



ECAY5004: Work, Welfare and Poverty

Theme 3: Sociological Approaches to Work and Employment



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Work



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Our Personal Work Values

- As we will see in this Theme, an individual's attitude to work is an important aspect of the sociology of work.
- It will also play an important role in Module ECGE6002Q Skills for Life: Employability and Future Pathways next year
- Therefore, if you have not already done so, please complete the 'Self Assessment Questionnaire; Personal Work Values' that you can find in the Additional Materials section of this Theme on Moodle

What is work?

- You have already been asked to find an appropriate definition of the phrase and you have also shared your own viewpoint
- In terms of the Social Sciences the answer to the question will depend on ones' ideological approach to the subject.

*What ideological perspectives can you recall from
EC SO4001 Understanding Society: An Introduction
to Sociological Theory?*



What is work?

- Theoretical approaches to work have been with us since the very beginning of the industrial revolution some 250 years ago.
- For example, in *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776 [2001]) Adam Smith saw that the increased specialisation that was occurring would allow for greater productivity
- This video (Frasier Institute, 2019) briefly outlines Smith's theories on the benefits of what he called the 'division of labour' (Smith, 1776 [2001] p.17)

1.



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What is work?

- Smith argued that this division of labour or specialisation would lead to three great improvements for the economy as a whole, namely;
- ‘First, to the increase of dexterity in very particular workman;
- Secondly, to the saving of time which is commonly lost in passing from one species of work to another;
- And lastly, to the invention of a great number of machines which facilitate and abridge labour, and enable one man to do the work of many’.

What is work?

- For this reason Adam Smith is often seen as the great proponent of **free market** economics,
- For example by the Adam Smith Institute.

Critical Thinking Exercise;

Let's take a moment to look at the website of the Adam Smith Institute as a source of evidence. (you can do this on another device if this is easier)



Guided Study Activity: Critical Thinking - Sources of evidence



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Critical Thinking Exercise

Now, feedback your findings to your Tutor.

1. What type of organisation is the Adam Smith Institute?
2. Can you detect any evidence of bias on the main page?
3. Are there any terms that you need to clarify or research further?



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What is work?

- However, Smith also recognised that this specialisation could also lead to problems.
- He identified that focussing on one, repetitive task would not provide the same job satisfaction as a more varied occupation.
- He goes on to argue that this means that the worker may only work for pay and would not experience job satisfaction
- Smith sees a further danger in the fact that, if workers are only working for their pay, and that pay is kept low by the employer then workers will not be motivated to be productive (Smith, 1776 [2001])
- This criticism has continued into the 21st Century, e.g. 'Adam Smith and the Contradictions of the Free Market' (Nolan, 2003)



What is work?

- We have already discussed the fact that the term 'work' is often used in a narrow sense of activities that a person carries out for pay
- But we have also seen that it includes **unpaid housework or caring** and **voluntary work**
- Whilst we will focus on the former sense for much of this Theme we could not forget that the other two types of 'work' do have important implications for social scientists
- What we do know is that we can regard 'work' as the carrying out of tasks which enable people to make a living within the social and economic context in which they are located and that 'making a living' can also include the latter two types of activity



'Classical' Sociological Theories of Work

- The study of work was seen as a central aspect of sociology for three of the 'founders' of sociological theory;
 - *Can you recall who these are?*
 - Emile Durkheim
 - Max Weber
 - Karl Marx
-
- We will now briefly look at each in turn before looking at more recent theoretical approaches



Teleology as a basis for sociological thought

- These three founders of the discipline of sociology can be said to take a teleological view of society

*Have we come across the term
teleological before?*

What do you understand it to mean?



Durkheim



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Durkheim and Work

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) saw society as being the 'more than sum of its parts' i.e. that every 'structure' in society was interlinked and contributed to the overall success of society

He argued that each 'structure' therefore needed to 'function' effectively for society to work

For this reason he can be seen to have helped to devise the structural functionalist approach to society

From a structural functionalist perspective, work should be organised and run in a way which positively contributes to the effective running of society

Indeed work was the main subject of his first publication 'The Division of Labour in Society' (1893 [1984])



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Durkheim and Work

- This perspective has influenced the development of several areas of employment
- Durkheim developed the concept of 'Human Relations' (i.e. that a common morality embracing everyone was necessary to maintain order and social cohesion)
- This in turn has influenced management practices in terms of ethical workforce management (Dingley, 1997)
- As well as the culture of corporate social responsibility ([CSR](#))



Durkheim and Work

- Durkheim's theories can also be seen to have influence the concepts of 'systems thinking' in corporate management
- Systems thinking defines a company as an entity with interrelated and interdependent parts;
- it is defined by its boundaries and it is more than the sum of its parts (subsystem).
- Changing one part of the system affects other parts and the whole system, with predictable patterns of behaviour.



Durkheim and Work

- Two other concepts which Durkheim wrote on were **anomie** and the **forced division of labour**
- The literal meaning of **anomie** can be traced back to the ancient Greek for 'lawlessness'
- **Anomie** describes the breakdown of social norms, and the resulting conflict, which occurs when a society changes too quickly (due to population growth or other changes) for the member of society to interact effectively and create new norms (see for example Dudley, 1978)
- Other have argued that 'Anomie at work can be simply generated, for instance, when an organization expresses its values unclearly to the employees' (Jahanshahi and Dehghani, 2020)
- For Durkheim it was important for companies to prevent anomie in order to maintain social order

Durkheim and Work

- For Durkheim, the 'division of labour' in an organisation should be a 'natural' process where people gravitated to the work for which they had most talent
- **The forced division of labour** refers to a situation in which those who hold power, driven by their desire for profit (or greed as he might call it), results in people doing work that they are unsuited for (see for example Dudley, 1978)
- Jones (1986) has argued that for Durkheim 'The "forced division of labor" is thus the consequence of that structural condition in which the distribution of social functions does not correspond to the distribution of natural talents'.



Durkheim and Work

- Durkheim also wrote a considerable amount on the concept of deviance
- We have looked at deviance in Module ECSO4002 Who Are We?: Culture and Identity

What do you understand the term deviance to mean?



Durkheim and Work

- For Durkheim, deviance plays an important part in the way that a society adapts in order to remain functional
- He felt that deviance challenges the perspective and thoughts of the general population, leading to social change by pointing out a flaw in society
- Therefore, in the context of work, both anomie and the forced division of labour could result in deviance

Can you think of examples of this?



Weber



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Weber and Work

- Max Weber (1864-1920) saw work as being central to the development of modern society
- Although his writing did have an influence on later **structural functionalist** approaches, Weber differed from Durkheim in that he was as interested in individual actions as he was on society as a whole.
- For this reason he can also be seen as influencing the **symbolic interaction** theory of social psychology (see later)
- Unlike Durkheim and Marx, Weber was more concerned with studying values and concepts rather than establishing a set of rules to follow



Weber and Work

- Weber was interested in the concept of '**orientations to work**' (see for example Reed, 1997)
- That is to say the way in which the **values** of an individual shaped the way in which they viewed work
- Central to this theory are the concepts of **intrinsic work values** and **extrinsic work values** (see for example Hegney *et al*, 2006)
- We will now explore these concepts in a little more detail

Weber and Work

- Essentially, **intrinsic work values** are 'refer to the degree to which employees value immaterial aspects of their jobs that allow for self-expression as important, for example, job variety and autonomy' (Taris & Feij 2001, p. 3 *cited in* Hegney *et al*, 2006)
- Whereas, **extrinsic work values** relate more to the material rewards for work and includes high earnings, promotion, and job security.
- These two concepts are widely discussed in the fields of careers and employability and the sociology of work, as we will see...



Intrinsic and Extrinsic work values

- In their study of 'the intrinsic and extrinsic work values that were perceived by the members of the Queensland Nurses Union (QNU) in Queensland, Australia, to influence job satisfaction' Hegney *et al* (2006), found that;
- The intrinsic values of nurses included 'the emotionally challenging and physically demanding nature of nursing work, work stress, morale and the level of autonomy' (ibid)
- Whilst the extrinsic values included 'perceptions of the rate of pay, rewards for skills and experience, the convenience of working hours, collegial support and teamwork, the safety of the workplace, nursing career prospects and the status of nursing as a career' (ibid)
- And they conclude that 'it is apparent that the intrinsic and extrinsic work values influence nurses' job satisfaction, and therefore nursing retention rates' (ibid)



Intrinsic and Extrinsic work values

- In his **longitudinal** study of 'Positive Adolescent Career Development', Andreas Hirschi acknowledges that both intrinsic and extrinsic work values are important factors in the career progression and that the 'overall level of importance [given] to various work values is a significant predictor of more positive career development' (Hirschi, 2010, p. 283)
- His research also indicates that 'this can be mainly attributed to the endorsement of positive **intrinsic** work values' (Ibid.)
- One important point that Hirschi makes is that 'work values are not fixed personality traits' (Ibid. p. 285)
- That is to say that our work values are not "set in stone" but will vary depending on our personal circumstances and the job that we are currently in.



Can you think of situations where our work values might change?



Weber and Work

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Work Values

- We can also explore these concepts by referring back to the Self Evaluation that you were asked to undertake in Theme 1

Take a few minutes to look at the Values on the Self Evaluation exercise.

Can you identify which are intrinsic and which are extrinsic using the definitions we have looked at?



Weber and Work

- Weber also developed a theory of bureaucracy which attempted to understand the way that work is organised from a **rational-legal** perspective
- That is to say that bureaucracy is "based on the general principle of precisely defined and organized across-the-board competencies of the various offices" (Weber 1921 [2015])
- which are "underpinned by rules, laws, or administrative regulations." (Weber 1921 [2015])
- We can see, again, that Weber's theories are based on the idea that the effective functioning of society in general and an organisation, in particular, is dependent on a set of naturally occurring rules

Weber and Work

- In particular, Weber notes three aspects that "constitute the essence of bureaucratic administration" in the **public sector**, and "the essence of a bureaucratic management of a private company" in the **private sector** (Weber 1921 [2015])

What do these two phrases mean?



- In contemporary discourse regarding work and society we also talk of the **third sector**

What does this phrase mean?



Weber and Work

- The first aspect of bureaucracy as defined by Weber can be seen as;
- A formal and rigid division of labour which assigns particular tasks and duties to particular people within an organisation based on their talents and abilities (Weber, 1921 [2015])

Can you think of examples of this?



Weber and Work

- The second aspect of bureaucracy as defined by Weber can be seen as;
- A set of regulations and rules that specify 'chains of command', responsibilities and the duties and 'capacity to coerce others to comply' (Weber, 1921 [2015])

What does this mean in practice?



Weber and Work

- The third aspect of bureaucracy as defined by Weber can be seen as;
- Ensuring that the people hired to do a job have the appropriate skills and qualifications in order to carry out the work expected of them (Weber, 1921 [2015])

What does this mean in practice?



Weber and Work

- These three aspects of bureaucracy can be used to create eight characteristics that a company should demonstrate **if it is to be effective**
- **Specialisation of roles** - (a similar concept to that discussed by Adam Smith and we also discussed this in Theme 3)
- **Meritocracy** – that the people who have the right skills for the job are employed (as opposed to *nepotism* for example)
- **Equitable administration** – fairness of promotion, the same rules applied to everyone etc.



Weber and Work

- **A Systematic salary structure-** with consistent rewards for people doing the same work
- **A hierarchy** – in which responsibility and accountability are clearly apportioned
- **A ‘code of conduct’** – which specifies what is expected of all workers
- **The supremacy of rules** – which means that abstract rules are consistently applied in all situations
- **Impersonal authority** – that is to say that it is the ‘post’ that has authority not the person

Weber and Work

- Weber also developed a theory of social stratification
- We will look in more detail at models of stratification of work, used by the National Readership Survey (NRS) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the next Theme (Changing Patterns of Work)
- Weber's model of stratification was broader than these in that, as with much else of his work, he included factors other than what people earn and what they own (which is the criteria that Marx used)
- He saw social stratification as consisting of three components, namely;

Weber and Work

- **Social class** - which is similar to the criteria used in the models mentioned above i.e. economic activity / employment
- **Status** – for Weber this relates to the non-material aspects of a person's place in society
- These include prestige, honour, social standing etc.
- This aspect has obvious links with the concepts of cultural and social capital that we have discussed elsewhere
- **Political affiliation** – the political party that one supports
- For Weber, these three things all effected a person's 'life chances'.



Marx & Engels



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Marxist Theory and Work

- Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) developed the philosophical approach of dialectical materialism – **have you come across this phrase before?**
- Materialism – this is the philosophical view that all facts and theories (including those of the mind etc.) derive from the physical or material world and physical processes – that is what we can see and touch rather than abstract concepts
- Dialectical – this concept, first discussed by Hegel, argues that there is always a conflict or a power struggle between opposing sides in any issue
- Therefore, dialectical materialism is the understanding that there will be conflict and tension in society caused by the distribution of material goods (money, possessions etc.) which can only be resolved if society evolves to a more equal and stable system.

Marxist Theory and Work

- Dialectical materialism and a sense that society was ‘evolving’ towards an ideal state, lead Marx to argue that the way that work was organised in each historical period (e.g. feudalism, mercantilism, capitalism) created social divisions which lead to conflict (Harvey and Marx, 2010) – see also Theme 4 – Changes in Working Practices
- For Marx, this is most extreme in modern capitalist society where the pursuit of profit has become the primary driver
- Thus, the primary conflict was between the capitalist (who held financial power) and the labour force (who had power in their numbers and ability to withdraw their labour)
- They also identified a change from a social division of labour (e.g. medieval society) to a technical one (industrial society)

Marxist Theory and Work

- This division between the owners of capital (the capitalists) and the workers (the proletariat) is centred on the relationship to the '**means of production**' (money, factories, raw materials etc.)
- He termed the economic system (e.g. capitalism) as the **Infrastructure** or **Base** and the social, cultural and political system (i.e. the way in which society is organised and how differing groups interact) as the **Superstructure**
- For Marx and Engels the infrastructure and superstructure that had developed under capitalism was de-humanising in that it turned human beings into 'wage slaves'



Marxist Theory and Work

Alienation

- Marx further argued that the process of capitalist industrialisation therefore lead to a process know as '**alienation**'
- As we have seen, Weber thought that work had both intrinsic and extrinsic values
- Marx and Engels felt that the capitalist mode of production had lead to the workers being treated merely as another commodity to be exploited for profit
- This meant that people had no sense of being in charge of their own actions at work (see previous Theme) and were therefore **alienated** from their own sense of humanity

(See for example Harvey & Marx, 2010)

Can you think of examples of this?



Marxist Theory and Work

Reification

- Marxist theorists have taken this thinking even further with the concept of reification (literally, making into an object or thing)
- Workers can become alienated from work because there is not intrinsic value to the work other than what they earn for doing it
- Building on the work of Georg Lukács, Gajo Petrovic (1983) defines reification as the 'transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world'
- In this view human beings simply become another 'commodity' to be used by the capitalist system to create profit

(See for example Gunderson, 2021)

Can you think of examples of this?



Marxist Theory and Work

False consciousness

- Engels was also interested in why many workers seemed to accept the status quo and were willing to put up with the conditions that employers imposed on them
- They termed this **false consciousness** as a way of describing this lack of appropriate 'ideology' in the working classes
- Essentially, they argued that the owners of the means of production not only dictated what **goods and products** people would be able to consume (i.e. what they produced in their factories)
- But that they also dictated what ideas and values the workers should have – this is known as **commodity fetishism**

Marxist Theory and Labour

Commodity Fetishism

- **Commodity fetishism** refers to the fact that ideas, values and thought are treated just like any other commodity that can be 'sold' to the workers (i.e. a commodity) and that the workers will accept that these things have power because they are told that they have (i.e. as some societies believe that objects can have spiritual power)
- For Marx and Engels this could happen because the **capitalists** did not just control the **means of production** but also the means of socialisation (i.e. education, religion, the media, advertising etc.)

(See for example Harvey & Marx, 2010)

What are your thoughts on this?



Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft



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Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft

- Ferdinand [Tönnies](#) (1855-1936) saw society as having two central organising principles which he called Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft
- Effectively these two concepts describe the way in which changes in working practices can change the way in which society is organised
- Gemeinschaft can be thought of to mean ‘community’ and includes the idea of the family and neighbourhood as being important sources of support and relates to the more rural and traditional forms of society
- Gesellschaft can be thought of to mean ‘society’ and includes the way in which companies and society as a whole have more influence over people and is often seen as being more superficial and exploitative.

Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft

- Thus, Gemeinschaft describes a society where families live and work alongside each other in close communities with intimate personal connections and an agreed set of social norms.
- For Tönnies, the rural village was the classic example of a gemeinschaft society – ***can you think of any other examples?***
- Conversely, gesellschaft society is dominated by large government bureaucracies and industrial production
- Traditional social bonds are broken down as families move apart because of work and the social norms are imposed by the system rather than developed by the community
- In using these concepts, Tönnies was seeking to describe and understand the changes rather than to promote an alternative system



Symbolic Interactionism



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Symbolic Interactionism and Work

- We first looked at this theoretical approach in terms of identity in ECSO4002
- However, the Chicago School has also contributed to the sociology of work in a number of ways
- One of these is the **negotiated orders** theory of organisations
- As one would expect from this school of thought the theory is not based on a study of hierarchies and bureaucracy (e.g. Durkheim) or the conflict between competing groups (e.g. Marx)
- Instead, it focuses on the complex interaction between individuals in an organisation and therefore has more in common with Weber

Symbolic Interactionism and Work

- ‘The **negotiated order** of an organization is the pattern of activities which has emerged over time as an outcome of the interplay of the variety of interests, understandings, reactions, and initiatives of the individuals and groups involved in the organization’.
- ‘It is recognized that the influence and power of some individuals or groups will be greater than that of others, but the ordering of activities which arises in practice is always seen as resulting from the contributions of the plurality of parties to the organization as a whole’.
- This theory has influenced the working practice of companies such as [3M](#) and Google where individuals are given more freedom

Symbolic Interactionism and Work

- Symbolic interactionist have also contributed to the sociology of work by undertaking field research and detailed analyses of individuals' experience of work (See for example Davis, 1984)
- One such area is the study of what is termed dirty work
- 'generally defined as tasks, occupations and roles that are likely to be perceived as disgusting or degrading' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999 *cited in* Simpson *et al* , 2012)
- It also includes paid caring, domestic work and low-level service and night-time work etc.
- The studies are interested in the way that 'dirty workers' perceive themselves, how they are perceived by others and the way that they are treated by others because of the work they do



Post-Modernism



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Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- Post-modernist sociologists are interested in the increasing complexity and fluidity of the nature of work
- The plurality of the types of work available and individual's attitudes to work are often the subject of post-modernist theorists
- Post-modernists are also interested in exploring whether the out-dated views of work that we will look at in Theme 4 are of any use in the 21st century
- Subjects of exploration include the move away from defining oneself by a job title to describing the 'things that one does to earn a living', the redefinition of what a 'work-space' is, zero hours working and the gig' economy.
- They both seek to understanding the changing nature of work in the 21st century and to explore innovative ways of working

Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- For example, in his paper *Brief Overview of the Advancement of Postmodern Approaches to Career Counseling* (sic) Maree (2010, p.361) states that the 'stable' post-industrial world of work no longer exists, and security and stability in the workplace are no longer guaranteed'
- Post modernists suggest that concepts such as 'transferable skills', creative thinking and the idea of '**planned happenstance**' become increasingly important in the contemporary world of work
- A leading career development theorist, John Krumboltz, has led this form of thinking about work and developed the Happenstance Learning Theory as 'an action-oriented approach to helping clients to both create and benefit from unplanned events' (Krumboltz, J. *et al* (2013, p.15)
- Many post-modern approaches such as this are similarly focused on practical responses to accelerating changes in working practices



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- One area where this is increasingly important is the field of Human Resource Management (HRM)
- For example, Rapuano and Valickas (2021, p.54) argue that we have moved away from a world where 'Employees moved up the career ladder through a sequence of well-defined positions in the organization's hierarchy while the organization supported career progress providing training and other career development possibilities'
- Instead, they continue, we are faced with a situation where 'new forms of employment, such as self-employed individuals, one-person employers and free agents' (ibid.) and 'new non-standard work arrangements such as teleworking, part-time, fixed, or temporary employment have emerged in contemporary organizations' (ibid.)
- 'As well as increased mobility, uncertainty and reduced loyalty in employment relationships' (ibid.)

Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- They argue that, in order to adapt to these changes, organisations need to take a more ‘individual’ approach to continuous professional development (CPD) based on Complexity theory.
- They argue that a ‘one size fits all’ (Rapuano & Valickas, 2021, p.56) approach will lead to staff dissatisfaction and high staff turnover
- In arguing this they make the case for companies to see themselves as ‘complex systems’ rather than the logical, structured bureaucracies as envisaged by Durkheim, Weber and Marx.
- In doing this they would adopt the central principles of Complexity theory which include unpredictability, in terms of what jobs will be needed in the near future and the types of skills needed (ibid. p.52)
- They argue that the ‘qualities that companies need to develop in their workforce are ‘adaptability, flexibility, risk-taking, resilience’ (ibid. p59)



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- Lemon and Macklin (2021, no page) make many of the same points arguing that complexity theory can be used to study employers in that any organisation can be seen as ‘an adaptive system, where patterns by individual actors lead to the process of organizing that is unpredictable, yet still has an influence on society’.
- They argue that what they call effective ‘employee engagement’ relies on the principles of complexity as outlined by Gilpin and Murphy (2010), in that;
- ‘employee engagement is a process embedded within an organization, where employees make up the system of engagement, and through the co-creation among employees, not processes developed and implemented by management’ (Lemon & Macklin, 2021, no page)
- ‘employee engagement is about the individual employee’s experience and personal agency, it creates a dynamic system that is unpredictable; human behavior cannot always be predicted’ (Lemon & Macklin, 2021, no page)

Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- Other studies have focused on defining the challenges of the postmodern world, e.g.
- In a recent study of postmodern approaches to the understanding of working practices Martino, Alonzi and Isidori (2023, p.94) argue that postmodernist theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Jeremy Rifkin, and Dominique Méda have identified the following aspects;
 1. ‘transformations due to globalization’
 2. ‘the advent of new communication technologies’, and
 3. The development of ‘digital work’ (also known as virtual workspaces)

Post-Modern Approaches to Work

Critical Thinking Exercise



- a) What do you understand the term 'globalization' to mean?*
- b) How has 'globalization' changed working practices?*
- c) How have new communication technologies changed working practices*
- d) How has 'digital work' changed working practices*



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- We have discussed Zygmunt Bauman's work in ECSO4002 Who Are We?: Culture & Identity
- *Can you recall the name of Bauman's theory of identity in a postmodern world?*
- In his Chapter on 'Work' in *Liquid Modernity* (2000, pp. 130-167) he quotes Pierre Bourdieu as saying 'to master the future, one needs to hold on to the present' (Ibid p.131)
- He goes on to argue that, in terms of work, 'The deepest, perhaps the sole meaning of progress is made up of two closely interrelated beliefs – that "time is on our side", and that we are the ones who make things happen" (Ibid p. 132)
- By this he means that postmodern society does not seek to identify trends in work practices from history but instead seeks to shape the future in creative ways



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- However, he argues that the fracturing of responsibility from sovereign states to massive multi-national corporations means that individuals are now uncertain as to who to put their trust in.
- He says that 'The most poignant yet the least answerable question of our times of liquid modernity is not "What is to be done?" (in order to make the world better or happier), but "Who is going to do it? (Bauman, 2000, p. 133)
- For example, Governments no longer control their own economies and decisions are taken on the other side of the world which affect jobs in the UK.
- He argues that this uncertainty as to who is in control is 'an experience akin to that of the airline passengers who discover, high in the sky, that the pilot's cabin is empty' (Ibid.)



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- He argues that progress has become a goal in itself rather than a means to an end
- ‘Progress is no longer a temporary measure [...] leading eventually (and soon) to a state of perfection’ (Bauman, 2000, p. 134) (e.g. the maintenance of the status quo of functionalism or the communist utopia of Marxism)
- Instead it has become a ‘perpetual and perhaps never-ending challenge and necessity’ (Ibid)
- For Bauman, what makes this even more confusing for individuals is that the ideas of what progress is are ‘*deregulated*’ in that the ‘offers to “upgrade” present realities are many and diverse.
- He also argues that progress has become ‘*privatised*’ in that each individual now has to decide what the best way to progress is or ‘improvement is no longer collective but an individual enterprise’



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- Other areas of interest for post-modern theorists include '**robotisation**'.
- *What do you understand this term to mean?*
- Theorists are not only interested in the way that robotisation has removed many skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs (e.g. car production) but also how they are changing other working practices
- For example, Turja (2023) has explored the way that different workers in the care sector have engaged or not engaged with [care robots](#) as part of their work, depending on their own interest in, or comfort with, technology



Post-Modern Approaches to Work

- Blackman (2000, p.149) argues that Complexity theory 'expects change rather than stability'
- As we will see in the next Theme, the nature of work is changing more quickly and to a greater extent than at any time before.
- Although, not strictly speaking a complexity theorist Rebecca Taylor has explored this issue
- In her own, qualitative, research Taylor interviewed five individuals whose lives 'involved managing a complex arrangement of paid work, voluntary work, domestic labour and informal economic activity' (Taylor, 2004, p. 36)
- She has created a 'framework' in order to explore the way in which people negotiate these 'complex arrangements' which goes beyond the simplistic paid/unpaid dichotomy and acknowledges the importance of **all** work



Taylor's Framework

Paid Work

**Formal paid employment
in public, private and
voluntary sector**

e.g. paid accountant or
care assistant

Informal economic activity

e.g. paid baby sitting for
friends or neighbours

Household / family work

e.g. paid baby sitting
within the family

**Public /
Formal**

**Public /
Informal**

**Private /
Informal**

e.g. unpaid accountant or
organiser for a community
group

e.g. unpaid care for sick or
elderly neighbour

e.g. unpaid care for sick or
elderly relative

**Formal unpaid work in
public, private and
voluntary sector**

Informal unpaid work

Private domestic labour

Unpaid Work



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Based on Taylor (2004, p.39)

Feminism



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Feminist Approaches to Work

- One aspect of feminist sociological approaches to work is the theory of **gender segregation**
- This explores the way in which gender can be seen to influence employment opportunities
- **Horizontal gender segregation** occurs when jobs within an industry are traditionally seen as being the domain of one gender in particular.

Can you think of any examples?



(See for example [European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021](#))

(See for example [House of Commons Trade & Industry Committee, 2005](#))

Feminist Approaches to Work

- In contrast **vertical gender segregation** describes a situation where senior positions in an organisation are commonly held by one gender (usually men) and the junior positions by the other (usually women)

Can you think of any examples?



(See for example [European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021](#))

(See for example [European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017](#))



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A real example of vertical gender segregation?



Feminist Approaches to Work

- Another factor which feminist theorists have identified is the gender split in employment in the public and private sectors
- *We have discussed this earlier in this Module. What do these phrases mean?*
- The Office for National Statistics illustrates this issue in its datasets



What are your thoughts on this data?



Feminist Approaches to Work

- In **first wave feminism**, located as it was in the Victorian period where the dominant ideology for middle and upper class women was purity, piety and domesticity (also called the “cult of true womanhood”), the debate centered on whether to keep housework in the private sphere yet make it more scientific and efficient (Richards 1915),
- Or, whether to “socialize” it by bringing it into the public sphere, as socialist Charlotte Perkins Gilman advocated (1898).
- Gilman argued that housework should be paid for (by the husband) in order to bring it into the same sphere as other paid work

Feminist Approaches to Work

- In the **second wave** movement, theorists can be grouped by their theory of how housework oppresses women.
- Typically, liberal feminists critiqued housework because it is unpaid. This makes women dependent on men and devalued, since their work is outside the meaningful sphere of public economic production (see Friedan 1963).
- Marxist feminist theorists saw this as part of the problem, but some went further to maintain that housework is part of a household feudal mode of production of goods for use that persists under capitalism and gives men feudal powers over women's work (see Fox 1980).



Feminist Approaches to Work

- Contemporary feminist perspectives continue to include unpaid domestic work in the definition of work as (as we saw in our initial definition of work)
- The debate about the economic and social function of housework and its relation to women's oppression is an old one that has been a feature of both the **first and second wave** women's movements in the US, Britain and Europe.
- In both eras, the underlying issue is how to handle the public/private split of capitalist societies in which women's reproductive functions have either limited their work to the home or created a "second shift" problem of unpaid housework and childcare as well as waged work.
- The second shift concept describes women who have a paid job outside of the home but who are also expected to undertake the 'house-work'



Feminist Approaches to Work

- This concept of a “second shift” of unpaid work has been extended by writers such as Veronica Beechey (1987 p.1) to include unpaid female labour in voluntary work as well as domestic work
- However, a constant theme in the Module is the way in which things are changing and this is also true in the area of voluntary work
- For example, Rebecca Taylor (2004 p. 34) argues that research has shown that ‘For the last 20 years at least, men and women have participated in voluntary work more or less equally’.
- However, in terms of domestic work, in 2016 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) stated that ‘Women carry out an overall average of 60% more unpaid work than men’
- And ‘that women put in more than double the proportion of unpaid work when it comes to cooking, childcare and housework’.



Feminist Approaches to Work

- More recently, the ONS **Census** report has shown that;
- In March 2022, employed women living with dependent children spent more time on unpaid childcare (an average of 84 minutes per day) and household work (an average of 169 minutes per day) than employed men living with dependent children (55 and 106 minutes per day, respectively).
- This data would seem to indicate that the concept of the 'second shift' is still credible in contemporary society

[ONS \(2022\) Families and the labour market, UK: 2021](#)

Feminist Approaches to Work

- One of the philosophical problems raised by the housework debate is how to draw the line between work and play or leisure activity when the activity is not paid
- For example, is a mother playing with her baby working or engaged in play?
- If the former, then her hours in such activity may be compared with those of her husband or partner to see if there is an exploitation relation present, for example, if his total hours of productive and reproductive work for the family are less than hers



Feminist Approaches to Work

- Divisions between postmodern and feminist critiques of employment practices are beginning to be blurred
- For example, like postmodernists, **third wave** theorists such as Kaplan *et al*, (1999) have critiqued the 'reductionism' and over-simplification that they identified as representing many examples of **second wave** feminism
- Also, theories of 'intersectionality' propounded by Kimberle Crenshaw (1997) and Hooks (2000) have explored the implications of biological sex, race and social class mean that every woman have an individual lived experience



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