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Organisational control and the self: critiques and normative expectations

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Abstract

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Keywords

Authenticity, Autonomy, Control, Multiple selves, Reflexivity, Self

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the normative assumptions about the self that are implicitly and explicitly embedded in critiques of organisational control. Two problematic aspects of control are examined – the capacity of some organisations to produce unquestioning commitment, and the elicitation of 'false' selves. Drawing on the work of Rom Harré, and some examples of organisational-self processes gone awry, I investigate the dynamics involved and how they violate the normative expectations that we hold regarding the self, particularly its moral autonomy and authenticity. The paper concludes by arguing that, despite post-structuralist challenges, some notion of a 'core' or 'real' self still holds salience for employees negotiating their identities within regimes of control. The assumptions and expectations surrounding this aspect of self are also a pivotal element in the western intellectual tradition that promotes and enables critique.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity

Autonomy

Control

Multiple selves

Reflexivity

Self

For the past few decades, organisation theorists have been very interested in the interconnections between organisational control and employee selfhood. This interest was stimulated in the 1980s by new forms of control that targeted not only employees' behaviour, but also their emotions, beliefs and values (Ray, 1986, pp. 150-152; Willmott, 1993; 2003). In keeping with the theoretical and ideological diversity found among critical management scholars, interpretations of the impacts and implications of these controls on the self have varied widely. Some paint a gloomy picture, arguing that employees subjected to 'cultural engineering' become anxious, fragmented, burnt out and prone to inauthentic play-acting (Casey, 1995; Collinson, 2003; Hochschild, 1983/2003; Kunda, 1992; Sennett, 1998). Others argue that workers are not so easily influenced. They can and do resist the wiles of those who attempt to manipulate them, constructing and maintaining robust identities in opposition (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 1994; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Employees can even twist attempts to control them to their own advantage (Robertson and Swan, 2003; Rosenthal, 2004).

This article is also concerned with organisational control and the self. However, rather than arguing either that individuals subjected to organisational controls become fragmented and anxious, or that they remain robust and resistant, I want to leave both possibilities open, and explore the issues from a metatheoretical perspective. Using critiques of organisational control and its impacts on the self as my primary data, I will examine the normative assumptions and expectations that inform critique. What is it about organisational control that bothers us, as critical management scholars? Why do we see control as dangerous, and why do we valorise resistance? What values and models of the self are implicit or explicit in critiques of control, and how can these be mobilised to sharpen our analyses?

Employees clearly experience organisations in many ways – as enabling, anxiety-provoking, or oppressive, for instance. Despite this variability, theorists often highlight particular features of the control-self dynamic, while downplaying or ignoring others. While this is rhetorically useful, its neglect of difference stifles comparative analysis. For example, Collinson (2003) argues that multiplicity and insecurity are pervasive features of organisational selfhood. This can be traced to the fundamental subject/object duality that lies at the very core of our consciousness, stimulating a futile search for a unified self. While the romantic hankering for unity that underlies this analysis is valid, its propensity to highlight multiplicity and insecurity in the most mundane of circumstances dilutes its capacity to differentiate. The awkward sense of multiplicity generated 'when friends meet parents, or when work meets home' (Collison 2003, p. 534) is of a different order from the distress experienced by, for example, some victims of child abuse whose 'split' selves prevent any consistent self-narrative at all (Harré, 1998, pp. 75-6; Scott, 1999). While this example is extreme, it shows how gradations of experience can be negated by adopting *a priori* positions, and how popular terms like 'multiple selves' lose clarity when used to describe diverse phenomena. What we need is a model of the self within organisations that is both more precise and more open to possibilities, a model that does not, in an *a priori* fashion, construct the self as *either* fragile and insecure, *or* robust and resistant in the face of power. With a more open and flexible framework we can more sensitively probe the zones where control becomes problematic, and examine the sources of our unease.

The article proceeds as follows. First, drawing on a long tradition of social and discursive psychology, I outline a model of a reflexive, multi-faceted self that is capable of adopting a variety of positions vis-à-vis organisational pressures and constraints. I show how this model can be used to tease out some of the normative assumptions and expectations that inform critiques of organisational control. I concentrate on two streams of critique - one that is concerned about too much unquestioning employee commitment, and another that sees control as problematic because it

incites the production of 'false' selves. By exploring problems associated with extremes of these conditions – destructive religious cults for the first, and undercover police work for the second – I argue that idealised notions of autonomy and authenticity inform much of the critique of control. The article concludes by considering what a relatively autonomous and authentic self might look like within contemporary organisations.

Reflexivity, social selves and multiplicity

A self that is capable of relating to others and consciously positioning itself within or against organisational control is a reflexive self. Reflexivity can be characterised as 'a self-defining process that depends upon monitoring of, and reflecting upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life' (Elliot 2001, p. 37). As Collinson (2003) noted, the capacity to monitor ourselves implies an ability to split our consciousness so that we, as subjects, can view ourselves as objects of our own attention. William James recognised this ability late in the 19th century when he distinguished between the 'I', or self-as-knower, and the 'me', or self-as-known. These were 'not separate things', but 'discriminated aspects' of the consciousness of a self observing the world and reacting to it (James, 1892, p. 176). Already in James we see references to multiple selfhood. Among the several 'mes' that James identified, there was a 'social me' that was itself multiple, as '[a man (sic)] has as many different social selves as there are distinct *groups* of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups' (p. 179).

Social control, then, is inherent in reflexive selfhood as individuals modify their 'mes' in response to the explicit and imagined reactions of others. This orientation towards others enables social and organisational life. Multiplicity is a normal and natural aspect of selfhood, as 'we divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances' (Mead 1934, p. 142). For

these theorists, there is a unified self behind the multiplicity, forged through an ongoing internal conversation between the 'I' and the 'me' as two 'phases' of the self. In Mead's scheme, the 'I' is the site of a more-or-less ongoing consciousness, which is spontaneous and creative. The 'me' is the self as a manipulable object of consciousness which, over time, internalises the social attitudes of the community in which it lives. The I and the me are in frequent dialogue, as a person initiates plans, responds to situations and the attitudes of others, and adapts him/herself to them (Mead 1934, pp. 173 – 178, 192 – 222). Normally, wrote Mead, 'the unity and structure of the complete self reflects the unity and structure of the social process as a whole' (p. 144). Only people who have experienced 'emotional upheavals' and/or are 'somewhat unstable nervously' experience 'cleavage' or discomfort from multiplicity (p. 143).

In this stream of thought, 'normal' social life involves the presentation of different selves (or different aspects of the more or less 'same' self) to different 'audiences'. Erving Goffman took this line of theorising further by exploring social interaction as theatre. In his view, 'All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify' (1959, p. 78). For Goffman, the self is a performance, a 'dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented' (p. 245). Tacit 'rules' guide social encounters, and order is established and maintained as individuals enact the roles expected of them (pp. 241-247). Goffman viewed roles as 'situated activity systems' that incumbents could variously embrace and/or distance themselves from (Goffman, 1961). He was primarily concerned with revealing the mundane and normally invisible 'rules' that guide interaction, rather than exploring the self-dynamics that gave rise to them. However, in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), he occasionally hinted at the reflexive self-management that attends enactments of self. He wrote:

> As human beings we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next. As characters put on for an audience, however,

> we must not be subject to ups and downs .... A certain bureaucratization of the spirit is expected (pp. 63-4).

Elsewhere (p. 229) he noted, 'to the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self' . Despite these tantalizing observations, Goffman did not dwell on the discomforts generated by life as drama. His overall focus was on the cognitive, calculated management of self-presentations.

It is not a great conceptual leap from Goffman's work to more recent post-structuralist or postmodern theories of the self. There is a similar focus on the self (or selves) as situationally-defined performances, and an emphasis on images. There is a similar turning away from the interior dynamics of the psyche. Indeed, Elliot (2001, p. 36) claimed that Goffman's theory of the self 'might well be understood as a precursor to … postmodern sensibilities'. More recent theorists have amplified the themes of performance, shallowness and fragmentation, often linking them to the proliferation of media and new technologies. According to Gergen, we are living in a 'socially saturated world' which presents us with 'an ever expanding vocabulary of being' (1996, p. 132). This plethora of choice produces 'multiphrenia', or a 'splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments' (Gergen, 1991, pp. 73-4). Gergen goes so far as to claim that we are witnessing 'a progressive emptying of the self - a loss in the credibility of subjectivity, agency, the "I" at the centre of being' (1996, p. 128). For some, this heralds a release from the stifling constraints of convention. For others, the loss of traditional anchors for the self generates anxiety and insecurity (Collinson, 2003; Elliot, 2001, pp. 129-151; Gellner, 1992).

At the same time, the recent dominance of post-structuralist views of the self have inhibited our capacity to investigate the impacts of change on the self-dynamics that produce emancipation and/or anxiety (Bendle, 2002; Smith, 1994). Foucauldian scholarship, in particular, has encouraged

scepticism towards the knowledge claims of the psychological, social and biological sciences – key sources of knowledge about the self. Feminist theory and post-colonial anthropology have further destabilised the idea of an 'essential' self that transcends gender, history and culture (Rose, 1996; Sampson, 1989; Venn, 1984). The argument that 'the self' as we have come to know and enact it is a product of historical circumstances is persuasive. However, it does *not* require us to be suspicious of reflexivity, and the different aspects of self that it produces, to the extent that we declare investigation of them off limits. Neither does it require us to doubt the very existence of the self. As the Foucauldian scholar Nikolas Rose observed:

> To speak of the invention of the self is not to suggest that we are, in some way, the victims of a collective fiction or delusion. That which is invented is not an illusion: it constitutes our truth (1996, p. 3).

In making this assertion, Rose echoed an often-quoted statement made decades earlier by the pragmatists William and Dorothy Thomas (1928, cited in Ritzer and Goodman, 2004, p. 195): 'If men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. In other words we, as contemporary westerners, construct ourselves in historically situated ways that have salience for us, and which have consequences for how we experience and enact our lives.

A threefold self

How, then, can we investigate the nexus between contemporary forms of organisational control and the processes through which employees construct themselves, with all their multiplicities and anxieties, as well as their capacities for resistance and creative nonconformity? Some of the groundwork was laid by the pragmatist social psychologists whose work was summarised above. They showed how reflexivity, in conjunction with an awareness of generalised others, enables the

production of multiple selves that respond to prevailing social norms. However, they conducted their work in simpler times and were primarily focussed on successful socialisation. They did not provide tools for analysing power, or self-processes that 'go awry' (1999, p. 677). In order to investigate the sometimes problematic self-dynamics associated with contemporary forms of organisation, we need a more complex set of concepts.

Despite their limitations, the fundamental dynamics of the self described by Mead and Goffman do provide a valuable starting point. In the 1990's, discursive psychologist Rom Harré combined and built on their work in a way that is useful for exploring some of the more complex manifestations of self that arise in contemporary organisations (Burkitt 1991, pp. 61-68; Harré 1998). Harré made distinctions among three interacting aspects of the self, which he designated selves 1, 2 and 3. These are not separate entities as such, but fluid and interconnected discursive devices through which we create, manipulate and sustain the complex phenomena grouped into the concept of 'self'. Self 1 is similar to Mead's 'I' (Harré 1998, pp. 74-5). It is the standpoint from which we experience and act upon the world, the embodied 'self' that we carry through time and space. Selves 2 and 3 are both objects of consciousness, reflecting different, but related, aspects of Mead's 'me'. Self 2 is a person's 'self-concept', a 'loose knit cluster' (p. 70) of beliefs about oneself, 'expressed, however inaccurately, in the content of confessions, self-descriptions, autobiographies and other reflexive discourses' (p. 76). Self 2 consists of people's beliefs about what their more or less 'real' or 'core' selves are – their preferences and values, their beliefs about their own capabilities, faults and talents, changeable as these are with time, place and different moods. Notwithstanding post-structuralist challenges to any notion of a 'real' self, it still holds salience for most people (Costas and Fleming, 2007; Tracey and Trethewey, 2005) and, as we will see below, it is often invoked in narratives about organisational control.

Harré's third self is implicit in Mead, but more fully developed in Goffman's work. This is the self as it is presented to the world (Harré, 1998, pp. 78-9). It may be experienced and produced as a relatively direct and unmediated expression of self 2 (as in 'I'm being myself') or as a consciously manipulated image, in which a person presents a self 3 that is different to the self 2 as it is privately created and understood. A person as a whole is constituted by narratives and performances that encompass all three aspects of self. Harré's scheme thus opens up a more complex conceptual landscape in which to explore aspects of self-production and self-expression that are implicated in organisational control, such as commitment, resistance and multiplicity.

It is important not to reify the aspects of self identified by Harre. They are 'no more than a rhetorical convenience' (Harré 1998, p. 16) that can be used to bring at least some clarity to discussions of different forms of selfhood, their circumstances of production and ramifications.[1] For instance, multiplicity in self 1 is a strikingly different phenomenon to multiplicity in self 3. In most (perhaps all) cultures, there are strong normative expectations regarding the continuity and singularity of self 1, linked as it is to a single human body uniquely located in time and space. Multiplicities in this dimension of selfhood do occur, however, as some individuals narrate selves that exhibit marked disjunctions in consciousness, biography and memory, to the extent that it appears as if different 'characters' inhabit the same body. This form of multiplicity is unusual, and generally considered aberrant or extraordinary. In some cultures it is labelled possession, in others it is pathologised as Dissociative Identity Disorder (previously called Multiple Personality Disorder) (Harré, 1998, pp. 150-152; Scott, 1999). Multiplicity in self 3 is ubiquitous, however, as socialised humans are expected to behave differently in different situations. It is generally regarded as 'normal', provided individuals do not violate certain ill-defined standards of self-consistency and exhibit behaviours that are deemed to be situationally appropriate.

Most 'ordinary' episodes of multiplicity involve selves 2 and 3 and relationships between them, and it is these dimensions of the self that are susceptible to organisational control, as employees are exhorted to adjust their emotions, values, self-perceptions and behaviour. Conceptualising organisational selves as crafted out of shifting permutations of selves 2 and 3 allows us to refine the questions raised in the introduction, so that we can get closer to the self-dynamics involved. How do mechanisms of control attempt to manipulate the processes through which selves 2 and 3 are produced? What sorts of relationships between these facets of self are produced and enacted, and with what consequences? And most importantly, when and how do organisational demands violate the integrity of the self? This latter question is a very difficult one, and impossible to answer with any precision. However, in travelling through this complicated territory, I will use two navigational aids. One is the set of deeply embedded normative expectations regarding viable and responsible selfhood that is part of the western intellectual tradition, and which emerges in the critiques examined below. The other is a pair of situations in which extreme demands are placed upon the self. Although destructive cults and undercover police work may seem somewhat removed from run-of-the-mill organisational life, the self-dynamics associated with them can shed some light on less extreme situations.

Organisational control and selves

The literature on organisational control and the self is vast. Within this literature, I will focus on two inter-related issues that seem to be the most troubling to critical management theorists. The first relates to forms of control that seek to infiltrate and reconfigure employees' selves 2, so that their most private beliefs, motivations and values are more closely aligned with corporate goals. The profound unease generated by this form of control is an indication of the strong normative expectations that attend this aspect of the self. A second concern grew out of empirical work that showed that employees' selves 2 are often not so easily manipulated after all. Instead, employees subjected to control often adopt

Goffmanesque maneuvers in which they self-consciously present selves that are at odds with what they 'really' think and feel. While such maneuvers can help employees to evade control by protecting what they perceive their 'real' or 'inner' selves to be, they can also incur costs. The interesting question for the purposes of this paper is when and how this 'acting' becomes deleterious to the self. In the following sections, I somewhat crudely label these two areas of concern 'too much commitment' and 'too much acting', and show how the threefold self can help us understand the self-dynamics associated with them, and the normative dimensions involved.

Too much commitment

In the 1980s, critical management scholars began to notice a new form of control being attempted in organisations in the US and the UK (Ray, 1986; Willmott, 1993; 2003). Inspired by popular management texts such as *In Search of Excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982), companies tried to manipulate employee self-perceptions, emotions and values through 'culture change' programs. These efforts provoked abundant critique, much of it based on ideological objections (Ackers and Preston, 1997; Ezzy, 2001; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996; Schwartz, 1987; Tourish and Pinnington, 2002; Tourish and Vatcha, 2005; Willmott, 1993) but some also informed by in-depth empirical investigations of the effects of these programs on employees (Casey, 1995; Kunda, 1992; Turnbull, 2001; 2002). Many critics were profoundly disturbed by the phenomenon, referring to it as 'organizational totalitarianism' (Schwartz, 1987), 'a benign yet invasive tyranny' (Kunda 1992, p. 20), and 'a corporate colonization of the self' (Casey 1995, p. 138) .

To comprehend what these critics found so troubling about cultural engineering, we need to appreciate the deep normative expectations that are attached to self 2. This is the self that is socialised into us by significant others as we mature, and through which we continue to forge our individual identities in adolescence and adulthood. It is the discursively constructed 'real' or 'core' self that we create to more

or less endure through the myriad performances that constitute our social lives. Although post-structuralists point out that belief in an 'inner' or 'core' self is a product of post-Enlightenment discourse, we are nevertheless deeply attached to it, and our continued discursive construction and protection of it is a pivotal means through which we constitute ourselves within power (Rose, 1996; Tracey and Trethewey, 2005). Most importantly, it is where we form, sustain and modify our values. Selfhood is imbued with morality:

> 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 (Taylor, 1989, p. 28).

Organisational regimes that tamper with self 2 are perceived to be dangerous because they interfere with the sources of morality that are imputed to reside there. Critics of these regimes frequently refer to non-corporatised 'original' or 'autonomous' selves that are in danger of being invaded and manipulated by commercial interests (e.g. Kunda, 1992, p. 226; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996, p. 188; Schwartz, 1987, p. 42). The following, taken from an article about the collapse of Enron, is a typical example:

> Once people over-align themselves with a company, and invest excessive faith in the wisdom of its leaders, they are liable to *lose their original sense of identity*, tolerate ethical lapses they would have previously deplored, find a new and possibly corrosive value system taking root, and leave themselves vulnerable to manipulation by the leaders of the organisation, to whom they have mistakenly entrusted many of their vital interests (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005, p. 476, emphasis added).

The issue here is not fragmentation, anxiety or multiplicity, but a discursive transformation of self 2 such that any distance between its preferences, values and beliefs and those espoused by the dominant

organisational discourse is diminished. Such adjustments may lead to less, rather than more, multiplicity, as employees simplify and align their identities with those prescribed to them by organisational others. The following extracts from interviews with 'committed' employees, taken from Casey's (1995) study, illustrate the reflexive processes involved:

> I'm the same kind of person at home as I am at work. Unfortunately, I think so. Sometimes I wish I wasn't but you're like this all day, I guess it gets to be like hard to be any other way … but I like to be the same… I think you should be consistent and I like to be even (Casey 1995, pp. 170-171).

Another committed employee interviewed by Casey (p. 146), despite several invitations, seemed incapable of envisaging or narrating any kind of differentiated self at all:

> Catherine: How do you feel in yourself about these changes, about Hephaestus? … How much do you feel that you're being yourself here?
>
> Ken: I don't understand the question.
>
> Catherine: I'm trying to find out a little how you feel about yourself here at work … Do you think you are the same kind of person at work as you are outside of work, like at home or when you're doing other things?
>
> Ken: Hmm, I don't understand the question.
>
> Catherine: Well, sometimes people say that they have a 'work me' and a 'non-work' me. Do you think you are the same, act the same, feel the same, have the same attitudes, values, when you're with your family or in some social circles outside your work life?
>
> Ken: Hmm .. I don't act the same. When I'm outside of work I'm not in charge .. My wife has to do everything.

The fact that Ken finally picked up on differences in actions rather than identity, feelings, values and attitudes suggests that he is not in the habit of discursively constructing an elaborate self 2, or that he was unwilling to share his reflections with the interviewer. This somewhat startling interview extract is also a reminder that perhaps not everyone engages in the kind of reflexivity that academics expect them to.

What is really troubling about the capacity of organisations to absorb and manipulate employees' selves 2, to the extent that their 'autonomous' moral sense is subverted, is that it may be used to perpetrate significant harm. There is long list of historical events that show that such worries are not misplaced – Nazi atrocities, events at Jonestown, Waco, Enron and other corporations where malpractice has flourished, the suicides and deaths associated with the Heaven's Gate and Aum Shrinrikyo sects. Literature about these phenomena – especially that which addresses so-called 'cults'[2] – is a useful place to look for assumptions regarding 'normal' and 'pathological' organisational/self dynamics. Theorists seeking explanations for 'cult-like' behaviour often allege that these organisations deliberately deploy techniques to destabilise or overwhelm the reflexive dynamics through which autonomous selves 2 are usually sustained. These include isolation from 'non-believing' friends and family (the familiar generalised others through which the 'core' self is usually maintained), strenuous work routines with little opportunity for privacy, rest and reflection, 'alternating periods of shunning and warm communal embrace' (Zablocki, 2001, p. 196), and control over discourses so that issues and problems are presented in black and white terms, and any questioning of the organisation's dogma is punished or repressed (Coser, 1974, pp. 103-116; Lifton, 1993, pp. 56-82; Singer and Lalich, 1995). These practices are reputed to alter the very foundations of the self, such that 'old' selves are replaced with 'new' ones which, although artificially generated, will act as uncritical and obedient 'deployable agents' (Zablocki, 2001, p. 183). Literature that is critical of cults is dotted with phrases such as 'a stripping away of the vestiges of an old identity' (Zablocki, 2001, p. 187), 'false or shadow self' (Anthony, 2001, p. 257),

'pseudo-identity' (West and Martin, 1994), 'psychological kidnapping' (Robbins, 2001, p. 76) and 'formation of a psuedopersonality' (Singer and Lalich, 1995, p. 79).

Of course, there are differences between corporations and high demand religious groups. Despite long hours, corporations don't usually encourage employees to separate themselves from family and friends. Religious groups also attract willing 'seekers' who might be more receptive to charismatic influence than cynical and disaffected employees. Nevertheless, a number of critics have drawn attention to similarities between the practices deployed by evangelical or cultic groups and those used by corporations seeking to enhance employee commitment. These include 'symbolic action to convey a sense of purpose, consistent information to shape interpretations, and extensive reward and recognition systems to shape behaviour' (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996, p. 157), as well as training sessions that require managers to 'confess' their 'sins' and be 'born again' (Ackers and Preston, 1997). Tourish and Pinnington (2005) identified several cult-like practices at Enron, such as the valorisation of Skilling and Lay as charismatic leaders, elaborate recruitment and initiation rituals, and repeated messages to employees that because they were 'the brightest and the best', they were destined for a glorious future. Lavish benefits, combined with a ruthless performance appraisal system, encouraged conformity and stifled dissent.

Comparisons between corporations and 'cults' highlight a common set of organisational and self dynamics that, in extreme circumstances, can lead to collective mayhem. However, the implications of these extremes for more ordinary situations are open to debate. Within the management literature, the depiction of cultural engineering as 'totalising' has been challenged (Gabriel, 1999; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995) and, as I discuss below, empirical researchers have found that employees do not very readily hand over their selves to employers for reconfiguration. This argument has its counterpart among cult/new religious movement scholars, who acrimoniously debate the scientific status of 'brainwashing' (Zablocki and Robbins, 2001b). This debate touches on many of the same concerns that trouble critics of corporate control, namely the putative ability of charismatic leaders and contrived organisational

techniques to subvert the self-processes of employees so that they lose their capacity to act as autonomous agents. The issue of when and how subtle forms of persuasion cross the line into illegitimacy is impossible to resolve. The debate does not so much pivot around 'proof' of 'brainwashing' as it does around strong normative expectations regarding the self's 'autonomy, voluntarism, and self-directedness' (Bromley 2001, p. 333).

In summary, there is a strong stream of critique that argues that organisational controls become dangerous when they tamper with the sources of autonomous ethical judgment that contemporary westerners believe are an integral aspect of viable, responsible selfhood. The concerns that drive this critique can be linked to historical events that suggest that seemingly 'normal' people can, given the right circumstances and techniques, be persuaded to cause serious harm. Such influence is not easy to exert, however. Scholars investigating cults/new religious movements may disagree vehemently about whether or not 'brainwashing' exists, but they do agree that, relative to the number of people approached through proselytising, very few become fully-fledged members (Bromley, 2001, p. 329; Zablocki, 2001, p. 176). The number who become involved in violent groups is smaller still. This observation is in keeping with findings from empirical work conducted in organisations. Here too, responses vary, with only some, probably a minority (Casey, 1995; Kunda, 1992; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Turnbull, 2001), of employees exhibiting the high level of commitment desired by the engineers of cultural change. This small incidence of total commitment is not grounds for complacency, however. Historical events indicate that our expectation that morally responsible individuals critically evaluate the discourses they encounter is not misguided. Western liberal democratic ideals, and indeed critical management scholarship, are based on the supposition that such evaluation provides vital protection against abuses of power. Employees who critically assess organisational discourses do not seek unity by merging themselves with the organisation, and are more tolerant of the multiplicity that is generated by taking a more distant stance. Multiplicity has its costs and benefits, however, and too much acting may also take its toll.

Too much acting

When critical management scholars first turned their attention to corporate cultural engineering, they emphasised its totalitarian, cultish ambitions. In doing so, they gave the impression that this mode of control was relatively effective, and that organisations were capable of turning their employees into obedient subjects whose capacities for independent thought had been obliterated. When reports of empirical research began to appear in the early 1990s, a more complex picture emerged (Casey, 1995; Collinson, 1994; 1992; Harris and Ogbonna, 1998; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Kunda, 1992; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Turnbull, 2002). While it appeared that some employees did indeed align their sentiments and values with those espoused by cultural engineers, many others attempted to maintain their 'original sense of identity'. This latter trend was particularly evident among blue collar workers who had long traditions of sustaining and defending identities that were opposed to management. For instance, a decade before his work on insecurity in organisations, Collinson (1992, 1994) reported the findings of his study of cultural engineering in a heavy industrial firm in the U.K. Shop floor workers referred to the U.S.-inspired culture change effort as 'Yankee bullshit' (1994, p. 32). One worker asserted that 'Fellas on the shopfloor are genuine. They're the salt of the earth, but they're all twats and nancy boys in th'offices' (1992, p. 87). Similarly, Holmer-Nadesan (1996) found that female service workers at a university residence in the U.S. refused to adopt the identities set out for them by cultural engineers. Instead, they drew on discourses of gender, class and family to craft alternative identities for themselves as surrogate mothers to the students in their care.

Resistance to organisational control can, therefore, take the form of defending and enacting putatively 'real' or 'genuine' selves that are set up in opposition to the 'false' selves prescribed by management. For many workers, however, particularly those in management and customer relations, choices between supposedly 'real' and 'false' selves are more murky and compromised.

Sanctions against enacting (certain versions of) one's 'real' self may be high, and/or the rewards for 'going along' with the production of 'false', or at least 'flexible', selves too enticing. Empirical accounts of cultural change contain many interview quotes that poignantly capture the tensions experienced by employees who are caught between being more or less 'true' to themselves (sustaining and expressing self 2), and behaving in organisationally desirable ways (enacting 'false' selves 3). Some examples follow. The first comes from a nurse who became a ward manager:

> I'm still a nurse at heart, a hands-on nurse. What I would call a real nurse. That is what gives me the real satisfaction. I don't like the managerial role, I would go back to being a staff nurse (quoted in Bolton, 2005, p. 15)

Here is another example, from an employee in an organisation that has introduced teamwork:

> You've got to conform …there is a herd instinct to it in some ways. I got into trouble recently because I was intimidating to my colleagues because I used certain words that aren't in their vocabulary and I got told to stop doing that… I'll help anybody … but I don't like being moulded quite that forcefully into being this way (quoted in Knights and McCabe, 2003, p. 1605)

Sometimes the pressure is perceived as going quite deep, into the very core of the self:

> [Y]ou can't be yourself in this place. You can't facilitate changes doing it in the interactive way you want to. You have to be more forceful. You have to aim to be someone else (a manager quoted in Turnbull, 2002, p. 33).

Employee responses such as these have generated a stream of critique which is quite different from that covered under the heading of 'too much commitment'. Writers who warned against the

dangers of too much unquestioning employee commitment based their critiques on a view of the organisational self as one that was losing its capacity to critically evaluate, to differentiate between what was 'real' in itself, and what was artificially prescribed by the organisation. The employees quoted above do not fall into this category. They maintain a capacity to narrate 'real' selves that are distinct from their organisationally prescribed selves, and they use these 'real' selves as positions from which to evaluate the power structures in which they are enmeshed. However, unlike the shop floor workers in Collinson's study, they do not wholeheartedly reject the identities that are thrust upon them. They are caught up in compromise.

The tensions generated by these compromises rub up against a set of normative expectations about the self that are linked to, but different from, those that fuel the critique of too much commitment. They have to do with the authenticity of the self. Like autonomy, authenticity is a value that is strongly attached to post-Enlightenment western selfhood (McAdams, 1997; Taylor, 1991), and like autonomy, is more of an ill-defined ideal than it is a concept realizable in practice.[3] In somewhat simple and romantic terms, we can view authenticity as an attribute of the self that is generated when individuals enact selves 3 that are felt as, and are seen to be, relatively direct and unmediated reflections of their selves 2. However, as documented by Goffman and many other great writers, such as Shakespeare, Austen and Freud, individuals routinely present selves 3 that bear all sorts of complicated relationships to what they 'really' think and feel. Depending on the situation, we can conceptualise these relationships as politeness, professionalism, conformity, Machiavellianism or deceit. How these phenomena relate to the authenticity of the selves performing them is not always easy to specify. Nevertheless, as is evident in the quotations above, organisational pressures that require employees to routinely produce selves that are markedly at odds with their perceived 'real' selves can generate discomfort, or as Goffman characterised it, 'a special kind of alienation from self' (1959, p. 229 see also Gergen, 1971, pp. 86-90)

The propensity of cultural engineering to tamper with employees' capacity to enact more or less 'authentic' selves features quite strongly in some critiques. Kunda (1992) and Casey (1995) both highlight the ambivalence experienced by employees who are seduced by the rewards of going along with the corporate culture, but who baulk at handing themselves over for a complete overhaul. The problem here is not that selves 2 and 3 are merged and dissolved into the corporate drive for profit (as in the critique of 'too much commitment'), but that these aspects of self become disconnected and prone to internal conflict. In Kunda's words:

> If the idea of normative control is founded on the hope of offering members a stable self grounded in a morally sound organizational community, the opposite is produced. Among full members, we find an ambivalent, fluctuating, ironic self, at war with itself and with its internalized images of self and others (1992, p. 221).

In the face of these difficulties, how can we get back to authenticity? Casey and Kunda both lamented ambivalence and ambiguity, and seemed to hanker, somewhat romantically, for organisations in which individuals could freely and consistently express what they perceive their 'true' selves to be without compromise. While this would undoubtedly be ideal, it is somewhat unrealistic, given that so much of organisational life consists of compromise and the careful management of self-presentations. Moreover, strong desires to escape ambiguity and multiplicity can lead us back to the problems identified above in the critique of too much commitment. A craving for unity is characteristic of a 'fundamentalist self' that fears pluralism and seeks solace by merging itself with all-or-nothing ideologies (Lifton, 1993, pp. 160 - 189).

There are clearly different ways of viewing relationships between selves 2 and 3, and linking these relationships to the concept of authenticity. If we veer towards romantic or fundamentalist views, we are more likely to view misalignments or multiplicities as alienating or inauthentic. However,

humans are capable of complex modes of reflexivity and self-management, and it is too simple to equate unity and alignment with authenticity, and multiplicity and acting with its opposites (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000). Hochschild (1983/2003) explored some of these more complex permutations in her pioneering study of emotional labour among workers whose occupations oblige them to routinely stifle or sublimate expressions of their 'real' feelings and selves. She found that some of these workers seek authenticity through 'deep acting', a form of self-management in which they try to *become* the organisationally prescribed self. This 'sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality' (p. 7), that is, it taps into and consumes self 2. Deep-acting workers have 'little or so sense of a "false self"' (p. 187). While this mode of selfhood may, on face value, satisfy yearnings for authenticity, Hochschild claimed that it produced the opposite effect. Workers who engaged in too much deep acting risked burnout and emotional numbness. They lost touch with the 'real' feelings that 'people turn to … in order to locate themselves or at least to see what their own reactions are to a given event' (p. 22).

To avoid the perils of deep acting, Hochschild advised the cultivation of a '"healthy" estrangement' in which employees 'clearly define for themselves when they are acting and when they are not; they know when their deep or surface acting is "their own" and when it is part of the commercial show' (pp. 187 – 188). Somewhat paradoxically then, in Hochschild's scheme, the authenticity and integrity of the self is protected through self-conscious fakery, while alienation is a side-effect of attempts to be 'authentic'. This is a more complex conceptualisation of the organisational self, one in which irony, ambivalence, multiplicity and fluctuation are not necessarily deleterious to the self, or signs that the self is 'at war with itself'. Instead, they can help sustain and express a resilient 'protean' self (Lifton 1993) that adapts and endures through the vicissitudes of organisational life .

There are, however, limits to the capacity of employees to accommodate dissonant or contradictory aspects of self without significant discomfort or harm. Again, it is impossible to clearly delineate the

circumstances in which 'acting' stops being benign or productive, and begins to feel alienating. A romantically-inclined person may be discomforted by fairly mundane situations, such as having to 'sell' herself at a job interview. A conman, on the other hand, may derive great satisfaction from deceiving others. At this point, it is worth considering the self-dynamics and normative expectations involved in an extreme situation – undercover police work, which puts considerable pressure on employees to enact selves that are markedly at odds with who they 'really' are. The stresses associated with this work are such that many law enforcement agencies restrict it to 'volunteers' who are specially trained. Nevertheless, studies suggest that those who perform it are at significantly greater risk of developing psychological problems than non-undercover police (Girodo, 1991; Marx, 1988, pp. 159 - 172). The problems are multiple, but some have to do with 'split personality' (Marx 1988, p. 169) or 'experiencing the self as "unreal"' (Girodo 1991, p. 626). In a high profile Australian case, an ex-police officer sued his employer for 'psychological injury'. The officer had spent four years undercover, assuming as many as six identities in a day. While posing as a drug dealer, motorcycle gang member and agent of the Russian mafia, he developed addictions to drugs and alcohol, and was described, years later, as still 'struggling to come to grips with his true identity' (Kennedy, 2005).

The Australian undercover agent had reportedly received little support from his employers beyond a tape of whale sounds to help him relax (Kennedy, 2005). Those interested in developing more substantial supports advocate, among other things, deliberate measures to help police maintain their 'original' selves. This involves regular and extensive interaction with family, friends and colleagues, those generalised others through which the non-undercover self is sustained (Hibler, 1995; Marx, 1988, pp. 159 – 172). This advice is similar to that offered by Hochschild (1983/2003, p. 197), who listed ways in which employees engaged in emotional labour can 'reclaim the managed heart'. These included 'talking quietly with a loved one, sorting it out in the occasional intimacy of a worker-to-worker talk'. In other words, 'backstage' regions, where the act can be dropped and the 'real' self re-invoked (Goffman, 1959,

pp. 109-140), are crucial for the maintenance of viable selves in the face of organisational pressures to act. Again, these are sites where irony, fluctuation and multiplicity may be evident.

To summarise, this second strand of critique condemns organisational controls that incite the production of 'false' selves. This is perceived as discomforting because it violates expectations we hold regarding the authenticity of the self. However, authenticity is a complex and elusive phenomenon, and equating it with a consistent alignment of selves 2 and 3 is too simple and romantic a perspective to accommodate the different ways employees negotiate their identities in contemporary organisations. Rather than alignment, authenticity seems to be associated with two inter-related phenomena. The first is a capacity to sustain a relatively robust self 2 through the performances that make up organisational life. This capacity is enhanced by backstage opportunities to 'be oneself' in conjunction with trusted and familiar generalised others. Secondly, some degree of authenticity can be maintained if employees can manage and choose the performances they adopt, such that the performances do not seriously undermine the values that reside in self 2. As Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000) found, intermittent 'faking' did not produce alienation among service workers who felt an overarching 'match' between their jobs and their 'real' selves:

> In such cases, being true to the display rules is being true to oneself – even if one is not currently feeling the display rules …. inauthenticity serves the cause of authenticity (p. 191).

Conclusion

Critical management scholars, whether drawing inspiration from labour process theory, psychoanalytic perspectives or post-structuralism, have traditionally been suspicious of organisational controls that target employees' self-perceptions and self-management, depicting it as oppressive, totalising and capable of robbing individuals of their autonomy. More recently, these

views have been challenged by analysts who claim that newer forms of control are not so effective after all, and that employees still maintain considerable discretion over the selves that they enact at work. To date, however, the debate has largely been polarised, as theorists have adopted *a priori* positions vis-à-vis the nature of both selves and organisational controls. This paper has been an attempt to explore some middle ground, to see if a more open-ended conceptualisation of both the self and the nature of control can add some nuance to our critiques of organisational power.

The threefold model of the self proposed by Harré is useful for this purpose because it facilitates analysis of the different ways that people construct and manipulate salient aspects of themselves within regimes of control. The inclusion of self 2, as a discursive space in which to locate what people believe and say about their 'real' selves, allows us to remain faithful to the narratives of employees, in which such a self is often invoked (Costas and Fleming, 2007). Notwithstanding postmodern scepticism regarding the notion of a 'real' self, people still produce and narrate degrees of 'realness' and fakeness' as they enact themselves at work, in response to organisational demands. These qualities of selfhood are not just abstract intellectualisations, but often viscerally felt. Without acknowledging this visceral aspect, it would be difficult to account for the discomforts reported by employees have to fake 'too much', or whose fake selves are too far removed from what the 'real' self believes in. These discomforts are in turn, linked to deep normative expectations that we hold regarding the production of selves. As viable, responsible persons, we are expected to produce and sustain more or less 'real' or 'genuine' selves, and to show some allegiance to these selves amidst the performances that constitute organisational life.

By interpreting critiques of organisational control through the lens of the threefold self and the normative expectations that surround it, it becomes clear that concerns about too much commitment and too much acting both revolve around the robustness of self 2. Regimes that seek to nullify and absorb it into the organisational purpose, or that interfere with its viability and expression by

requiring ‘too much’ enactment of dissonant selves 3, imperil the self as whole. Where controls cross the line into these dangerous territories is impossible to specify. Employees who can escape controls in backstage areas have more chance of sustaining and enacting viable selves 2, as do those who have extensive connections with trusted and familiar generalised others with whom they can ‘be themselves’. Organisational regimes that tolerate idiosyncrasies and dissent may also be less destructive to the self. Narrating and enacting a robust self 2 does not, however, mean that we are returning to the notion of a stable, essential, unified self. Rather, we are recognising that there is a discursive space from which individuals can evaluate, resist and adapt, a space in which to enact a ‘protean’ self (Lifton 1993). While complexity and multiplicity of selfhood can undoubtedly generate tension and anxiety, it can be also be enabling and productive. The difference seems to lie in the degree to which the narrative that holds the selves together is able to sustain that imaginary, elusive, yet seemingly necessary and nourishing illusion – the ‘real’ self.

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[1] There are complications and unanswered questions associated with the scheme, such as: - How do the contents of self 2 (one's beliefs about oneself) come to be known? Do one's private thoughts and beliefs about self presentations 'belong' in self 2 or in self 3? To what extent do verbal avowals of the 'real' self 'belong' in self 2, and to what extent are they manifestations of self 3 Harre (1998) discusses some of the complexities and conundrums associated with his scheme on pp. 90-92, 135 – 141.

[2] There is no widely accepted definition of the term 'cult'. Indeed, there is a large and fascinating literature on 'cults', or 'new religious movements', as some commentators prefer to call them, variously excoriating or defending them on the grounds of religious freedom. See Singer and Lalich (1995), West and Martin (1994) and Zablocki and Robbons (2001). Controversies over the status and methods of these groups are beyond the scope of this article. Their relevance for present purposes lies in the fact that a minority of these groups manifest what most people would agree is an extreme and harmful form of organizational control.

[3] Writers who philosophise about autonomy and authenticity find links between them. Both concepts implicate a reflexivity that produces an 'inner voice' that is self-directing and self-creative, and not merely an uncritical reproduction of discourses gleaned from generalised others. See Stoljar (2001) and Rössler (2002).