Tonnies, 1957), the importance of tradition, community, and close personal relations was replaced with cultural pluralism, individual specialization, and transitory, impersonal relations. Capitalism furthered this shift by encouraging an emphasis on the economy, and according to Habermas (1981; 1987), the economic sphere of capitalism and market relations sublimate and dominate all other spheres of modern life. Capitalism, in fact, means the positing of society as an adjunct to the market and non-contractual relations, such as those linking the individual to the community and to other individuals, are accordingly discouraged (Demant, 1953). A person is no longer defined according to his or her status or relation to the community, but instead according to one's class or relation to the market (Weber, 1978). As a result, individualism has emerged as a political "ism" (Habermas, 1975) and is at the heart of the ethos of capitalism (cf. Khleif, 1992).

Despite the demise of tradition and community, however, in modern society are not without bases for evaluating right and wrong and are not unable to deduce, create, or construct

principles reflecting these judgments. Bell (1976:14) described this basis: "The fundamental assumption of modernity...is that the social unit of society is not the group, the guild, the tribe, or the city, but the person." Most directly, then, what is deemed **right** in contemporary American society is that which permits self-expression and fulfillment without interfering with the expression or fulfillment of others. (Here, too, a shift from the traditional to modern can be seen in the replacement of traditional authority with legal-rational authority (Weber, 1978) -- hence, the emergence of a litigation society wherein individual rights and privileges are defended.) In other words, contemporary society is not without morality. However, the bases of the morality have changed from traditional sources, church and community, to a more contemporary source -- the self (cf. Bellah, et al., 1985).

To the extent that this is true, contemporary beliefs about work do indeed constitute an ethic after all. Work values are not only related but they also exist in reference to principles upon which evaluations of right or wrong may be based. Viewed in this way, the contemporary work ethic can be characterized as a set of related moral beliefs in which work has meaning and importance insofar as it contributes to self-esteem, self-definition, or self-actualization; in other words, to a feeling of individuality, to satisfying the hungers of identity in the

market-based, rather than kinship-based, modern world. Most other values associated with work are related either directly or indirectly to this central work value.

Individuals in modern society, then, work and work hard not in order to reflect God's favor nor to win the favor and respect of the community insomuch as they work in order to sustain the respect and regard of themselves, self-reliant heroes in isolation from others (cf. Bellah, et al., 1985).

A contemporary work ethic, then, does exist and can be characterized according to an emphasis on the self, with other work values, such as the purpose of work, contributing to this definition and focus. Within this more general work ethic, however, variations in specific work values were also found according to occupational status and type. These variations in work values, with regard to the relation of work to others and the purposes of work, need not be considered as comprising separate work ethics on their own, but instead as contributing different specific work values, which vary in content but are similar in theme, to the more general contemporary work ethic.

#### Structuralist Constructivist Analysis

In the following sections, the contemporary work ethic and the occupational variation in work values are analyzed according to the structuralist constructivist perspective as conceived by Bourdieu (1977; 1989) and others (Rose, 1985;



Harvey, 1993). Structuralist constructivism suggests that structure or material conditions such as economic activity do not determine cultural behavior and beliefs. Structure does, however, set the parameters within which cultural interpretations, which are created to make sense of the work situation, are constructed. Forms of economic activity do not dictate beliefs and values about work but do set limits upon plausible orientations (Rose, 1985:18). In this way culture, or components of culture such as values, is situationally specific yet constructed culture must also be integrated into a broader cultural framework. Cultural beliefs or values provide meaning, yet the possible meaning constructed is constrained by existing structural conditions and the broader cultural climate of the nation-state.

In examining work values more specifically, from the structuralist constructivist perspective, values emerge in response to the structure of work. The creation of these values are linked to and delineated by the conditions present in the work situation. As a component of a larger cultural framework, situationally created work values are integrated with the larger culture and are, as a result, linked to and influenced by that culture. Specific work values are, then, correlated with both structure and culture and are determined solely by neither, but are influenced by both.

From this view, culture is sovereign to a degree and

may, in turn, shape structure and through integration alter the broader cultural framework but only within the boundaries that the structure and the broader culture permit. Work values, in particular, like other cultural components arise out of a cultural context which can be viewed as a set of meanings constructed from other structures or situations. Because conditions of work are related to other aspects of structure, values about work will be related to other aspects of national culture.

In an analysis of the contemporary work ethic and contemporary work values, the structuralist constructivist perspective, including an examination of both structural and cultural correlates, may be applied at two levels. In examining the emphasis on the self in the contemporary work ethic, certain historical cultural influences can be identified -- such as the general cultural trend that singles out the self, at times leaving it in splendid isolation (cf. Bellah, et al., 1985). More specific to an analysis of contemporary work values and a work ethic, even this general cultural trend can be examined in light of the structural context in which it emerged, namely a capitalist industrial economy. The question arises, then, of how the emphasis on the self as an aspect of American culture might be understood, at least in part, in relation to the structure of American society -- specifically the structure of the economy and work -- and in relation to the broader

cultural framework of the era. That is, the culture of the self can be seen as arising out of a macro structural context and, as such, can be seen as being linked to, and affected by, other aspects of mass American culture.

Structuralist constructivism can also be used to analyze variations in work values according to the more specific structure of occupational status and type. Structural conditions may exist on the macro level of society. They may also be more specific to situations, such as the particular occupational conditions of work. On another level, then, structuralist constructivism can be used to understand how individuals in specific occupational structures create cultural components, such as values, that provide them with meaning in a particular work situation. The scope of structural influences and cultural integration vary at these two levels, yet the process of cultural construction of values is the same. Cultural and structural correlates of the contemporary work ethic and occupationally-specific work are discussed in the next sections of this chapter.

#### The Relationship between Mass Culture and Economic Structure

In this research, the contemporary work ethic has been characterized as an ethic of self-fulfillment. This finding is consistent with other examinations of contemporary culture which have found an emphasis on the self to be

predominant in American society. As discussed in Chapter 3 in greater detail, individualism and a focus on self-fulfillment as aspects of American culture emerged most notably in the 1960s. This emphasis came about, in part, as a response to the social ethic of the 1950s, where conformity to organizational norms and goals and the security such loyalty procured were highly valued in the initial phase of the Cold War era and post-McCarthyism. Such a cultural belief system, as discussed by many writers (e.g. Galbraith, 1967; Goodman, 1968; Mills, 1951; Packard, 1962; Whyte, 1956), can be described as:

Work has meaning only as it affects the group or organization and as it contributes to one's status and promotion in the organizational hierarchy. Work is a means to success in an organization which is dependent upon conformity or adaptation to group norms, on the ability to get along and play the game. (Buchholz, 1978:220)

It was the Age of the Organization Man, the Other-Directed Person -- as writers of that era, including David Reisman, opined -- it was the Age of Rogerianism and of Group Dynamics. The conformity the social ethic required and the security adherence to it offered (although facilitating the purchase of pleasure brought by consumerism) directly undermined an individual's ability to become self-actualized. The importance of self-actualization began to grow, supported in part by psychological views such as Maslow's (1954) which defined self-actualization as the pinnacle of human existence. Yet,

such an emphasis on the self depended upon the very economic and social security that was being challenged. That is, even according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one could not become self-actualized until other basic human needs, such as physical and emotional survival and security were met.

### Self-Fulfillment and Economic Abundance

Similar to the emergence of a social ethic in the 1950s, which grew out of an earlier context of great economic scarcity and political insecurity (the Depression and World War II), the emergence of a culture emphasizing the self arose out of a structural context of affluence (cf. Galbraith, 1984; Bell, 1960). Prior to this period of plentitude, the more traditional work ethic gave moral purpose to work which staved off scarcity and deprivation. Having survived and surpassed such difficult times, the purposes of work and the needs it served, which are reflected in work values, had to be upgraded. Subsistence no longer was a sufficient pay-off for work since subsistence was no longer in question for most. Instead, the pay-off for work, the values associated with work shifted to self-fulfillment (Barash, 1983:238). In this way, economic condition, a central structure of society, shaped culture and, in particular, cultural values and beliefs about the role of work.

The contemporary work ethic can, on one hand, be seen

as an extension of that era. As the self replaced security as a central work value, nothing else has since emerged to replace the self. The age of affluence, making an emphasis on the self feasible and fashionable, lasted from 1941 to 1971, when Nixon floated the central currency of the world, the U.S. dollar, taking it off the gold standard and allowing Western-European currencies (and, in a sense, economies) to compete with it. During this age, despite a political call to embrace service to others in the 1960s, through Kennedy's Peace Corps or Johnson's Great Society, also made possible by the age of affluence, emerging individualism took hold and lasted through the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> The "me generation" which characterized the 1980s is evidence of the continuation of this emphasis on the self in culture. During this era, of apparent economic prosperity but impending economic doom, consumerism and concern with the self reached a capitalistic climax.<sup>13</sup> In part, then, a work ethic emphasizing self-fulfillment is a cultural legacy which arose in the structural context of economic abundance.

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<sup>12</sup> It should be mentioned that although the predominant trend of the 1950s was affluence and self-satisfaction, there was a counter-trend exemplified by social criticism of such cultural egoism (cf. Harrington, 1962; Mills, 1956).

<sup>13</sup> This is not to suggest that selfishness is the highest or only expression of self-fulfillment. In fact, altruism can be seen as a component of or adjunct to self-fulfillment as can be seen in the traditional work ethic and the contemporary work ethic.

## Economic Decline: The Self and Others

The impending doom of the early 1980s has, however, clearly reached fruition. To the extent, then, that a work ethic stressing self-fulfillment is based upon economic conditions of security and plentitude, the recession, brought about by major transformations in the economy, of the 1980s and 1990s would have some affect on work values. Regarding those who are generally considered most capable in achieving self-actualization in work, middle-class professionals, one writer pondered the potential effects of some of the work-related changes brought about by the economic transformation and related recession:

We are all likely to become a little more skeptical about the creative possibilities of work when we see engineers, consultants, and scientists discarded because their devotion to their work has been so absolute that they are deemed incapable of adaptation to changes in technology. More important than changes in our own attitudes as recipients of ideological appeals, the nature of the ideological appeal begins to set up dissonance among its promoters as its unreality becomes apparent. (Anthony, 1984:10)

From this perspective, the economy and its related structures of work no longer provide the security or the opportunity for unbridled self-actualization as did the economy and structure of work in the 1960s and 1970s. In spite of this, as an example of cultural perseverance, self-fulfillment remains an important work value.

Yet, the contemporary work ethic is not unidimensional as it involves, like all ethics, a set of related beliefs

and values. Besides an emphasis on the self, the contemporary work ethic also includes a work value which emphasizes the relationship of work to others. While in part this can be understood and analyzed as one of a variety of means to achieve self-esteem or self-actualization or as simply a relic of traditional culture, it may also be indicative of an effect of broader structural and thus cultural change -- such as rising economic insecurity. That is, the emphasis on the self as an aspect of the contemporary work ethic and of American society more generally may be tempered by the insecurities of post-industrial life just as the increasing emphasis on the self following the 1950s was accentuated by the economic securities of the post-war era. Economic and occupational insecurity undermines an individual's ability to strive for and attain self-actualization because it brings into question more basic issues of sustenance and self-survival. The economic recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s has slowed or stopped financial surplus for most and changes in the nature of work has either impeded the pursuit of self-fulfillment through work or completely taken away the opportunity for work-based self-fulfillment because of unemployment.

If work is void or lessened of the opportunity to serve the self, then something else must take its place.

Work is associated with status and self-esteem...  
If work does not bind us to a skill, a profession,



or a work group, then this is an impoverishment of the individual. One of the major problems of the modern industrial society is that traditional bonds to institutions -- such as the family, work, church, or governmental leaders -- have been loosened, or have been broken down. Working together and sharing an occupation creates a special type of relationship. It forges unique bonds which may not be as strong as the family, but are, perhaps, more intense and more human than are political bonds. Work-group solidarity is not only an end-in-itself, but can contribute to quality of life. (Applebaum, 1992:572)

Though this quote refers most directly to relations with others in the context of work, it can be applied more broadly to a work-based orientation towards others. If the self cannot be fulfilled directly in the context of work, because of increasing insecurity and structural change, then it can be fulfilled indirectly through others. Members of an occupation or work situation may, then, be seen as an extended family offering kinship-type ties within an otherwise relationless society. In fact, modern society, or *Gesellschaft* may persist and survive because of these pockets or enclaves of *Gemeinschaft*. In post-industrial society where service-oriented occupations are on the rise, this culturally constructed value of the importance of others in work is further structurally grounded.

In addition, an emphasis on the self isolates individuals who are, as a result of industrialization, already isolated in distinctly separated spheres of society. Religious, political, and even familial spheres have, in various ways, failed to fully reintegrate individuals in society and have, in some respects, contributed to further

isolation. Work, on the other hand, is an integrating force as it is a sphere of social activity in which many individuals consistently participate -- interdependence as the basis, in fact, of solidarity (organic) in modern society. While decreased economic prosperity and security have potentially threatened the search for self-fulfillment for those who are active in the labor force, work, in its relation to others, provides an alternative source of meaning and value.<sup>14</sup> This value, which it should be mentioned does not supersede the value of self-fulfillment in work but merely complements it, is accentuated by a structure of work which is service, and therefore other, oriented.

The general contemporary work ethic can, then, be analyzed in its structural and cultural context. It can be linked to the American cultural emphasis on the individual, which arose partly in response to the economic prosperity following World War II. The emphasis on self-fulfillment in the contemporary work ethic is, however, tempered by the economic recession of the 1980s and early 1990s and by the transformation of the economy and work from industrial to a

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<sup>14</sup> The response to increased economic insecurity has been different, of course, among those not allowed to participate in the labor force. I am not, therefore, implying that economic hardship is pulling Americans out of their isolated, individualistic way of life to a more other-oriented, communal orientation. Quite the opposite shift is occurring for a large segment of our society who lack any opportunity of integration.

post-industrial. In the next section, occupational variations in work values are examined according to conditions of work.

### Analysis of Occupational Variations in Work Values

While the contemporary work ethic can generally be characterized as one emphasizing the self, relating work to others, and finding purposes in work which support these two values, variations in work values also exist according to occupation -- most specifically, occupational status, occupational type, and conditions of work. Just as the more general work ethic can be viewed as arising out of a particular structural context -- for example, the way the nation-state is organized, the context of the national economy -- occupationally specific work values can also be viewed as arising out of particular occupational structures. That is, workers not only live in a broader structural and cultural climate, they also live within more particular occupational niches. These niches include certain structural elements -- conditions of work --which set parameters within which workers may construct meaning for their existence and experience.

Occupational structure, however, may delineate work-related culture (work values) in several ways. Most simply, the specific conditions of work, such as the availability of autonomy, creativity, control, security, and the like,

together create a particular circumstance in which some constructions or interpretations of meaning are more possible than others. For example, occupations offering little creativity or security do not readily offer the worker opportunities for reaching self-potential or actualization and work values constructed to provide meaning to the work situation are not likely to emphasize these goals. Occupational differences in the relation of work to others can be analyzed according to this perspective.

#### Value of Work in Relation to Others

As illustrated in Chapter VII, while most workers defined the importance and value of their work in relation to others, the others towards which the work was oriented varied according to occupation. Upper and middle-status professionals were more likely to state that contributing to society and helping others was an important and valuable aspect of their work, whereas lower-status workers emphasized pleasing the boss or others, and blue-collar workers highlighted teamwork. Although some of the conditions of work associated with occupations within these occupational categories cannot be specifically linked to work values and thus serve as a basis of analysis<sup>15</sup>, one

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<sup>15</sup> Due, in part, to the qualitative nature of the research and a related small sample size (40 interviewed and 177 surveyed), documentation of variation according to specific conditions of work is somewhat limited. Grouping variations of belief into the broader categories of

condition that differentiates occupations can -- the degree of professionalization. Different occupations have different creeds or ideologies about what is important in their work, what sustains them and gives their activity meaning. These creeds may arise "naturally" or may be instilled in the process of professionalization.

Many upper and several middle-status occupations are defined as professions. In order to attain and maintain professional status, an occupation must, among other things, prove itself to be invaluable to the well-being of the society and, because society therefore depends upon it, an occupation must reassuringly illustrate its special moral character which warrants such a responsible position. Creeds, such as the hippocratic oath of doctors, proclaim a profession's commitment to the service of the public good. These creeds may also be thought of as ideologies because they provide justification of an occupation's status as a profession.

Professional ideologies are instilled in the individual worker during the process of professionalization. This process includes not only the acquiring of specialized skills and education, but also the resocialization of one's identity and outlook through the internalization of the profession's ideology (Becker, 1970).

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occupational status and type compensates for this methodological circumstance.

Individuals find purpose and identity through ideology. When individuals share an ideology, they also share an identity and have a common purpose. A shared ideological commitment brings collective energies into focus. (Buchholz, 1983:52)

From this perspective, it is not surprising, then, that individuals working in professional occupations which, as a result of their status as professional include a commitment to the service of society, cite contribution to society as an important and valuable aspect of work. All human groups, including professions, make claims and have myths to live by; some even live up to such myths and exemplify them.

Yet, although determinism is often attractive, we should be careful not to suggest that professional ideologies are the sole determinants of work values. Beliefs or ideologies emerge not only from professionalization or from the requisites of the larger economic or occupational structure, but also from psychological sources, the broader cultural framework, and other factors.

A principle ideology concerns the orientation to work. Wants and expectations can be based on individual needs in the psychological sense but they can also be based on culturally prescribed goals. Hence, it is not possible to explain all variations in the orientation to work from the process of socialization within the immediate socio-technical system or as a response to the exigencies of the formal organization. (Buchholz and Dickson, 1979:236)

Professional status, then, does not necessarily directly demarcate work values. The ideologies inherent in professionalism may be pervasive but, in order to be even

nearly determinant, must find fulfillment or realistic expression in the activities of those it proposes to exalt.

Professions, like other occupations, consist of many tasks, some of which could be exalted as saving society, others which could be considered inconsequential to the betterment of mankind. A school teacher, for example, is more likely to define her work based upon the more consequential aspects of her job, such as teaching children, rather than the more inconsequential aspects, such as recess patrol. Within a profession, there is a rank order of activities, the most important of which are adopted as the professional creed. Between professions, there is also a hierarchy of status, one reflecting the historically achieved power of a given profession vis-a-vis others.

This general perspective may help explain why there is variation in professionals' commitment to contributing to society and why other workers sometimes cited it as important as well. That is, some professionals emphasized simply helping others as a valuable aspect of their work. Semi or non-professionals, particularly those for whom helping or serving others was a central condition of their work, also stated that helping others was important.

For semi-professionals, it may be that this work value is related to their intermediate professional position, that is, that abstracting from the helping-orientation of their occupation into a societal level contribution had not yet

occurred. It is also possible, as is most likely the case for non-professionals, that the conditions of their work shaped their values in such a way that helping others was seen as important. Each of these are plausible explanations of potential shapers of work values and beliefs.

Beliefs about work are seen to derive both from the effect of a particular form of work on individual beliefs and from the effect of culturally based ideologies about work. Ideologies result partially from the legacy of institutions and ideas which is "adopted" by each generation...and, partially, as rationalizations of current self interests and actions. In this way ideologies are formulated through the constant interplay between current contingencies and historical legacies. (Buchholz and Dickson, 1979:235-6)

The emphasis of lower-status workers on pleasing the boss or clients and the emphasis of many blue-collar workers on teamwork is a clear example of the "interplay between current contingencies and historical legacies." It is not safe to assume that lower-status workers do not aspire to the same status and societal regard that is accorded professionals. What is safer to assume is that the means to attain such a status are less readily available. A historical legacy of work values includes the belief of serving others in some way, whether it be God or the society. The current contingencies of many lower-status and blue-collar occupations, however, limit the ability of one's work to be seen as directly and clearly contributing to the well-being of society or to help others in a way that is considered by the larger society to be indispensable.



Emphasizing teamwork and pleasing the boss may be viewed as expressions of this general will, however, that are situationally constrained by conditions of work. Teamwork and pleasing the boss link lower-status and blue-collar workers to others in the same way, though on a very different scale, that contributing and helping links middle and upper-status workers to others.

These work values are, then, both structurally specific (the conditions of work) and culturally relative (according to broader definitions of the value of work).

#### Occupation and Social Class: The Purpose of Work

Besides specific conditions of work, that is, beyond the structure of an occupation, individuals are also more broadly shaped by the conditions of their class position. In the same way that work structure limits the creation of cultural interpretations, the class structure of the broader society constrains and shapes, through available and unavailable resources of meaning, cultural construction. In other words, as one of the positions in the social structure and one related to occupation, objective class structure creates interests and constraints (Turner, 1991:515). Further, individuals' interpretations of their position in the structure do not simply provide understanding and meaning.

Peoples' "definitions of situations" are neither neutral nor innocent, but are often ideological

weapons that are very much a part of the objective class structures and the inherent conflicts of interests generated by such class structures. (Turner, 1991:510)

Because occupation is linked to class position, differences in work values may also be analyzed in this broader sense.

In the previous discussion in this chapter, the individual worker in a particular occupational structure creates a culture which provides meaning to the experience delineated by that structure, which in turn dialectically, may shape the structure. In the same way, class cultures are constructed out of the resources made available or not available by the social structure. In this way, work values which are shaped out of similar occupational experiences can become class values, as class also involves similar outlooks on life. Class culture may also, in turn, shape, either through change or reinforcement, the social/economic structure.

Classes as collective personalities, with interests and consciousness of their own, are thus fabricated from the manifold lives of those individual actors who construct their biological praxes from within the objective horizons of their class. The class actor and the individual are not coextensive, nor are they reducible to one another...They are dialectically linked parts of a single whole so that each part only exists in and through the limiting possibilities of its opposite. (Harvey, 1993:22)

To the extent that individuals belonging to any particular social class share some experiences relative to an objective structure, they will, then, according to this perspective, "represent the world in common ways and

classify, choose, evaluate, and act in a particular manner" (Turner, 1991:516). Work values are one such representation and commonality can be found among members of different occupational, and therefore more broadly social, statuses. More specifically, values regarding the purpose of work and reasons people should work vary according to occupational status. These variations can be understood and analyzed according to the perspective discussed above.

Most lower-status workers in this research, who because of the close link between occupational status and social class are likely to be members of the lower class, said that everyone who was able to work should work. Partly related to the importance of teamwork, people should work to be self-sufficient and not to rely on others for financial support. In describing this work value of other members of the lower-class, one author found:

The creed of giving a fair day's work for a fair day's wage is a point of pride...A man's sense of masculinity is irrevocably grounded in the fact that he is a steady worker and the family's breadwinner. It is a poignant fact of lower-class life, however, that the jobs these men hold seldom command sufficient social esteem. Most men resent this, but can do little to change public culture's evaluation of them and their work. (Harvey, 1993:73-4) (cf. MacLeod, 1984; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1981)

What the lower-status worker can do, however, is object to or loathe those who do not make the same sacrifices and face the same social stigmas. Lower-class life is constrained by harsh economic realities that are staved off, when they are, only by work in jobs which are sometimes

neither secure nor fulfilling. Out of these circumstances, individuals in the lower-class construct an interpretation of their experience which somehow justifies their reality. One of the few interpretations or ideologies which can be sustained in the objective position of lower-status work and working class life is the importance of self-sufficiency (cf. LeMasters, 1975). As long as workers are able to be sufficient, they have earned a status higher than those who are not able to be self-sufficient. When work or other economic realities of lower or working class life are do not offer status and esteem, the importance of self-sufficiency as a work-related value is accentuated.

Besides emphasizing self-sufficiency, lower-status workers were also more likely than other respondents to say the most important purposes of work were to fight boredom and provide structure. Members of the lower class most often have lower levels of education. This objective class correlate greatly shapes class culture.

The educational processes [of different social classes] lead to motivational structures that are class specific, that is, the repressive authority of conscience and an individualistic achievement orientation among the bourgeoisie, and to external superego structures and a conventional work morality in the lower class.  
(Habermas, 1975:77)

For the lower class, a more limited educational experience creates a structure in which expressions of activity are more restricted. Consequently, with fewer resources with which to structure their time and entertain their

capabilities, work provides a given structure which helps fight the boredom that an otherwise non-working day, week, year, or life would bring.

For the middle or upper classes, a more expanded educational process brings about different opportunities and thus a different cultural construction -- more individualistic and achievement oriented, a different *Weltanschauung* or worldview. Further, freed from direct economic necessity and material need, members of the middle and upper classes develop tastes and hold values that are associated with liberty and luxury. Emancipation from the requisites of economic survival, coupled with expanded educational processes bring about quite a different set of work values. To members of these classes, work is one of sometimes many opportunities to develop their mental acuity and to explore the boundaries of their abilities. Most middle and upper-status workers in this research defined intellectual stimulation and potential achievement as the central purposes of work.

In addition, since work is not as directly tied to economic sustenance and, more importantly, because middle and upper-status work usually offers greater esteem and status, ideologies mandating work are less pervasive. Instead, middle and upper-status workers are more likely to suggest people work, not for self-sufficiency, but because work provides the means to reach one's potential and to

self-actualize. Those in middle and upper-status occupations were ambivalent about whether people should work because their class position offers them other sources of esteem and fulfillment. Lower-status workers, on the other hand, have few means of survival beyond self-sufficiency. When middle and upper-status workers were indignant about others working, it was because they thought potential was being wasted, not because people were dependent or lazy.

Social class position is comprised by many factors, the most important of which is occupation because it indicates the all-pervasive synonymy of work and class. In addition to specific structural conditions of work, it is another basis upon which variations in work values can be understood and analyzed. Members of social classes are confronted with objective structural realities of which and within which they must find and create meaning in the same way that individual workers in specific occupations are faced with conditions of which and in which they must construct meaning to their existence and experience.

#### Summary

In this chapter, a composite of the contemporary work ethic was constructed using the work values presented in the findings chapters, Chapters VI, VII, and VIII. Contemporary work values can be characterized as an ethic because the values comprise a set of related beliefs which imply

positive or negative judgments. The contemporary ethic differs from the Protestant work ethic and the secularized traditional work ethic in that its basis of morality does not reside in God or the community, but instead within the self. This ethic can be understood in the context of contemporary culture which emphasizes self-fulfillment -- a culture which arose out of an economic structure of affluence and security particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. The emphasis on the self in the contemporary work ethic is, however, tempered by the structural condition of increasing economic and social insecurity brought about by the transformation in the world economy and the increasing isolation of individuals in industrial society.

As a result of these changes, a component of the contemporary work ethic involves the relation of work to others. Within this more general contemporary work ethic, variations in work values, as shown in this study, existed according to occupational status, occupational type, and social class. These variations were analyzed with regard to the specific conditions of work for members of professions, semi-professions, and non-professions. Further, class location within the larger social structure brings about variations in belief regarding whether and why people should work as well as the purposes work may serve.

In the next chapter, the findings of the research are reviewed and linked to the socio-historical analysis that

was provided in earlier chapters of the dissertation by examining the work ethic as an ideology. The traditional work ethic can be viewed as supporting the early stages of capitalist industrialization while the contemporary work ethic can be seen as supporting an advanced industrial and early post-industrial economy. Within this framework, and relying upon the analysis of the relationship between culture and structure presented in the present chapter, I will discuss the potential future of the work ethic.



## CHAPTER X

### THE FUTURE OF WORK AND THE WORK ETHIC

As a final discussion issue in this dissertation, the socio-historical analysis provided in earlier chapters is integrated with the empirical analysis provided in the findings. This integration is achieved in the first section of this chapter through an analysis of the work ethic as ideology. Specifically, the work ethic is regarded as a broad cultural ideology supporting and justifying an economic structure. When changes occur in the economic structure, such as a shift from a pre-industrial to industrial economy or a shift from an industrial to advanced industrial and post-industrial economy, ideologies about work correspondingly change. First, the Protestant work ethic is discussed as an ideology supporting an early industrial capitalist structure. This ideology is, however, challenged by changes in the structure of work. As a result of such a "legitimation crisis" (Habermas, 1975), the work ethic undergoes transformation. Secondly and relying on the empirical findings of this study, this process is discussed in relation to the shift from early industrialization to contemporary society. Here, the emergence of the contemporary work ethic is described according to three stages of ideological development: 1) Cultural ideologies

emerge to deal with social disorganization. 2) The new ideology proves adequate and becomes widespread. 3) The ideology becomes fully accepted and part of the broader culture which provides support to institutions (Buchholz, 1983).

In the second section of this chapter, using this general framework -- of the work ethic as ideology -- the future nature of work and the work ethic is explored. In a post-industrial, post-capitalist economy and society the nature of work will be as radically transformed as it was after initial industrialization. In the same way the traditional work ethic was challenged by advanced industrialization, the now contemporary work ethic may be challenged by post-industrialization. The possibilities of a new economic structure may have on work values are explored.

#### The Transformation of Structure and Culture

In the previous chapter, the contemporary work ethic was said to arise within a particular structural context. That is, individuals constructed work values that enabled them to make sense of and find meaning in their work situations, according to national and world trends in the economy. It was argued that culture and structure are linked in this way. Work values, as a component of culture, are also linked to conditions of work, as an aspect of

economic structure, in another related way. Just as work beliefs must somehow "fit" the work situation -- that is, work values are constrained by the specific conditions of work -- the general work ethic must somehow correspond to the broader economic structure. In other words, the Protestant work ethic and the traditional work ethic were related to early industrial society. The contemporary work ethic is, then, similarly related to advanced industrial or post-industrial society.

One way to view the fit between work values and broader economic structure is to view the work ethic as an ideology. A work ethic can help the individual worker make sense of his or her work situation and can also be a set of beliefs which support and justify an existing economic system.

The concept of ideology refers to a shared set of beliefs that are representations of an individual, groups, or an entire society. An ideology is the framework of ideas that integrates and synthesizes all aspects of an individual's, a group's, or a society's being -- political, social, economic, and cultural. Ideology legitimizes the institutions of a society and helps make their functions acceptable. (Buchholz, 1983:52)

The Protestant work ethic can be viewed as an ideology supporting an early capitalist industrial economy and society. As Buchholz (1983:51) explains:

As an ideology, the Protestant Ethic served to legitimize the capitalist system by providing a moral justification for the pursuit of profit and the distribution of income that are a part of the system. The Protestant Ethic not only had behavioral implications...it also had ideological implications in providing a moral legitimacy for capitalism.

Most specifically, the Protestant work ethic assigned moral value to the dedication of oneself to productive activity and the accumulation of profit, both of which were necessary to the early development of industrial capitalism. This ethic defined work as a duty and religious calling. Hard work and success proved one's spiritual salvation and, at the same time, helped to sprout a capitalist system.

An ideology or set of beliefs is successful in legitimizing a given situation as long as "actual conditions [lend] some degree of credibility to their claims" (Zuboff, 1983:159). The Protestant work ethic survived the early stages of capitalist industrialization unchanged because some opportunity for craftsmanship remained.

As long as work retained something of its intrinsic meaning, it could be justified within the ideological framework of the self-made man. But as the engines of mass production geared up and work organization began to emphasize a minute subdivision of labor, close supervision, and increased hierarchial control, what was needed was a new work ethic... (Zuboff, 1983:160)

In other words, as industrialization progressively generated work conditions that limited opportunities to identify and take pride in one's productive labor and hence to assess one's standing with God or the community, the Protestant work ethic was brought into question.

The components of traditional world-views, which represented the context of and the supplement to bourgeois ideologies, were softened and increasingly dissolved in the course of capitalist development. This was due to their incompatibility with generalized social-structural forces of the economic and administrative systems... (Habermas, 1975:79)

In the context of capitalist industrial work, then, the Protestant work ethic and the traditional work ethic no longer could adequately provide interpretive meaning to individuals' work experiences. As a result, throughout the history of industrial society the traditional work ethic, Protestant and secular, has lost its ability to fully legitimize the capitalist industrial structure.

Evidence of the loss of the Protestant work ethic's legitimizing power or the more secular traditional work ethic's influence over workers' values can be seen in administrative attempts to construct and impose substitute ideologies. Having lost the motivating force of a shared cultural perspective, we first see the emergence of such popular strategies as scientific management, and later, self-directed work teams. However:

The cultural system is peculiarly resistant to administrative control. *There is no administrative production of meaning.* Commercial production and administrative planning of symbols exhausts the normative force of counterfactual validity claims. The procurement of legitimation is self-defeating as soon as the mode of procurement is seen through. (Habermas, 1975:70)

In order for cultural traditions such as the work ethic to be sustained, "they must take shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, or [be] shaped by hermeneutic consciousness" (Habermas, 1975:70).

From this perspective, longing for the return of a traditional work ethic or attempts to resuscitate a traditional work ethic in the context of advanced industrial

society is unrealistic and impossible. The structure of society has changed and, to the extent that culture is constructed to make sense of structure and serves to legitimize economic structure, traditional cultural elements can no longer be feasibly sustained.

It is unproductive to compare the contemporary worker with an idealized counterpart of yesteryear, particularly since there is no clear evidence that the passage of time has created a work force that is less motivated than its predecessors. Rather it is far more useful to ascertain whether the American labor force has largely accepted a new attitude towards work, a meaning that is secular and self-centered. (Bernstein, 1980:25)

A more prudent perspective from which to view the contemporary work ethic is as a legitimizing ideology for the current structure of work. Cultural ideologies such as the work ethic may go through a series of stages (Buchholz, 1983:52-3).<sup>16</sup> In the first and early stage, new cultural ideologies emerge in response to cultural disorganization brought about by the failure of previous ideologies to provide meaning. New ideologies reduce this cultural strain and provide organization by creating meaning for human behavior. In response to increasing specialization of work and individualization of modern society, a contemporary work ethic stressing the self is more successful in constructing meaning to work than were more traditional work ethics which emphasized salvation through success and usefulness to

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<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, these ideological development stages seem to very closely resemble the process of paradigm shift as delineated by Kuhn (1970).

community.

In the second stage of ideological development, a new ideology proves adequate to deal with the contingencies of current societal conditions and becomes widespread throughout the culture (Buchholz, 1983:52). The contemporary work ethic has not been the only ideology or set of beliefs which has emerged to replace the traditional work ethic. Other "ethics" include the entrepreneurial ethic, the career ethic, the social ethic, the organizational ethic, and the leisure ethic to name a few.

These ethics have risen in response to the cultural void left by the legitimation crisis of the traditional work ethic, but have not become widespread in the culture. For example, the leisure ethic asserts that contemporary work is inherently exploitive and therefore cannot provide meaning or purpose to life. Meaning is instead found through the pursuit of leisure which work, through its external rewards, makes possible. Yet, work distributes external rewards unequally allowing some greater opportunity to find meaning through leisure than others. The leisure ethic, then, has not become widespread as a work ideology. Similarly, an aspect of the career ethic, the organizational ethic, and the social ethic emphasizes loyalty to and security within an organization. However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, security within an organization or in any employment situation is not a condition which all workers

consistently enjoy. The widespread internalization of these beliefs and values about work is therefore limited.

The contemporary work ethic, on the other hand, may prove to be more adequate in dealing with current work conditions and, as a result, be more widespread in the culture. The contemporary work ethic stresses self-fulfillment in work but, like leisure and security, not all contemporary work situations provide equally the ability for self-fulfillment. Fulfillment, however, unlike security or external rewards, is more open to creative management -- that is, it can be more easily manipulated and constructed than other aspects of work. It is not safe, then, to assume that even lower-status work, for example, is void of opportunity for self-fulfillment.

The most routinized and paced paid labor requires some worker's knowledge to be applied if the task is to be done in the optimum way, and thus virtually all jobs provide the raw material for workers to regard themselves as "skilled," even if this is not institutionalized. Pride can be obtained from doing any job, even the most menial, well, in the eyes of bosses or other workers. The respect of significant others in the workplace can be what is sought and valued, and this does not depend on the abstract quality of the task to be done. (Moorhouse, 1987:241)

Because self-fulfillment can be attained in many work situations, it, as opposed to work beliefs, is more adequate as an ideology providing meaning in work and in legitimizing the conditions of work. This adequacy, combined with broader cultural and economic forces, enables the work ideology to become widespread in the culture.



In the third stage of ideological development, as the culture becomes reorganized, the ideology becomes fully accepted and part of the broader cultural system which provides support to institutions. "At this stage, an ideology...becomes a means of legitimizing a new cultural system and becomes a bulwark...used to support the status quo culturally and institutionally" (Buchholz, 1983:53). The contemporary work ethic, emphasizing the importance of fulfillment of the self, is an integral part of a larger cultural system which places the individual above nation, community, and even family. First emerging most prominently in the 1960s, the "self culture" has since pervaded many institutions of American society. Government was and is expected to serve the individual while individual needs and wants are politically pursued through special interests. Early efforts from our nations's leaders at emphasizing public service were unable to counter this cultural force.

During the 1960s, for example, the "other Americans" (Harrington, 1961) were discovered amidst a society of affluence. Welfare programs were designed and implemented to help these poor, but these very same programs were soon blamed for causing slowed economic progress. Helping those, who by the standards of capitalism's survival of the fittest, could not help themselves, was not considered politically viable because it contradicted the broader cultural ideology of the self -- most specifically in this

case, self-sufficiency. The welfare backlash of the early seventies serves as an illustration of the strength of the infiltration of individualism in the institutions of American society.

More specific to the contemporary work ethic, an emphasis on the self supports and helps legitimize advanced industrial capitalism (and currently, early post-industrial, post-capitalism) in two ways. First, and simply, as advertisers have been telling us for quite some time, the way to become self-fulfilled and self-actualized is to consume, particularly their specific products. Clearly, as much as American culture is a self culture, it is also a materialistic culture. Through consumption, and only through consumption, Americans are able to become better -- thinner, more beautiful, and more powerful. In other words, through the purchase of products, individuals become self-fulfilled and self-actualized. Attaining such a personal pinnacle feeds capitalism at every step.

Secondly, modern work takes a variety of forms and offers varying degrees of opportunity for satisfaction, such as achieving external recognition, seeing the results of one's work, accomplishing something worthwhile for the society, or attaining autonomy. Not all work in contemporary society offers the same sources for satisfaction and the same conditions in which meaning in work is constructed. But one common opportunity for

creating understanding and purpose in work does exist -- the opportunity for self-fulfillment. As long as the conditions of work, no matter how void of esteem-producing opportunity they may seem, allow workers with all their creative capacities to forge some bases for fulfillment, the contemporary work ethic will legitimize the existing structure of work.

Only when either the conditions of work completely inhibit this construction or when workers become unable to create positive, self-enhancing meaning, will the work ethic emphasizing self-fulfillment cease to legitimize work.<sup>17</sup> The contemporary work ethic, then, arose out of a broader cultural and structural context and, in turn, serves to legitimize existing arrangements, particularly as related to conditions of work in an advanced capitalist industrial society. We are, however, in the midst of a transition to a post-industrial, post-capitalist economy and society. As the nature of work changes, values and ideologies about work may also undergo redefinition. In the next section, implications for the future nature of work are discussed in relation to the future of the work ethic.

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that some contemporary work conditions do not already inhibit an individual's ability to find self-fulfillment. However, this situation does not appear to be widespread enough to discredit the ethic of self-fulfillment in work.

## The Future of Work

Although the application of the terms has been debated, it is generally thought that American society is becoming a post-industrial and post-capitalist society. The United States is considered to be a post-industrial society because of a shift from the manufacturing of goods (industrial) to the provision of services and information (post-industrial). Relatedly, the ownership of the means of production is shifting from the capitalist or entrepreneur, who owns and controls the equipment necessary for the production of goods, to the knowledge worker, who owns and controls knowledge which is the central basis of the post-industrial economy, thus moving the United States towards becoming a post-capitalist society. These forces are transforming the nature of work in many ways and these changes have implications for the future of the work ethic.

In the shift from manufacturing to services, one of the central changes in society has been a decline in semi-skilled employment.

This shift is based on three factors...The economy itself is moving in the direction of the provision of services, with the production of goods remaining rather constant. In addition, many forms of production have been moved outside of the United States or have been the object of intense foreign competition...The final factor here is technological change, with the development of robotics and other advanced production techniques that lower the demand for semi-skilled work. (Hall, 1986:71)

For those who had been working in the manufacturing sector

of the economy and who could, through often very difficult and alienating work, maintain a working class standard of living, no such comparable opportunity exists in the post-industrial, service-oriented economy. Further, many jobs in the service sector have been structured to be part-time or temporary which additionally undermines the economic security of the worker. As a result, it may be increasingly difficult for these workers to find or to create self-enhancing aspects of work. However, because service-oriented work often involves interaction with others, workers may increasingly place importance and value on others in work and in work-based sources of self-esteem. With regard to the contemporary work ethic, the shift from manufacturing to services may also undermine the emphasis on the self if new work forms fail to provide the opportunity for self-fulfillment and at the same time reinforce relations with others as important and valuable.

A post-industrial economy and society is not only service-oriented, but also depends upon the management and manipulation of information and knowledge. Work in this sector of the post-industrial economy requires increased levels of education. Knowledge workers, because of their greater educational attainment, will be more likely to expect work to be interesting, challenging, and full of autonomy (Rose, 1985:48). Further, as possessors of knowledge, knowledge workers own the means of production and

may depend less on a particular company for their economic survival. This independence allows them increased mobility which, in turn, increases the degree to which they can challenge any given work situation. Most simply, if a present employment condition does not meet their heightened expectations, they may rather easily seek fulfillment elsewhere. Unlike the unskilled worker who is limited in employment options and is less able to challenge or change conditions of work, the knowledge worker may challenge a work structure which impedes his/her self-actualization.

This potential ability has two important and related implications for a future work ethic. First, it is likely that an emphasis on self-fulfillment in work values will continue in a post-industrial society because of the higher levels of education of knowledge workers. These workers may not only expect more from work, but also be in a better position to control the conditions of work through their increased mobility. Second, because of this influence, the structure of some work in post-industrial society is likely to include conditions which have the potential for self-enhancement. A continued emphasis on the self as a central value of work is likely, then, to exist in the post-industrial, post-capitalist society.

In light of this discussion, perhaps the most important implication of the future nature of work -- that is, the completed transition to post-industrial society -- for the

future work ethic is that because of the differences in work conditions for those with lower levels of education and those with higher levels of education, there may not be a work ethic in the future. This is not to say individuals in all types of work will not find any importance or value in work, but that their values about work will not be based on or related to an integrated and widely held set of moral beliefs. Instead, as work become increasingly differentiated between low-paid service work and higher-paid information management, work values may also become increasingly specific to the tertiary or primary sectors of the economy. In addition, it is most likely that the least educated will be the most greatly affected by the "enforced leisure" that a post-industrial economy is likely to require. That is, it is likely that the global economy will not be able to provide work for all who want it and, in fact, there may be up to 15% who are forcibly unemployed. Work values may vary, then, not only according to different occupational experiences, but also according to different employment statuses.

#### Summary

In this chapter the work ethic, both traditional and contemporary, was analyzed as an ideology created and maintained to justify economic conditions. The Protestant and traditional work ethic were viewed as undergoing a

legitimation crises in the context of advanced industrial society. Similarly, the contemporary work ethic may cease to provide adequate explanation for and justification of the conditions of work in a post-industrial society. Relying upon the forecasted changes in the future of work, implications for future work values were discussed.

In the next and final chapter, a summary of this dissertation is provided along with some concluding remarks about the work ethic and post-industrial society. Based upon this review, suggestions for further research are made.



## CHAPTER XI

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, a brief summary of the dissertation is provided, consisting of a review of the major themes of discussion, empirical findings, and theoretical explanations. In addition, based upon this review suggestions for further research are made, such as studies of work values as the post-industrial economy becomes more fully established, a quantitative study to more closely examine occupational variations in work values, ethnographies of workers in their occupational context to more clearly understand the relationship between work values and work behavior, research including pre-occupational values and interests, and cross-cultural examinations of work values in order to most fully understand the influence of culture.

#### Summary of Dissertation

Having linked the socio-historical and empirical components of this research and having suggested the implications of this exploration of the relationship between culture and structure for future work values in the previous chapter, the analysis is now complete and a brief summary of this research is in order.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the relationship between culture and structure in the context of the work ethic. This endeavor was two-fold: First, it involved a socio-historical examination of the evolution of conceptions of work. Work was first viewed as lacking any positive qualities, except as offering penance, but later, most firmly with the emergence of the Protestant ethic, developed positive and far reaching meaning. Work had value in its direct link with God because work, or one's calling, expressed the will of God and indicated, when leading to success, God's favor. The Protestant ethic was secularized, but even through this transformation, work continued to have positive meaning. These conceptions, the Protestant work ethic and the secularized traditional work ethic, were later analyzed in relation to their structural context -- particularly early capitalist industrial society.

To further explore the relationship between culture and structure, a second component was included in this research. In order to characterize and examine the contemporary work ethic, 40 in-depth interviews were done and 177 open-ended questionnaires were collected. The findings of this research indicated that the contemporary work ethic can be characterized as containing work values emphasizing self-fulfillment, work and its relation to others, and work as having purpose.

Within these general trends, occupational variations in

work values also existed. Upper-status professionals were more likely to cite contributing to society as an important work value. Middle-class semi-professionals said simply helping others was important, as did those for whom helping or serving others was a central condition of their work. Individuals working in lower-status occupation more often cited pleasing the boss or clients as important, as a work value regarding the relation of their work to others. Occupational variation also existed within the more general value of the purposes of work. Lower-status workers said the purpose of work, and hence the value they held in it, was to fill time, provide structure, and fight boredom. The purpose of work for most middle and upper-status workers was to provide learning, personal growth, and mental stimulation. Finally, lower-status workers more often thought all capable individuals should work in order to be self-sufficient while middle and upper-status workers were not as adamant about mandatory work, but thought that work was an important way to become "self-actualized."

The socio-historical and empirical components of this research were, then, analyzed according to Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism (1977, 1989). This view suggests that culture is created within boundaries defined by the structural context (see Chapter III for a full explanation). Using this perspective, the work ethic was analyzed in two ways. First, through an examination of the

relationship between mass culture and economic structure, the link between the Protestant and traditional work ethic and early industrial society could be seen just as could the link between the contemporary work ethic and advanced, or post-industrial society. Further, by including concepts from Habermas' theory of legitimation crisis (1975) and by viewing the work ethic as an ideology, the transformation from the traditional work ethic to the contemporary work ethic was analyzed. It was suggested that as a legitimizing force, the traditional work ethic supported an industrial economy, but in the shift to advanced industrialism, traditional values may have lost their legitimizing force and were then replaced with the contemporary work ethic. A similar transformation in work values may take place as we become more firmly a post-industrial, post-capitalist society.

Structuralist constructivism was also used to analyze and understand occupational variation in contemporary work values because culture arises out of a structural context not only on the societal or macro level, but also within the more specific structure of occupations. Because occupations contain different conditions of work, the meaning individuals construct of their work experience will vary accordingly. Further, because occupation is one of the bases of social class, variations may be seen not only according to occupational status but also according to

broader social class.

Through the socio-historical and empirical analysis provided in this dissertation, the relationship between culture and structure in the context of work values has been explored. In the process, the contemporary work ethic has been characterized and a potential explanation of the shift from the traditional work ethic to this contemporary one has been proposed. As with any research project, while some answers were provided in this dissertation, many more questions have been raised. These are discussed and presented as ideas for further research in the following section.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Because our society is in the midst of such a revolutionary transformation from advanced capitalist industrial society to a post-industrial, post-capitalist society, similar examinations of work values after this transitional period are necessary.

During periods of profound socio-economic change such as the present, a bewildering gap opens between once comfortable old value-perspectives now "outdated" by new material circumstances, and novel perspectives that have not yet been clearly defined or in which persons still do not have proper confidence. (Rose, 1985:18)

Future studies would help to more clearly illuminate the post-industrial work ethic and examine relationship between structure and culture. Such studies would also help

delineate the effect mass culture has on work values and the influence work values have on mass culture. To the degree that culture is constructed by individuals to make sense of their structural situation and to the extent that culture serves to legitimize structure, a study of future work values would indicate whether the contemporary work ethic faced a legitimation crisis in the context of post-industrial work. Future research would also show how this crisis was managed, either through the differential reconstruction (Rose, 1985:16) of the contemporary work ethic, or through a complete recreation of work values.

In addition to describing contemporary work values, this research explored the relationship between culture and structure by examining variations in work values according to occupation. Differences were found between the general occupational categories of status and type of work. However, because of the necessarily limited size of the sample, variations of value according to specific conditions of work could not be ascertained. A quantitative study using a national, representative sample could more clearly examine the extent to which specific conditions of work, such as autonomy, opportunity for creativity, service to others to name a few, affect work values.

The relationship between values and behavior is not direct and in many cases understanding values does not enable us to predict how an individual will act. Further,

what one says about their work values may not clearly represent their work values as would their actions. For these two reasons, future ethnographic research linking work beliefs and behaviors would be illuminating.

Regardless of the type of method used, whether it be quantitative or qualitative, in researching the effect of occupational conditions on work values, the confounding issue of self-selection of occupations remains. Research which incorporated the values and interests of individuals prior to their occupational experience would enable the clearest analysis of the effects of the structure of work on work values.

Finally, because structure does not determine culture any more than culture determines structure, a cross cultural analysis of work values would also help in discovering the extent to which work values are shaped by structure and the extent to which they are shaped by mass culture. It is probable that in all societies this is a complex and dialectical relationship, but a comparison of societies with similar structural arrangements but different cultural perspectives would simplify and make clear the nature of this dialectical relationship.

#### Conclusion

Critics lamenting the loss of the "work ethic" may indeed have something to mourn given the findings of this

research. Work values stressing self-sacrifice and service to God and community appear to have faded from the collective conscience of contemporary Americans, assuming, of course, that these values were ever firmly held by most. Recent analysis and commentary asserting the loss of the work ethic may, then, be correct: the Protestant work ethic and the secular traditional work ethic are not evident in contemporary work beliefs and values. Yet, to link this assertion with the proclamation that contemporary workers lack a work ethic, and hence may not be working very hard, is not, in light of this research, an accurate assessment of the current state of work beliefs. The Protestant work ethic and the secular traditional work ethic have been replaced with a contemporary work ethic, one that equally stresses working hard and doing a good job, not for God or the community, but for the self. Economic decline, which had been the basis for worry, cannot, then, be attributed to a lack of work values among contemporary workers but a shift in work values can be linked to broad changes in the nature of work.

Besides an exploration of the nature of the contemporary work ethic, the examination of work values and the change from the Protestant work ethic and the secular traditional work ethic to the contemporary work ethic also has served to explore a larger question: From where does culture come? Work values, as an aspect of culture, do not



arise out of some "black box" of society but arise in order to make sense of an individual's or group's work situation. Work values are only part of a society's culture and as such are affected by other cultural elements, but they are also influenced and shaped by the work context, or more specifically, the conditions of work.

From this perspective, then, work values and the work ethic emerge in response to structural contingencies and are integrated with other cultural components. Work values, or any cultural component, are neither autonomously created nor structurally determined. They are simultaneously constrained and constructed. In this light, the study of the contemporary work ethic is the study of the intersection of culture and structure, partially, and ultimately a reflection of some of the changes resulting from the shift to a post-industrial society.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Background

(I will ascertain gender and age by appearance, estimate income by occupation, and work in the question of marital status.)

1. What kind of work do you do?  
How long have you been doing this kind of work?  
What did you do before this?  
Did you always want to do this kind of work?
2. Does this require any special education?  
What kind of training or education have you completed?  
Do you belong to any kind of union?

Description of Work

3. Could you describe a typical day of work?  
Is your work generally challenging? In what way?  
Does it provide much autonomy or self-direction?  
Do you supervise many others?  
Do many people tell you what to do?  
Do you feel that your job is secure?

Sources of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

4. What is the most fulfilling aspect of your work?  
Why do you like these things the best?
5. What is the least satisfying part of your work?  
Why do you dislike these aspects of your work so much?

Work Ethic Beliefs

6. If you had all the money you needed, would you still work (at this job or any other)? Why or why not?
7. Do you think everyone who is able should work in some way?
8. What do you think is most important about work in general?
9. Do you think work is "good" for people? If yes, how so?
10. In summary, could you describe your work ethic?
11. Do you have anything else to add? May I contact you again?

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF ATTITUDES ABOUT WORK

The nature of work has changed a lot during the past few decades. This survey is designed to explore whether attitudes toward work have changed too. This questionnaire is being distributed to different types of workers across the country in hopes of gaining a better understanding of people's view of work in the 90's. Your participation is voluntary, but your thoughtful responses will contribute substantially to my research about work attitudes. Your responses will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous. Employers will not have access to individual questionnaires. Only a general report, in which no single worker or work place can be identified, will be publicly available.

Some of the questions on this survey ask you to simply mark a box or fill-in a blank while others ask you to explain your point of view. You may, of course, write as much or as little as you like, yet the more you describe your perspective, the greater the understanding of workers' viewpoints and needs. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

To return the questionnaire, mail it to me in one of the single, self-addressed and stamped envelopes provided with the questionnaires. Thank you very much for your time and effort. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Marcia Ghidina  
Department of Sociology  
University of North Carolina at Asheville  
Asheville, NC 28804

The first few questions ask about some general information.

1. What is your gender?
  1.  female
  2.  male
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what state or region do you work? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?



5. Are you a member of a union?  
 1.  yes  
 2.  no
6. What is your race? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your approximate annual income?  
 1.  0-15,000  
 2.  16,000-25,000  
 3.  26,000-35,000  
 4.  35,000-50,000  
 5.  51,000 or more
8. What is the title of your present type of work?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
9. How long have you done this kind of work? \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) with the following statements:

- |   | SA<br>(1)                | A<br>(2)                 | D<br>(3)                 | SD<br>(4)                |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. I can be sure of my job as long as I do good work.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. My job challenges me almost every day.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I give orders to others more than they give orders to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. My job is interesting enough to keep me from getting bored. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

The following questions ask that you write out a response. The more information you are able to provide, the more I will be able understand about work attitudes and concerns.

14. If you were talking to someone who knew nothing about your work, how would you describe your job, your general routine?

15. What is most fulfilling about your work? Please explain why this, as compared to other aspects of your work, is most satisfying.

16. Please describe what you like least about your work and why.

17. If you had all the money you needed, would you still work (at this job or any other)? Why or why not?

18. What is most important to you about your leisure time?

19. What do you think is most important about work in general?

20. Do you think work is "good" for people? If yes, in what way?

Thank you very much for your participation.