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Karin Garrety
University of Wollongong, karin@uow.edu.au

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Normative change programs - that is, programs that attempt to effect organisational change through altering employees' beliefs, values, emotions and self-perceptions - have been heralded by some as the royal road to corporate 'excellence'. Academic literature on the phenomenon, however, is pervaded by a sense of unease. Critics claim that these programs invade employees' subjectivity, and erode their autonomy and capacity for critical thought. In this paper, I employ concepts from the work of George Herbert Mead and Rom Harré to explore the reflexive processes of managers subjected to a normative change program that was carried out in an Australian steel plant during the 1990s. Taking two supporters of change as my prime examples, I show how reflexive processes are manifested in the way managers talk about themselves - their private 'real' selves, their public personae and the relationship between these aspects of self. I conclude by examining how reflexivity is linked to autonomy and critical thinking, and argue that our academic unease about normative change may be explained by our own evaluations of the degree to which employees engage in the sorts of reflexive processes that we, as academics, value.

Keywords
Normative change, Culture change, Subjectivity, Identity, Ethics

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Reflexivity and Normative Change

Dr Karin Garrety
School of Management and Marketing
University of Wollongong
Wollongong
NSW 2522

Phone: +61 2 4221 3565
Fax: +61 2 4227 2785
e-mail: karin@uow.edu.au

Abstract

Normative change programs - that is, programs that attempt to effect organisational change through altering employees' beliefs, values, emotions and self-perceptions - have been heralded by some as the royal road to corporate 'excellence'. Academic literature on the phenomenon, however, is pervaded by a sense of unease. Critics claim that these programs invade employees' subjectivity, and erode their autonomy and capacity for critical thought. In this paper, I employ concepts from the work of George Herbert Mead and Rom Harré to explore the reflexive processes of managers subjected to a normative change program that was carried out in an Australian steel plant during the 1990s. Taking two supporters of change as my prime examples, I show how reflexive processes are manifested in the way managers talk about themselves - their private 'real' selves, their public personae and the relationship between these aspects of self. I conclude by examining how reflexivity is linked to autonomy and critical thinking, and argue that our academic unease about normative change may be explained by our own evaluations of the degree to which employees engage in the sorts of reflexive processes that we, as academics, value.

Keywords
Normative Change
Organisational Change
Reflexivity
Self
Moral Development

Normative change programs - that is, programs that attempt to effect organisational change through altering employees' beliefs, values, emotions and self-perception - were very popular during the 1980s and 1990s (Alvesson & Willmott 2002, Barley & Kunda 1992). Because of their popularity and their nature, they have attracted a great deal of interest from academics (Casey 1995, Kunda 1992, Van Maanen & Kunda 1989, Willmott 1993). While management gurus and their followers celebrate normative change as a sure-fire road to

corporate 'excellence' (Peters & Waterman 1982), much of the academic literature is pervaded by a sense of unease. Some critics depict the programs as totalitarian, as illegitimately invading hitherto private realms of subjectivity, where they rob employees of their autonomy and capacity for critical thought (Ezzy 2001, Willmott 1993). Others, informed by empirical investigations of organisations in which normative change programs have been deployed, paint a more complex picture. Some employees do indeed uncritically absorb the tenets of the programs. Others, however, adopt positions that are more distant and nuanced, ranging from ambivalence through irony and cynicism to outright resistance (Casey 1995, Collinson 2003, Kunda 1992). Somewhat paradoxically, critical management scholars are also discomforted by these more sceptical employees, and portray the associated change programs as creating pretence, fake sociability and insecurity. There is no escape. Even those who disengage and resist ultimately reproduce the power relations they attempt to defy (Fleming & Spicer 2003).

Despite these paradoxes, this paper is broadly sympathetic to the critiques of normative change, and seeks to advance the critical perspective in two ways. First, rather than offering a critique of the ideology of these programs, I explore an aspect that has until now received little attention – the reflexive processes through which employees subjected to normative change programs negotiate their engagement (or non-engagement) with them (Alvesson & Willmott 2002: 621). My emphasis is on the reflexivity of employees who support normative change programs. This will allow me to pursue my second aim, which is to consider what it is about this support that discomforts commentators. *Why*, exactly, do so many management academics (myself included) find these programs unsettling?

The article is organised as follows. First, I introduce the research site, our research involvement and methods, and the change program that was conducted there. Next, drawing on literature from the field of social psychology, I discuss the nature of reflexivity and present a model of the self that is useful for exploring responses to organisational change. I use the model to illustrate and discuss the reflexive processes engaged in by two managers who 'bought into' the normative change program quite willingly. The paper concludes with some comments regarding the moral implications of different forms of reflexivity. We, as academics, value critique. The unease which some us feel with respect to change programs could be explained by the way we evaluate the reflexive processes of those who are subjected to change.

The Company, our research involvement and methods

Steelmaking Oz is a large heavy manufacturing company with its headquarters in Australia. Since 1997, I have been part of a group of up to 12 people that has carried out a series of research projects in and with the organisation, sometimes as participant observers, but more often in a non-participating capacity (Badham et al. 2003; Garrety & Badham 2004; Garrety et al. 2003). We have gathered an

extensive array of data, including company documents, transcripts of numerous interviews, meeting notes and notes generated in the course of ethnographic observations. The sub-projects have all been concerned with organiational changes, including technological change, cultural change and changes concerned with work practices and occupational health and safety.

The company was established early in the twentieth century. From our observations and from comments from employees, we can provide the following description. For much of its existence, Steelmaking Oz was managed along strict hierarchical lines by managers who displayed and valued technical expertise far more than interpersonal skills. The shop floor workers were, and still are, heavily unionised. These influences, combined with a workforce that is predominantly male, led to the development of a 'macho' culture, characterised by poor communication, displays of aggression, and a 'them' and 'us' division between management and workers. Despite these characteristics, the company enjoyed good profits for many years. However, by the 1980s, reduced government protection and increasing international competition joined industrial strife and macho-style management as problems that plagued the company. Influential people within the organisation began to argue that if the company was to survive, the culture, and the managers who produced and maintained it, would have to change.

In the late 1980s, the HR division of the organisation began experimenting with normative change techniques such as neurolinguistic programming (NLP). According to information provided to us by key individuals who were involved with this experimentation, several senior managers experienced powerful personal transformations as a result. They began lobbying for a training program for managers that would focus on self-development. Against some opposition, and with the help of consultants, they established and sustained a program along these lines from 1993 to 2001.The Steel Leadership Program (SLP or 'Leadership' for short), as it came to be known, was a residential workshop lasting from 8 to 10 days. It was held every few months at a location distant from any of Steelmaking Oz's offices and factories. Managers from different sites and levels of hierarchy, about 24 at a time, were brought together. Facilitators used role play and real-life incidents from work and home, combined with a range of psychological concepts such as NLP and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, to explore the managers' personalities and challenge their actions, habits and assumptions.

The SLP was clearly a normative change program that sought to effect change by reconfiguring managers' self-perceptions and self-regulatory behaviour. As one of its architects explained:

> the activities were focussed around self-awareness as being the first step for organisational change. It was really an experiential workshop around understanding self so you could then make a change in the organisation.

A senior manager who attended the SLP described it in the following terms:

> The whole course was about identifying your behaviour and actually freeing up some of your inhibitions to make you more of a leader, and less of a manager. [It] was fairly in your face. 'I'll show you what you are…and you might not like it'…. They were fairly up front about doing that.

From these quotations, and from discussions with other attendees and program facilitators, it appears as though one of the major aims of the SLP was to instil an instrumental 'self-awareness' that could and would be mobilised in the interests of smoother communications, improved interpersonal relationships and ultimately greater productivity. In doing so, it attempted to alter the reflexive processes through which employees understood and managed themselves. Reflexive processes are those internal conversations through which we construct, maintain and alter our sense of who we are, and how we present ourselves.

This article is based primarily on two sets of semi-structured interviews. The first set, a group of 16 conducted in 1999 and 2000, were with managers who had attended the SLP. The aim of this series of interviews was to record managers' recollections of the program, and its impacts on their understandings of themselves and their place in the organisation. The second set of interviews consists of 15 conducted in 2002 and 2003 with a range of organisational members – operators, managers, safety officers and human resources personnel. The purpose of this second series was to investigate the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator in the organisation. As this was one of the main tools employed in the SLP, this second set of interviews yielded some useful data for this paper. Most of the data used here are, however, derived from the first set of interviews, as the questions around which these interviews were based were more explicitly directed towards eliciting information about the effects of the SLP on managers' self understanding and self management. The analysis of the data was also informed by a broader understanding of the organisation, developed over years of research conducted there.

Reflexive processes and multiple selves

We humans create, understand and manage ourselves through reflexive processes. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines reflexive as 'implying [a] subject's action on himself or itself'. The fact that most humans can perform mental actions on themselves denotes an ability to split the self into at least two inter-relating entities. In the late 19th century, William James identified these entities as the self as subject (or self-as-knower) and self as object (or self-as-known) (Leary & Tangney 2003: 7). While James' differentiation remains fundamental, later theorists have extended his ideas in ways that are useful for investigating employee responses to normative change. Firstly, prevailing norms and power relations profoundly influence the way people reflect on and manage

themselves. Charles Cooley (1902) coined the term 'looking-glass self' to describe how people evaluate and regulate themselves in the light of how they think *others* see them (Jenkins 2004: 39-40). Early in the twentieth century, George Herbert Mead developed these ideas further with his concepts of the 'I', the 'me', and the 'generalized other'. The 'I' is the self-as-knower, the site of a more-or-less on-going consciousness. The 'me' is the self as an object of consciousness. In Mead's model, the I and the me are in frequent dialogue, as a person initiates planned actions, responds to situations, and adapts him/herself to them (Mead 1934: 200-222). Following on from Cooley, Mead also incorporated social norms into the reflexive processes through which people create and maintain a sense of self. Norms enter and permeate the self through the concept of the 'generalized other' – an internalised representation of other people's attitudes that is used to monitor and censor the self's thoughts, actions and speech (Burkitt 1991: 40-43; Mead 1934: 154-155).

The model of the self and its reflexive processes posited by these theorists is consistent with that implicit in the SLP. It is a self that can reflect upon, evaluate and regulate itself in response to shifting situations and norms. However, to take the criticisms of normative change programs into account, we need to consider the possibility that these processes may not necessarily be benign, that they may produce selves that are compromised, fragmented and fake. Mead's scheme does not have much space for these uncomfortable and possibly unhealthy aspects of self-formation. In his view, 'a multiple personality is in a certain sense normal', as 'we divide our selves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances' (1934: 142). Only people who are 'somewhat unstable nervously' dissociate or completely forget key aspects of themselves (143). Overall, Mead's focus was on the successful socialisation of integrated and adaptable selves (Burkitt 1991: 53, Harter 1999). To create more space for potentially troubling aspects of self-formation and presentation, even among those who are supposedly 'normal', we need a more complex model.

In his discursive psychology, Rom Harré extended the work of Mead and others in ways that are useful for my analysis (Burkitt 1991: 61-68, Harré 1998). Harré (1998) distinguished three interacting aspects of self, which he designated selves 1, 2 and 3. These are not separate entities as such, but linguistic devices through which humans create, alter and sustain the complex phenomena that can be grouped into the concept of 'self'. Harré, in common with other theorists of the self (Henriques et al. 1984, Burkitt 1991, Jenkins 2004) sees the self as a discursive construction, in which multiple and sometimes contradictory aspects of self are held together through narrative. Self 1 is similar to Mead's 'I' (Harré 1998: 74-5). It is the standpoint from which we experience and act upon the world, the embodied 'self' from which we speak, and that we carry through time and space. Except in rare cases of pathology, such as amnesia and multiple personality disorder, this aspect of self is singular and continuous, at least until we die. Selves 2 and 3 are both objects of consciousness, reflecting different, but related, aspects of Mead's 'me'. Self 2 is a person's own 'self-concept', a 'loose

knit cluster' (70) of beliefs about oneself, 'expressed, however inaccurately, in the content of confessions, self-descriptions, autobiographies and other reflexive discourses' (76). Harré's third self is implicit in Mead, but more fully developed in the work of Erving Goffman (1959). This is the self as it is presented to the world. This self may be a direct and unmediated expression of self 2, or a consciously manipulated image, in which a person presents a self that is different to the self 2 as is it privately known and selectively revealed. Harré's scheme thus opens up a more complex conceptual landscape in which to explore the reflexive processes of employees constructing, maintaining and altering their identities during organisational change.

Data analysis

The interviews on which I am basing this analysis are, of course, performances put on for the benefit of the interviewer and subsequent readers of the transcripts, most of whom would remain ignorant as to the identity of the interview subjects.[1] The interview performances were therefore selective representations of the interviewees' selves 3, bearing uncertain relationships to their 'true' selves, that is, their 'real' attributes, opinions and beliefs. Because the interviewers (myself and a research assistant) did not know the subjects in any depth, we cannot make statements about their really 'real' selves and the authenticity of their performances. However, these matters are not the focus of my analysis. Rather, I am interested in the managers' discursive constructions of themselves during the interview process – how they describe and explain themselves and their reactions to the SLP. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 640) noted, 'interviews … do not measure the "truth" of identity but interactively provoke its articulation'. In the 'identity work' done during the interviews, we can discern statements indicating self-concepts (self 2 - who I say I 'really' am, what I think I'm 'really' like) that can be differentiated from roles and self-presentations (self 3 – reports of what I do, how I present myself, how I behave as a manager). These statements, and statements connecting different aspects of self, constitute the reflexive processes that I want to explore.

Alan – 'I just became me'

In 1956, William Whyte published *The Organization Man*, a critique of corporate practices that encourage conformity and unquestioning obedience to organisational norms. Organisation men who 'allow corporate definitions of

[1] Subjects interviewed about the SLP could elect to make all or part of their transcripts public within Steelmaking Oz, either anonymously or with identification. Most approved circulation of their transcripts, some with sections excised. All but one chose to remain anonymous. The interviews on the MBTI were not circulated in full. Instead, they formed the basis for a report complied for the company. Respondents were assured of anonymity, and could elect to edit or withhold their transcripts if they chose.

reality to serve as unquestioned criteria for their self-definition and their world view' (Kunda 1992: 225) also appear in more recent analyses. The two individuals whose reflexive processes I now examine could both, in their different ways, be characterised as organisation men.

The first – Alan – recounted how the SLP completely altered his understanding of himself: 'Leadership changed me', he said. He narrated its effects as follows:

> The Leadership course — actually, what happened to me there was — I think that I'd actually been playing a role for all the years I'd been at Steelmaking Oz beforehand. I've often described it to people like — I took the mask off. People said I'd changed, but I don't think I did. I just became me.

Alan described a pre-SLP self that was forged in the old management style:

> I'd been brought up through the old dictatorial style. You know, the dymo label on the hat said I was the chief, so I was. Traditional management style. My mentor before that was very strong in the drive-through process, you know, the barge-through process, take no prisoners style…. I used to be one of the heroes of that old style.

Unlike some of our interview subjects, Alan did not recount any pre-SLP discomfort evoked by a perceived mismatch between a sensitive 'real' self (self 2) and the tough style (self 3) demanded by the 'old' culture. Rather, his pre-SLP self seems to have been fairly unified. Steelmaking Oz demanded a tough manager so that is who he *was*. It was only in retrospect, after reportedly discovering a hitherto unknown emotional self which he now identified as his 'real' self, that Alan detected a mismatch between this self and the tough manager he believed himself to be for so many years.

Alan was interviewed five years after attending the SLP. His new self was thus narrated as an enduring one. In the following extract, he described the difficulties he experienced in maintaining and enacting this new self as he transformed a moribund division of the organisation:

> We made a lot of progress, weeded out a lot of people. We had to do it. We couldn't really function—safety, people's wellbeing—to the point where I thought I was going mad. I'd get quite emotional about it sometimes and I'd never been that way before. And I realised why I was emotional about it—because I'd used the mask before to protect myself. In the first couple of months or the year after I'd thrown the mask away, the guys were going to get it back out again and stick it back up. They weren't used to it. They refused to let me take the mask off.

This extract shows how, through the reflexive processes of self construction and self regulation, Alan created considerable congruity between his selves 2 and 3, both before and after the SLP. His reference to using his pre-SLP 'mask' to 'protect' his old self against emotions indicates that this 'tough' self ran quite deep. He does not portray it as a surface display covering up an always-there emotional inner self. The inner self was shaped to fit the externally presented image. Likewise, his reports of persisting with his 'non-masked' new self after the SLP, in public presentation as well as in private reflection, indicates a lack of distance between his selves 2 and 3.

Bill – "If Leadership had said…"

When asked what he remembered most clearly about the SLP, Bill replied

> Some things about myself and my behaviour that it was good to know. The Myers-Briggs stuff was very important. I got a lot out of that. Some of the networks – just meeting people there was very good. I suppose I approached it fairly analytically.

He went on:

> When I came back into the workplace, I didn't have very much support to change my behaviour and how I interact with people, so it was very easy to fall back to the old ways. I kept on finding myself doing that. I suppose there weren't practical things you could pick up and say 'I can run with this and do it'. It was fairly general, fairly high level.

For Bill, the 'things about myself and my behaviour' that he claimed to have learned at the SLP did not, as they did for Alan, translate into a fundamental new identity. Instead, he kept 'finding [him]self .. fall[ing] back' into the old ways. Bill narrates a passive and habituated self, whose continuance of the old style seems to be driven by routine and an absence of clear direction, rather than an active construction of a self that is opposed to change. Indeed, he asserted his support for change, but did not know how to do it:

> If Leadership had said 'These are patterns of behaviours that we want to stop. These are patterns of behaviour that we want to encourage' and you had actually done 'good' and 'bad': 'Here you are. Take it away and think about it'. That would have been better. I found it very hard to actually grasp something to do.

Bill reported that he eventually did change, from having a style that was 'fairly autocratic and controlled' into 'somebody who is willing to let go a little bit'. This happened at a workshop held two years *after* Bill attended the SLP:

> This workshop said 'Well, how do we want to present ourselves to our customers?' We've got a certain process we go through, and the people in the group came to the conclusion that you can change the process, but if you don't change the behaviour that encapsulates that process, then you don't do anything different. And suddenly it all clicked for me. It all clicked that there were behaviours that were positive behaviours, and behaviours that were negative behaviours. The group as a whole listed the positives and the negatives. So I got a good look at that and said 'Hmm, I do most of the negatives, and I don't do any positives'. This year it was like the light came on and I realised that I had to change. And this is what I need to do to change – individual specific behaviours.

Bill claimed to support the change program, but he could not translate it into personal change until it was presented in the form of 'individual specific behaviours'. Despite this unusual response, I have included him as an example of an organisation man because of his willingness to adopt management's definitions of 'good' and 'bad' behaviours.

The reflexive processes of organisation men

Although Alan and Bill reacted to the SLP quite differently, they both accepted its ideology and intent without question and sought to abide by its prescriptions, despite the difficulties they encountered in doing so. From this admittedly very small sample of two, what can we say about the reflexive processes involved in the production and maintenance of organisation men like Alan and Bill? The feature that unites these men, despite their differences, is the relative absence in their interview accounts of a *robust, well developed and enduring self-concept* that is maintained as an entity separate to their managerial roles. Alan conflates his self-concept with his self-presentation as manager, both before and after the SLP. The fact that he reported such a complete transformation suggests that Alan was not particularly attached to his pre-SLP self. It was, perhaps, forged out of the 'Steelmaking Oz' tough guy image rather than out of a more personally meaningful process of self-discovery and understanding. On encountering the SLP, the old self crumbled or disappeared and was replaced with a new self that fitted the new management style.

In his interview, Bill also merged his self-concept and managerial role. However, his account portrayed a continuity of self which was in marked contrast to Alan's transformation. He only altered his behaviour when he was unequivocally told what to do. He constructs a worldview in which actions are either 'good' or 'bad', 'positive' or negative'. Moreover, he does not use his own judgment to categorise and guide his actions, but relies on others to do so for him. Radically transformed or not, the relative lack of a robust and enduring self 2 deprives both men of a position from which to evaluate, reject or selectively appropriate the prescriptions contained within the SLP. Their response to the SLP had an all-or-nothing character.

By way of contrast, and to support my interpretation of the reflexive processes engaged in by Alan and Bill, I offer extracts from interviews with two managers who, in my view, narrated self-concepts that seemed to be much more robust and enduring. This enabled them to create a space between themselves and their roles, in which they could exercise judgment and choice. The first quote is from a female engineer;

> It (SLP) sort of showed me how to make people feel more comfortable with me because I'm a fairly driven person. I have set goals and I' m always ambitious. … Because of this I probably came over to some people as very aggressive. It's OK to be aggressive if you are a guy, but it ain't OK if you're a woman, and you pay severely for it for a lot of years, and I mean a *lot* of years. .. I've learnt from the course to still have that sort of drive in me, but to portray myself in the image more of what they wanted of a woman.

In this passage we see a complex invocation of selves and their relationships – a seemingly well understood and stable 'real' self that is goal-oriented and ambitious, and two possible presented selves – an aggressive self that is a fairly direct reflection of the perceived real self and a consciously crafted, more 'womanly' self which, while in some ways inauthentic, is perceived by this woman to be a more effective way to achieve her ends.

It is interesting to compare this quote with that of another manager, who said:

> I'm probably listening more to people. I feel – being who I am – under pressure, certainly in a meeting type environment, to say things when I really don't feel there is anything to say. I learned that it's all right to be like that. I'm more a 'step back and think about it' person and then maybe contribute. I find a lot of people, particularly in this industry, natter a lot and you don't seem to get anywhere. So that was good to know.

Again, there is a sense here of a well understood 'real' self 2 who in this case is quiet, and an awareness of alternative selves 3, who may or may not talk in meetings. Like the engineer, this man created some distance between the privately known 'real' self and the self that is portrayed in the managerial role. In both cases, appropriation of elements from the SLP is selective. They are not mobilised automatically and unquestionably in the interests of corporate goals, but deployed for more immediate, situated and personally meaningful purposes.

Conclusion: The moral implications of reflexivity

We create our selves through reflexive processes, that is, through the internal dialogues in which we tell ourselves who are, what we value, and how we should behave (Harré 1987, Lewis 2003, Taylor 1989). As Taylor (1989:28) noted

> To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary.

Moral evaluations about who to be, and what to do, surface in the reflexive processes through which managers narrate their engagements with the SLP. Managers who, like Alan and Bill, obediently adopt the prescriptions of normative change programs are unsettling because they fail to engage in an activity that we critical management scholars value highly, that is, the questioning and challenging of authority. Although it is going too far to claim that Alan and Bill are morally reprehensible, the existence of people who passively absorb versions of reality promoted by the powerful is troubling. They invoke uncomfortable images and possibilities, such as mass brainwashing, cults and crimes committed while 'following orders' (Willmott 1993, O'Reilly & Chatman 1996, Tourish & Pinnington 2002).

What, then, is the link between reflexivity and a capacity or propensity to question authority? Work in the psychology of moral and cognitive development provides some useful concepts for exploring this question. Researchers such as Kohlberg (1984), Gilligan (1982), Perry (1988) and Belenky et al. (1986/1997) have examined the discursive and reflexive processes through people reason about justice, morality and truth. Despite some disagreements and differences in emphasis, these theorists all detected 'stages' in the type of discursive reasoning people engage in as they move through adolescence into adulthood. As individuals mature, childish self-absorption is replaced by a style of reasoning in which notions of 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' are derived from others. Kohlberg and Gilligan call this conventional morality, Perry refers to it a position of dualism, and Belenky et al, in their study of 'ways of knowing' characterised this reliance on 'received knowledge' as 'listening the voices of others'. In this style, generalised others are given precedence, and critical evaluation of those others is absent or suppressed. Bill is a good example of a person who displays this type of reasoning. Although Alan does not articulate his reliance on the voices of others as explicitly as Bill, his immersion in the prevailing norms, both pre and post SLP, suggests that a similar style may be in operation.

Although some, perhaps many, adults remain at this stage, others begin to question conventional morality and truths. These people may eventually move on to a post-conventional morality guided by abstract principles of justice (Kohlberg) or a well developed ethic of care (Gilligan). They no longer rely on received knowledge, but learn to critically evaluate other people's truth claims. Here the emphasis on conformity, that is, displaying a socially acceptable self 3, is replaced by a style of reasoning that privileges the development of a stronger and more independent self concept (self 2) equipped with a personally meaningful set of values and capacity for independent thought. Gilligan described the shift towards

this style as ‘juxtaposing the concern with what other people think with a new inner judgment’ (1982: 82). Belenky et al. tellingly characterised it as a ‘reclamation of the self’ (1986/1997: 133).

A robust and relatively stable self-concept by no means guarantees resistance to, or the prevention of, abuses of power. Indeed, individuals with a robust sense of self, and little concern for what others feel, may be particularly effective manipulators and exploiters. Nevertheless, a capacity to create distance between one’s self and the prescriptions of generalised others affords some space within which to evaluate and choose among different actions and responses. Many critics of normative change programs lament the distance, cynicism and irony that many employees display in response to such programs. However, these responses may be typical of employees who do not conflate their selves 2 and 3, who do create distance between what they perceive their ‘real’ selves to be, and the roles that proponents of change attempt to thrust upon them. The critics’ propensity to view distance and irony as symptoms of organisational pathology may be an outcome of their own romantic hankerings for unified selves. As we saw above, however, unified selves can also be problematic. Rather than focus on outward manifestations of behaviour, such as compliance, resistance and so on, it may be more fruitful to examine the discursive and reflexive processes through which employees position themselves within the power relations of the organisations in which they work.

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