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Symposium abstracts

Work, identities, gendered and other diversities and
learning

Anatomy of Meredith Grey and Seattle Grace: Lessons from a Hit TV Show about Professional Identity and Ethics

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In this paper, I introduce a project which explores culture as a site of adult learning about work and identity. The American television show *Grey's Anatomy* provides an example of how popular culture helps inform understandings of occupation, work and identity in the context of a particular profession and society in general. This study complements previous adult education work in the area of critical cultural studies and media consumption (see Armstrong, 2005; Jarvis, 2005; Sandlin, 2005; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007). It also launches a larger study which will involve participants who work or study in the health care sector and regularly watch this show.

Methodologically, I borrow from several perspectives. Narrative and life history are helpful in approaching episodes, characters and story lines as accounts of work and life experiences. Semiotics is useful in interpreting how relations such as gender, race, sexuality and class are constructed and expressed through language, appearance, behaviour and other forms of representation.

This paper has three themes. The first theme relates to the portrayal of professional education. Christine Jarvis (2005) explores messages about education in another hit series; however, in *Grey's Anatomy*, education is the *raison d'être* that the main characters come together. In its premier season, the show introduced a group of medical interns. It has followed them through their year-long internship and progressed with them to residency, the next level of medical education in the United States. Its introduction of a new group of interns helps maintain its focus on medical education and ensures that characters continue to convey opinions about pedagogy and learning outcomes.

The second theme is the medical professional as a social character. I discuss the portrayal of characters as gendered, raced, sexualized and classed individuals. Viewers have learned much about the backgrounds of the main characters. These backgrounds position the characters socially, and indicate how both popular culture and identity develop in the context of social relations.

The third theme concerns professional ethics and the intersection of such ethics with other values. Several episodes have placed characters in ethical dilemmas, and questionable decisions often resurface long after initial problems seem to be resolved. This resurfacing of ethical debates provides an opportunity for characters to develop and assert ethical arguments, learn from their experiences, and teach viewers about ethical systems, the reality of ethical tensions and the role of ethics in professional life.

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Doing, knowing, being: Notes from a naval shipyard on competency and social identity in the skilled trades

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Educational attainment and occupation are viewed by social researchers as the key indices of social status, and professional occupations that require university education occupy the top rung of all major socioeconomic status scales (Blishen, 1987; Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996). Beyond this vertical arrangement, however, occupational groups might also be arrayed according to other characteristics such as their demographic profiles, their workplace cultural patterns, and the nature (rather than just the level) of the education and competency they require. Differences in occupation-education intersect with individuals' sense of identity and group affiliation (Willis, 1977; Lehman, 2005).

In Canada, the social position and character of the apprenticeable trades are matters of debate. The sociological literature generally depicts the skilled trades as positions of social disadvantage, structurally reproduced through the family (Looker, 2001). The imputation of inferior status reflects, in part, the general association between educational attainment and earnings (de Broucker, 2005), but also the fact that apprenticeship training and certification in Canada are institutionally isolated from university-level studies. The boundary between trades/vocational and university/professional realms is also clearly marked by differences in cultural practice and habitus. Further, the trades manifest extreme and persistent gender imbalances, constituting separate "pink" (personal services) and "blue" (industrial) occupational groups. All of these factors may contribute to a widely reported "trades stigma" (Sharpe, 2005). Meanwhile, official and unofficial advocates of apprenticeship extol it as a route to lucrative and respectable work and to "trade pride" – the inherent satisfaction that arises from deep competence and a firm occupational identity (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2006;).

This paper reports on a study of group membership practices among civilian skilled trades workers in a Canadian naval shipyard. Data were gathered in 2007 by means of a pen-and-paper survey (N=509) of certified trades workers and apprentices in the facility, as well as ten group interviews with 49 participants drawn from the workforce, management, and labour unions. A neo-Weberian research framework was adopted, drawing on recent literature in economic sociology (Swedberg, 1998; ; Smelser & Swedberg, Turner, 2000;) and social capital theory (Granovetter, 1988; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 2001).

Members of the study population are found to strategically invoke a sense of vocational identity that incorporates both "trade stigma" and "trade pride". Workplace cultural norms, which rehearse the exceptional nature of trades competency and identity, intersect in circular fashion with institutional structures of both the workplace and the education system, helping to perpetuate the distinctive social characteristics of the skilled trades at the macro level.

Experiences of mature students in Higher Education

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The paper focuses on the reasons mature adults returned to study, the strategies they employed to cope with the academic demands and related expectations during their year of study, and the effects and consequences of the higher education experience on their relationships with significant others in their lives. The paper foregrounds class and its role in mediating the choices, actions and experiences of mature students through drawing on Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit of habitus, capital and field.

Class trajectory works differently for mature students, shaping both reasons for entry into higher education, the higher education experience itself, and the relationships between mature individuals and significant others in their lives. Mature students returned to study to acquire cultural capital that they wished to convert in other spheres of their lives. For working class students, this sphere was work, and for middle class students it was equally the social or personal sphere and the work sphere. Emotional and related support was expected by mature students, but these emanated from different sources. For working class students the work and academic environments mattered: for middle class students, the personal and work environment. The academic demands and expectations created issues of anxiety and disconnect for working class students, while middle class students showed examples of fit, ease, and comfort within the higher education environment.

The paper concludes that although the work environment acknowledged and valued middle class men, it became non-supportive, and even threatened, by middle class women. For working class students, the work environment was mostly disinterested and showed little value towards the academic achievements of working class students. This lack of support showed in the social and personal relationships of working class students as well. As a consequence of their return to study, working class students' relationships were often at risk. Emotional capital was readily available and provided through the personal relationships of middle students of both gender. The social circle of middle class students further supported these students due to their familiarity with the higher education environment. Both sources of support – emotional capital and familiarity with the field – facilitated a sense of fit and ease within the higher education institution for middle class students.

Using a class and gender lens, the presentation will focus on the role of the work environment and its enabling and disabling role in the educational processes of mature adults.

Female doctors and male nurses? Gender and learning.

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Female doctors and male nurses?

New work - new genders? New genders - new work?

The aim of this paper is to consider basic societal transformations of work and learning in the light of studies of gendered, work related learning as re-configuration of identities. Empirical studies of individuals' subjective relation to of work and work related learning have revealed a close connection between gender relations and societal work organisation. This observation has become particularly pointed in studies of a number of professions dealing with traditional 'women's work', in which the close links between the nature of work, the subjectivity of the worker and societal division of labour appears to be historical and changeable.

Internal segregation in medicine: An exploratory evaluation of the experiences of 6 female medical specialists in South Africa

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Internal gender segregation is evident in the South African medical profession, as is the case worldwide. Thus, although women are increasingly accessing employment in traditionally male-dominated fields like medicine, they struggle to participate to the same extent as their male counterparts (Wildschut, 2008a). We find women and men with the same professional titles work in different fields in the same profession, and the specialties favoured by women have lower status (Wright, 1994; Reskin & Roos, 1990). The traditional view is that this is an expected outcome, based on gender preferences resulting from socialisation. I argue for a more comprehensive interrogation of the position of women in medicine (Wildschut, 2008a, Wildschut 2008b), and thus it is important to investigate the perceived gendered work identities across specialties within a profession, as it not only affects many aspects of the professional's experience, learning and decisions related to their profession (Buche, 2008), but also their retention.

This paper explores the motivations underlying the specialisation choices of six female specialist doctors working in Cape Town, South Africa, and tests whether the specific gender work identity associated with that specialism resulted in their motivation to enter it. These women were interviewed and asked to provide an account of their general experiences as medical doctors in a male dominated profession, as well as a more specific question related to their choice of specialisation. Preliminary analysis of these 6 cases lead me to later argue that the previously essentialist assertions around a specialties' inherent gender work identity, should be interrogated more comprehensively; not only to better understand the motivations of women doctors, but also to assist in exploring the possible structural constraints that such simplistic assertions could present.

Characters: 1903

Learning after Work: Training activist seniors

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In this paper we present information on a Canadian study of learning in the 'third age' (Lasslett, 1989). This is the stage following retirement from active working life, which in many countries occurs around age 65. The context for the three-year study reported here is an action research project conducted by co-investigators from universities in the province of British Columbia, and the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of British Columbia (COSCO). COSCO is led by a retired labour activist; its executive includes a range of retired trades people and professionals. The executive team chose to push back against cuts to seniors' health care by recruiting researchers and academics to assist them in developing and implementing a plan of action to change government policies. A three-year demonstration project--Health and Safety Learning: for seniors by seniors--was developed and is in the second stage of implementation.

The demonstration project consists of developing a series of health literacy transfer modules for use in a program to train activists, themselves seniors, to deliver the modules in their own communities and recruit other seniors for the training. The goal of the project is to establish learning communities throughout British Columbia that will foster an improved quality of life and independent living for older adults well into their advanced years.

The Health and Safety Learning (HSL) project confronts the important role of learning in maintaining the health, quality of life, and longevity of older adults. The training also prepares individuals to take on new roles in their community and society. In the paper we provide the conceptual framework for the study, and discuss the choice of Participatory Action Learning (PAL) as our methodological approach. We describe the attributes of the third age, and provide information on ageing and learning. Following this we describe the initial fieldwork and report preliminary results from the training workshops.

Learning biographies: Identity and apprenticeships in England and Germany

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Young people's identities have been widely explored in studies of school-to-work transition. Processes of identity formation and decision-making are said to have become all the more critical with the de-standardisation of the life course, with young people having to cope increasingly with discontinuities in their education and work careers. Outcomes of transitions are commonly explained in terms of individualisation, or, more commonly, socialisation. Similarly, research on young people's experiences of work-based learning has focused on the reproduction of social class, stressing the structuring force of organisational and occupational identity. All too often these studies have neglected the rich biographical experiences of young people and, thus, the complexity of the processes of identity construction. Lacking an adequate account of identity formation, they often only superficially and selectively consider past events, disregarding wider social contexts and relationships.

Based on an ethnographic study of apprentices in retail and vehicle maintenance in England and Germany, the paper will explore young people's learner identities over time and in relation to particular learning environments. Following situated learning theory, learning is conceptualised as participation, focusing on the social construction of meaning and of particular 'learning cultures'. A particular focus is on the relationship between the social identity of occupations and pathways, governing ideas of what and how apprentices are expected to learn, and the ways in which they actively construct their self-identities. The paper will, however, go beyond narrow conceptions of occupational or organisational identity by exploring the interrelationship between (changing) cultural representations of occupation, class, gender and ethnicity, and the ways in which young people negotiate these multiple identities as they move in a variety of social contexts.

Importantly, and in contrast to previous work, the study adopts a biographical approach. Part of the tradition of life course research and symbolic interactionism, the biographical approach recognises the interrelated nature of individual action and social contexts. It enables us to explore the ways in which individuals construct their identities over time, as a continuous process of meaning-making. The research will provide an insight into young people's experiences of and expectations towards learning and the strategies they develop for adapting to and shaping the learning culture. The biographical approach is ideally suited to exploring the role of contrasting social contexts, such as the highly regulated, high-status dual system in Germany and the flexible, weakly regulated system of apprenticeship in England.

Learning in the Service Sector: How baristas acquire their workplace identity

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Baristas have a contentious workplace identity. Starbucks, a multi-national coffeehouse company, has trademarked the term barista, giving the occupation a decidedly fast-food air. An alternative perception, however, is associated with places like boutique cafés, and trends such as the slow food movement and international competitions which demand high levels of professionalism in the preparation of espresso-based coffee. My research project explores this workplace identity through a study into the work and learning environments of service staff employed in the preparation of espresso. This paper relates to first phase of this project the literature review and the development of a research methodology. As such the purpose of this paper is to explore key concepts that relate to baristas and café culture. In addition work-based and workplace learning will also be compared and contrasted in order to develop insights about, and methods of identifying learning in the workplace to be applied during the fieldwork phase of this project.

Situating gendered learning in management

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The aim of this paper is to investigate how aspects of gendered learning may differ between managerial levels. As the aim indicates, the empirical focus is on managers. This professional group has been thoroughly researched within leadership studies, however not to the same extent from the perspectives of situated learning. In the paper we combine theories of situated learning (cf Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) with theories of doing gender in organizations (cf West and Zimmerman, 1987; Acker, 1990). These theoretical traditions share certain meta theoretical assumptions and we elaborate the notion of the concept of situated gendered learning in the paper. The empirical material consists of 42 qualitative interviews with managers, 15 women and 27 men, on three different managerial levels within an industrial firm. The paper analyses learning trajectories for first line, middle and senior managers. The empirical findings demonstrate that the learning trajectories are gendered in terms of different outcomes and experiences for women and men of different management levels. The findings also demonstrate that these gender differences created various opportunities and barriers for learning and career development in work. We therefore propose a model, which focuses on the intersecting and dynamic aspects of the expansive and restrictive feature of the learning environment on the one hand (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Evans et al, 2006) and the gendered notions and structures of the specific context on the other hand. The conclusion is that an analysis of such features of the learning environment can shed light on the gendered opportunities for learning that are available and the gendered barriers to learning. These opportunities and barriers might affect individual managers as well as women and men as managers to "move to" the company and to "move up" to different managerial levels within the company.

The role of recognition in learning processes - health- and care work for elderly as an example

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Professional health work for elderly, sick people is low ranked in the medical hierarchy. The article discusses the role of recognition in learning processes among female nurses, social- and health care assistants and occupational therapists working with people with dementia and other age related illnesses.

In interviews with these groups of professionals two different spaces for learning are put forward as having great potentials for learning processes, in which both the individual and the group are able to expand their capacities: Supervision groups and interdisciplinary conferences in the hospital wards. Both are examples of learning spaces which in several ways differ from their surrounding institutional context.

In supervision groups experiences of the individual health worker are in focus. What are in common are work experiences, while education and position of the participants vary. The experiences often have a strong emotional dimension as health work with old, sick people confronts the professionals with both existential and societal conditions of human life. The participants in the group tell about situations from her practice and the emotions they arose. The stories are reflected upon and unpleasant emotions are potentially contained in the group. According to interviewed health professionals this common "working through" experiences functions as a space for learning cognitively and emotionally.

In interdisciplinary conferences the patient and his or her diagnose is in focus. The medical hierarchy is for a while put into brackets - contributions from all members of the group are important, in spite of educational background and position. While doctors use their medical knowledge, social- and health care assistants tell about their experience of the everyday care work with the patient. Both kinds of knowledge are taken into consideration when deciding the patients' treatment and eventual successive help when returning to own home. The interviewed health professionals see these conferences as spaces for exchanging knowledge, learning by each other, and feelings of being part of a team.

What the two spaces for learning have in common is the potential for recognition – of emotions and of knowledge. With Axel Honneth's critical theory of recognition as a point of departure, the article discusses the importance of recognition in learning processes at work.

As relational beings, human learning processes can be said always to imply recognition. But especially in work fields which are mentally loaded or which are not held in high esteem culturally, this condition seems to be important. When it comes to public financed health- and care work this raises questions to both the way work is being organized and to the impact of modernization processes. The article concludes that if we by work place learning mean anything more than purely adaptive processes, we need to take the possibility to create recognizing learning spaces into account.

Work identities, horseracing and gender.

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Until the mid-1970s and the passage of the sex discrimination legislation, women were not permitted to be jockeys in the UK. Even now, despite the removal of formal barriers and the feminisation of the racing industry workforce, women are still a very small minority of jockeys. Drawing on interviews with women working in the racing industry, together with an ethnographic study of a racing yard, this paper explores the changing opportunities for women in racing, focussing particularly on the shift from indentured to modern apprenticeships and the relation between serving an apprenticeship and the acquisition of gendered, workplace identities. A small number of women manage to succeed in becoming jockeys in what remains a very male-dominated occupation. This paper asks what it is that distinguishes these women from their peers and what it is that enables them to break through the 'glass ceiling'. Using Bourdieu's notions of habitus, entitlement, symbolic and cultural capital, it argues that, while women in general are disadvantaged by gender, class privilege enables some to succeed (Liddle and Michielsens, 2007). Furthermore, indentured apprenticeships can be conceptualised not only as an initiation into a specific occupation but also into a specific gender identity which in and of itself made it impossible for women to become apprentices (Cockburn, 1983). One of the aims of modern apprenticeships was to contribute to the de-gendering of occupations, thereby enabling women to become jockeys; this, however, has not happened to any significant extent. One explanation for this could lie in the continued gendering of modern apprenticeships and their embodiment of masculinity. This embodiment is apparent in the discourses that are mobilised to justify the exclusion of women from race-riding. Arguments are frequently advanced suggesting that because women's bodies are allegedly weaker than men's they are unsuited to race-riding and more easily injured. This sort of opposition has, however, been circumvented by a few women who are distinguished by a particular class habitus, sense of entitlement, cultural, symbolic and economic capital. This paper asks what sort of work identities do these women, and others working as 'lads' in the racing industry develop and how is it that particular classed and gendered identities enable some women to gain entry to 'masculine' occupations within racing while most continue to be excluded.

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Working in local and devolved government: doing gender and practising politics

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This paper explores the experiences of working as a political representative in local and devolved government in Wales, drawing on research undertaken as part of an ESRC-funded project into gender and political processes in the context of devolution. The gender composition of local government and the National Assembly for Wales are very different with women constituting, on average, 22% of councillors across Wales and 47% of Assembly Members. In this paper we draw on interviews with women and men Assembly Members and councillors to investigate the extent to which the different institutional organisation and gendering of local and devolved government affect the working environment and organisational culture of these two political arenas. Several of the Assembly Members we interviewed had experiences of both local and devolved government and this enables us to compare the organisational cultures of local government and the National Assembly and the differently gendered ways of doing politics that characterises them. We show that, while the National Assembly can be said to have a feminised political and organisational culture, at local level politics is masculinised. This has implications both for the ways in which women and men learn to do politics and for how they learn to do gender in these different political domains. Indeed women and men often come to politics through different routes and this also has implications for their understanding of politics and the ways in which they engage with it. This notwithstanding, our findings show that in a masculinised political space women, as well as men, adopt 'masculine' styles of working while, in a more feminised political space, there is less pressure on both women and men to practise politics in what is often referred to as a 'macho' style. Our evidence shows that there is a widespread perception that having a gender balance in the National Assembly means that both politics and gender are done 'differently' and that 'women's issues' and equalities issues more generally are given greater priority. This contrasts with local government where women representatives are in a minority, the working environment takes little account of caring and domestic responsibilities, and women as well as men learn to 'do' gender in a masculinised arena where both women and femininity are seen as out of place.

Workplace learning dispositions in young New Zealand learner-workers

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This paper focuses on the dispositions that young people in early career development bring to, and develop through, their workplaces and learning experiences. The analysis draws on selected findings from Pathways and Prospects, a 5-year study of over 100 young New Zealanders navigating the transition from school and career pathways.

The study is located against the backdrop of the complexity, uncertainty, and new work demands in emerging knowledge societies. These demands centre not only on knowledge and skills, but also on people's dispositions. Learning, in and outside of the workplace, has a central role here as we increasingly recognise the value of different learning settings and learning as necessarily lifelong.

The integrated qualitative and statistical cluster analyses of young people's semi-structured interview narratives provided four dispositional clusters early in the study - the Hopeful Reactors, the Confident Explorers, the Passion Honers, and the Anxious Seekers. Now, five years after the first post-school interviews, four new clusters have emerged - the Opportunity Initiators, the Risk Managers, the Fine-Tuners and the Disgruntled Triallists. There are interesting differences between clusters, and an overall picture of young people's "production" of careers and identities which are de-coupled from traditional vocational identities and traditional learning arrangements.