

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE COLLOQUIALISM, "A REAL JOB": IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

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This study of the colloquialism, "a real job," challenges previous assumptions about work socialization. It extends theoretical approaches by situating the stage model of work socialization within a larger context of communication. In the current study, college students explain the meaning of the colloquialism by writing personal narratives. An interpretive analysis probes the ontology of work and the political socializing nature of the colloquialism.

Occupational choice is fundamental to the continuity and existence of society (Caplow, 1954, p. 18). Its relation to how cultures organize the modes of production or how the modes of production reflect occupational choice is critical to the maintenance of a particular social order. Of course, modes of production have varied historically and cross-culturally. Why and how these variations exist and change have been the matters of philosophical debate for centuries (e.g., see Adam Smith, 1776/1937 or Karl Marx, 1844/1983). Yet, questions remain unanswered—questions concerning the ontology and ideology of labor and others concerning the socialization and organization of work. Contemporary scholars continue to investigate work socialization and "explore the social constraints placed upon individuals in this choice process" (Dunkerley, 1975, p. 2).

One area of study, as yet to be explored fully by socialization researchers, is how everyday discourse reflects and creates occupational order in society. Everyday discourse includes a variety of communicative forms (e.g., conversations, stories, ritual exchanges). The study reported herein focused on one of these forms, the colloquialism, and how it functions in the work socialization process.

STAGE MODELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Sociologists, under the rubric of work socialization; framed questions about the work choice process in terms of stage models as early as the 1950s (e.g., Miller & Form, 1951 as cited in Dunkerley, 1975). Although stage models have been useful in understanding the process by which individuals move toward certain occupational choices and assimilation (Brown, 1985; Feldman, 1976; Fisher, 1986; Jablin, 1984, 1987; Louis, 1980; Pribble, 1990; Van Maanen, 1975, 1978, 1979; Wanous, 1977), they have been challenged for their limitations (see Bullis, 1993; Smith & Turner, 1993). For example, Dunkerley (1975) argues that:

The assumption . . . is that career in various occupations is largely an automatic process which is determined by formal stages, with specific internal and external constraints. . . . A large number of cases exist, however, where there are not specifically defined stages in the career process. (p. 25)

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Dunkerley (1975) calls for an investigation of occupational ideology and status as influential in the occupational choice process. His work attempts to break down the bifurcation between work and non-work in suggesting that occupational ideology permeates all aspects of an individual's life.

Giddens (1979) expands criticisms of the stage model of socialization in his call for researchers "to overcome traditional dualisms of subject and object" (p. 120) by recognizing socialization as dynamic interaction. Most research in this area "does not go far enough if it simply refers to the continuity or temporality of the life course. For this still treats 'society' as a static or finished order, rather than recognising the *mutuality of time-process*, linking the life course to the inherent temporality of social reproduction" (p. 129). Furthermore, Giddens suggests that one cannot even speak of "*the process of socialisation*, except very loosely" (p. 129), because it too readily leads to socialization's being viewed as a standardized process, when, in fact, it is mutually constituted.

McPhee (1986) challenges work socialization models for their "emphasis on accommodation of interests and mutual influence [that] ignores an overwhelming imbalance of power between individual and organization, as well as hegemony" (p. 2). McPhee does not limit socialization to the confines of organizations, nor to the general perception of anticipatory socialization as merely a means to occupational choice. "[S]ocialization processes cannot be valid without recognition of socialization's place in the whole world system" (p. 1). We must take into account (1) the historical and evolutionary aspects of work, (2) the political aspects of class division and domination, (3) the variety of roles, companies, and industries, as well as nationally and culturally, plus (4) "the range of roles of a human/worker in society" (p. 1). McPhee calls for a "radical model" that extends beyond the "organizational career" model, . . . [and beyond] organization-serving work taken as a given" (p. 2).

Cheney (1987) argues that the term *socialization* organizes the ideological contradiction between individualism and conformity. *Socialization* allows for the existence of the individual, but privileges the organization. Researchers must take care when they speak of "the socialized" or even "socialization," as this terminology supports "an ideological framework which paradoxically exalts the individual while promoting social control" (p. 18). Cheney calls for researchers to challenge accepted and promoted meanings of socialization for the hidden assumptions embedded within it.

More recently, Turner (1992) and Smith and Turner (1995) challenge stage models for their explicit and implicit assumptions that lead to viewing the work-choice process through a "container" metaphor. Specifically, they argue that current research into the subject of work socialization reifies the status of organization by privileging the organization and generally marginalizing the individual. Even if this privileging is overcome and researchers focus on individualization, they establish an artificial bifurcation between the individual and the organizational socialization process (Smith & Turner, 1995).

The previous criticisms have been directed at the stage model as a whole, especially with regard to the excessive emphasis the model places on *the organization*; however, less attention has been given to the implicit assumption that each stage contributes individually to creating an organization emphasis. For example, anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 1987) devalues non-organizational work. Specifically, to categorize work, labor, or jobs¹ that are performed prior to organizational assimila-

tion as *anticipatory* suggests that any work prior to organizational work is preparatory in nature (i.e., it is not *real* work; rather, this anticipatory work prepares one for *real* work). Therefore, anticipatory socialization as it relates to the discursive construction of a *real job* is given special attention in this study.

The second stage, assimilation, has been defined as "the process by which an individual becomes integrated into the 'reality' or culture of an organization" (Jablin, 1987, p. 693). Once again the emphasis on *the organization* is apparent. The organization emphasis marginalizes workers who are not employed by what is considered a legitimate organization (e.g., women working at home, artists, musicians, etc.).

The third stage is exit. Exit refers to "job/organizational disengagement" (Jablin, 1987, p. 717). By including the term, *job*, the emphasis on *the organization* is lessened and allows researchers to investigate marginalized work. Nevertheless, as Jablin notes, "[C]ommunication scholars have been remiss in studying organizational disengagement" (p. 717). They have focused on those variables that are directly linked to *the organization* and they find exit difficult to interpret. Here *the organization* emphasis re-surfaces. Although valuable information can be garnered from this approach, it promotes an emphasis on *the organization* and limits our understanding of communication to a variable analytic framework.

Finally, the stage model portrays socialization as cyclical in nature. As Jablin (1987) explains, "[T]he knowledge, skills, and experiences they collect through any one cycle will incrementally become a part of their anticipatory socialization for subsequent cycles" (p. 725). Portraying socialization as cyclical is advantageous, in that it leads researchers to view the process as dynamic. However, it does not lead them to ask why we view the work as anticipatory in the first place. Emphasis is placed on real work (i.e., anticipating it, achieving it, and leaving it) yet, where the notion of *real job* comes from and what a *real job* means in contemporary society has not been reckoned with by organizational-socialization communication scholars.

The purpose of this study was *not* to negate the stage-model approach to the study of organizational socialization. Studies using this model have provided useful information about the phenomenon. Nor was the purpose of this study to challenge findings concerning the various components of the stage model; rather, the purpose was to present an alternative rendering of work socialization that highlights the role of communication in the construction of the meaning and practices of work. By addressing the socio-political nature of the colloquialism, "a real job," we can gain more knowledge about the work-choice process and the occupational ordering of society.

This communicative approach allows researchers to ask questions that are not limited by the constraints of the stage models; for example, How does the colloquialism reify the concept of *anticipatory socialization* as a category that relegates numerous forms of labor, work, and jobs to a marginalized position in society? Questions of this sort position the stage model within a larger context of communication and provide an alternative frame that acknowledges communication as constitutive of socialization. This approach, moreover, is responsive to the call for alternative ways of understanding work socialization (Bullis, 1993; Deetz, 1992; Giddens, 1979; Smith, 1990; Smith & Turner, 1995; Willis, 1977).

One way to advance our understanding of work socialization is to explore specific forms of communication that are related to the work socialization process. This

investigation examined the implications of the colloquialism, a real job, for understanding socialization. The colloquialism was selected as the specific form of speech because of its unique ability to carry the dominant ideology through everyday discourse.

COLLOQUIALISMS

Colloquialisms are informal and familiar speech forms that have the status of cliché. Perleman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) characterize the cliché as "the result of an agreement as to the way of expressing a fact, a value, a connection between phenomena, or relationship between people. There are poetical clichés and political clichés" (p. 165) that can be challenged linguistically (i.e., there is a better way to say this) and ideologically (i.e., the reader/listener does not agree with the reified meanings embedded in the cliché). The latter is pertinent to the study of organizational socialization.

Stereotyped formulae, such as the colloquialism, can be considered *maxims* that

not only condense the wisdom of the nations—they are also one of the most effective means of promoting this wisdom and causing it to develop. . . . It is true that a maxim can always be rejected, that the agreement it calls forth is never compulsory, but so great is its force, so great the presumption of agreement attaching to it, that one must have weighty reasons for rejecting it . . . and of the consequences it involves. (pp. 165–166)

Lyotard (1979/1984) asserts that "they [popular sayings, proverbs, and maxims] are like little splinters of potential narratives, or molds of old ones, which have continued to circulate on certain levels of the contemporary social edifice" and remind us to "*never forget*" (p. 22). As Geertz (1974/1983) notes, "People use experience-near concepts spontaneously, unselfconsciously, as it were colloquially; they do not . . . recognize that there are any 'concepts' involved at all" (p. 56). In further support of this notion, Anthony (1977) writes: "To regard an outlook as being generally expressed in clichés is not simply to criticize it, however, for the status of a cliché may be the mark of an ascendent ideology" (p. 9). In short, there is agreement that the colloquialism is powerful in its ability to offer a reified reality (also see Bateson, 1972; Cheney, 1986; Stahl, 1989; Stohl, 1986).

Although scholars agree that a colloquialism may represent and enact an ideology, a systematic empirical investigation of the relationship heretofore has not been undertaken. This study investigated the political nature and socializing functions of one colloquialism, a real job. Specifically, it addressed the characteristics that constitute a real job, whether individuals perceive it in a static or dynamic way, and whether they adhere to a uniform definition of the expression or have multiple perspectives. An interpretive analysis was employed to determine whether the colloquialism of interest functions as a socializing message, and if so, how.

THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

Rhetorical arguments about the ontology of labor have been waged throughout western civilization. Arguments often present support for the prevailing social construction of labor within a specific socio-economic system or challenge that perspective. For example, the rhetoric of Karl Marx clearly challenged the prevailing definitions of labor as set forth by Adam Smith. Each philosopher implies an essentialist perspective (i.e., they argue that they can define or name the essential

nature of labor). To the contrary, I argue that the ontology of labor is communicatively created and historically grounded (for discussions of ontological relativity, see Quine, 1969; Schiappa, 1993). Therefore, what constitutes "real labor," "real work," or "a real job" is communicatively constructed and may reflect, create, support, or challenge the dominant work ideology.

Arguments suggesting that the colloquialism carries the dominant ideology in a seemingly subtle, innocent, and taken-for-granted way, are questioned in respect to the colloquialism, a real job. The dominant work-related ideology in practice in the United States is that of capitalism. The tenets of capitalism, and more central to this study, the tenets of valuable labor have been enunciated by Adam Smith (1776/1937) in his famous work, *The Wealth of Nations*. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to review the ideological underpinnings of capitalism fully, Smith's views of valuable labor and his explanation of the inequalities of occupations are pertinent.

Specifically, Smith argues that jobs are less valued when they are (1) enjoyable, (2) easy or nonskilled, (3) temporary or unstable, (4) have low probability of success (5) require little trust, (6) are not conducted in their natural time (e.g., a soldier in war time versus a soldier in peace time), (7) underutilize the worker in terms of duration and intensity, and (8) are not the primary means of support. Furthermore, Smith suggests that organizations with respectable long-lasting reputations contribute to a higher work status for the workers. The following study of students' personal narratives about their encounters with the expression, "a real job," assesses whether the colloquialism will demonstrate the characteristics of valuable labor as set forth by Adam Smith and a reliance on "legitimate" organizations.

SOCIALIZATION AND THE COLLOQUIALISM

On the basis of the theoretical perspectives advanced in this essay, I argue that the rhetoric of the past (e.g., Adam Smith's treatise) is embedded within everyday discourse (e.g., the colloquialism). Furthermore, this discourse produces meanings and practices that constitute organizational structure and activities. I suggest that everyday discourse produces a meaning system that acts to socialize or control people (e.g., through the occupational choice process) by supporting one dominant meaning of work to the marginalization of other meanings (e.g., Deetz, 1992; Foucault, 1976/1978; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mumby, 1993). Thus, the meaning and value of work is relative and communicatively created. In addition, organizational activities (e.g., occupational choice) reproduce certain forms of communication. Thus, as Smith (1993) and Smith and Turner (1995) argue, socialization is co-produced through organization and communication.

Although everyday discourse is exemplified by a variety of forms of talk, I have selected the colloquialism to explore work socialization as a discursive and co-productive process. The colloquialism, as discussed previously in this essay, is related to the proverb and acts as a condensed narrative (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Both proverbs and narratives have been the focus of socialization studies. Narratives have been explored for their ability to carry the dominant ideology in a socializing capacity (Mumby, 1987). Similar to the proverb, memorable messages carry political implications as they socialize workers (Stohl, 1986). However, both the narrative and the memorable message tend to have an identifiable source to which the listener can affix authorial responsibility. To the contrary, Arewa and Dundes (1964) argue that "proverbs may serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication"

(p. 70). The authors suggest that when parents use proverbs to socialize their children, "The guilt or responsibility for directing the child is projected on to the anonymous past, the anonymous folk" (p. 70).

Colloquialisms may provide more anonymity than proverbs. Colloquialisms do not call on the ancient wisdom of ancestors; rather, they exist as taken-for-granted realities. Giddens (1979) suggests that taken-for-granted discourses reify the ideological status quo. Other colloquial phrases, such as, "time is money" or "money does not grow on trees," may act in a reifying and socializing manner; however, "a real job" seems to be most related to the meaning of work and occupational choice, which are the central concerns of this study.

On the basis of the supposed anonymity of the colloquialism and its taken-for-granted status, I address three general questions: (1) What are the characteristics of a real job?; (2) Who is attributed as the source of the colloquialism as a socializing agent?; and (3) Do alternative meanings of the colloquialism exist beyond those associated with the dominant ideology? After exploring these issues, I conduct an interpretive analysis of how the colloquialism functions as a means of defining work and as a socializing activity that produces, reproduces, or challenges the current occupational ordering of society.

THE REAL WORLD, A REAL JOB, AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Thirty-four college students enrolled in communication courses participated in the current study.² Although college students, compared to non-college students, may have distinctly different views as to what constitutes a real job, their selection for this study was based on the notion that educational systems (e.g., universities) have been thought of as outside the real world yet are a place where individuals are prepared for life in the real world.³ As such, students may be unfairly categorized as being in an anticipatory stage and receive no credit for the work they do as students because either their activities are directly related to learning or represent part-time or full-time employment that supplements or covers in full their tuition and living expenses. Students have undoubtedly worked during the course of their lives (when work is defined in broad terms), but the stage model is likely to view them as being in preparation for an organizational job. Presumably, they should be more than familiar with the colloquialism, "a real job."

All students enrolled in two small classes (16 of 21 at a rural university and 18 of 24 students at an urban university) received extra credit for participating in the project. Each student was asked to recall a recent or salient time when he or she encountered the phrase, "a real job." The students were told that the encounters could reflect their telling someone else to get a real job, someone else's telling them to get a real job, or any other set of circumstances in which they heard or used the phrase. If students had never encountered the phrase, they were instructed to write a one-page essay on their career aspirations. Participants wrote or typed the essays outside class and returned them within one week. The students' essays were reproduced exactly as the participants wrote them.

From a review of the essays, it was clear that all students participating were familiar with the colloquialism. The phrase is common in our society, as the following responses suggest:

I've been asked this question at least a hundred times by people who think that a 9 to 5 job is the only job to have.

"When are you going to get a real job," that question's been thrown up to me more times than I can count.

I have encountered the saying "get a real job" several hundred times.

Owen (1984) argues that interpretive thematic analysis is especially well suited to studies that require an open analysis that does not impose a unit of analysis. An exploration of the meanings embedded within the colloquialism exemplifies this concern. Thus, Owen's rationale for a thematic analysis is appropriate for the present study. Owen suggests that three criteria be present in order to establish a theme: "(1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness" (p. 275). *Recurrence* and *repetition* are employed to answer the first three questions that concern the characteristics, source, and alternative meanings of the colloquialism. *Forcefulness* is integral to the interpretive analysis that follows the discussion of the first three questions.

Following the procedures set forth by Rawlins (1983a, 1983b), all narratives were read several times to ensure familiarity. Each was summarized on note cards with special emphasis on the characteristics used to describe a real job and whether the student's story reflected an objective single perspective on the ontology of work or whether alternative perceptions were apparent. The characteristics were categorized by means of the typification procedures suggested by Owen (1984) and followed by his suggestions for thematic analysis. These two forms of preliminary analysis served to provide answers to three basic questions: 1) What are the characteristics of a real job?; 2) Who is telling whom to get a real job?; 3) Do alternative meanings of a real job exist?

The characteristics of "a real job" were content analyzed by the author and two trained coders. The "characteristics" analysis was selected for coding because the characteristics are fundamental to the interpretive analysis, and they seemed to be the most complex in terms of quantity and overlapping meanings. First, the author read and coded all narratives according both to a general and specific category system. The general category system was divided into two classifications: 1) What is a real job?; 2) What is not a real job? The specific category system grouped similar characteristics under separate headings. A trained coder read 25 of the 34 narratives and categorized the characteristics. An interrater reliability of .89 was achieved. The same 25 narratives were given to a second trained coder. The interrater reliability between the author and the second rater was .92. These estimates were based on a Cronbach's alpha. In addition, ten randomly selected narratives were recoded by the first trained coder and the author. This analysis was subjected to additional statistical analysis to address the possibility of chance agreement. A Kappa of .78 was achieved.

CHARACTERISTICS OF REAL JOBS

Characteristics of a Real Job

Most of the personal narratives contained a listing of characteristics (usually independent of one another) that define a real job. These characteristics could be placed into one of two general categories: (1) what a real job is and (2) what a real job is not. Several characteristics could be collapsed into one. For instance, one person characterized a real job as one that requires one to pay taxes, while another respondent wrote that real jobs are not getting "paid under the table." Furthermore, several people said a real job results in "adequate" or "above minimum wage" pay, whereas others said that a real job is not low paying. The results of the first

TABLE 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF WHAT A REAL JOB IS

Characteristic	Frequency of Report
money	18
utilizing education or potential	8
enjoyable	8
standard 40 hr work week, 8 hr day	7
advancement	5
reputable company	4
pay taxes	3
nonrepetitive work	3
satisfaction and self-fulfilling	3
medical benefits	3
recognition	2
own office, desk, or phone	2
status	2
report to someone else	2
manual labor	2
with a business corporation	1
offers enjoyment to others	1
autonomy of decision-making	1
paid vacation	1
sick leave	1
belonging	1
being your own boss	1
student	1
something you get after graduation	1
helping others	1
doing God's will	1
where you make a difference	1

categorization indicated that money is the dominant characteristic of real jobs ($n = 18$), followed by utilization of education or skills ($n = 8$), and enjoyableness ($n = 8$). Close behind was the view that real jobs are worked during the day for eight hours, with a total work week of 40 hours ($n = 7$) (see Table 1). In describing what a real job is not, respondents reported that real jobs are not associated with poor management ($n = 3$), and management does not abuse subordinates ($n = 4$). Contrary to the previous list, three respondents indicated that real jobs are not "enjoyable" (see Table 2).

The vast majority of accounts fit within Adam Smith's (1776/1937) description's of labor, and most accounts implied that a valuable job in a capitalist socio-economic system means either producing goods or being employed by an organization.

A ski instructor was told that he did not hold a real job. Although this work requires great skill, it was marginalized. Consistent with Smith's philosophy of work, the ski instructor's job can be considered seasonal, recreational or easy, and not requiring the education of the respondent. Most importantly, those who criticized the student pointed out that the work is "enjoyable."

A student who felt it was his duty to point out the failure of his friend to hold a real job revealed a reliance on several of Adam Smith's criteria.

John has a four year degree. . . . To date, John has not had a job that could *utilize his degree*. He was going to start his own hauling business [*a spur of the moment idea*]. The only experience he has had was driving a snow plow truck for the city . . . on a *part-time basis*. I asked John, "When are you going to get a real job and *use your education*." [He doesn't] want to work for anybody else. I told him

TABLE 2
CHARACTERISTICS OF WHAT A REAL JOB IS NOT

Characteristic	Frequency of Report
where people mistreat subordinates	4
where poor management techniques are used	3
enjoyable	3
outdoor work	1
volunteer	2
easy to find if you are a liberal arts major	1
being a student	1
part-time or seasonal	2
with a family-owned business	1
spur of the moment entrepreneurship	1
having to deal with rude clientele	1

that the only jobs he ever looks for or gets are of the nature [that] *requires no skills* or *higher educational levels*. There is nothing wrong with this fact, but John is *capable of much more*. [emphasis added]

Most students wrote that a real job "pays well" (six figures was suggested), holds the possibility of "advancement," includes being a part of "management," allows for "independence" and "your own office," is "full-time," and is "40 hours" with "benefits" and with a "reputable company." Full-time work, as characterized above, fits Adam Smith's criteria that work should be both the primary source of income and not be of a temporary nature. These characteristics reflect an emphasis on performing services for someone else.

Volunteer organizations and organizations with lower prestige or legitimacy are not perceived as offering real jobs. For example, a respondent was told that volunteer work did not constitute a real job, and she was persuaded to give up her dream of joining the Peace Corps. Another respondent asked her ex-manager when he was going to get a real job for two reasons: (1) working in fast-food management is not real work and (2) the particular organization had a reputation of low quality. One respondent reported that his friend did not have a real job because he worked for a relative in a family-owned business, had not been promoted, and was, therefore, unable to earn enough money to support his wife.

Most of the students linked their real jobs to working for organizations that paid at the very least "adequate and fair remuneration." The only non-paying job described as real by the respondents was being a student. Only two students reported being a student as having a job.

Although the vast majority of accounts reflect the capitalist rhetoric of Adam Smith and an unquestioning acceptance of organizational jobs, exceptions did exist.

Alternative Meanings to a Real Job

Whether or not the respondents acknowledged the existence of alternative meanings of a real job was assessed by creating and assigning responses to one or the other categories of rejecting or accepting alternative meanings of a real job. The broad category, rejects alternatives, included several subcategories: (1) there was no mention of any alternative characteristic of a real job other than the meaning espoused by the respondent ($n = 8$); (2) the respondent incorporated a new characteristic into his/her construct of a real job ($n = 1$); (3) the respondent noted that

different jobs are real to different people, but this is grounded in the dominant ideology and based on the notion that some people are less skilled or educated, or some organizations are of inferior quality ($n = 10$); (4) the respondent accepted that alternatives have been proposed, but they are either wrong, "odd," or "crazy" ($n = 4$); and (5) the respondent recognized that alternatives exist but preferred the dominant discourse ($n = 4$). Twenty-seven respondents promoted the dominant discourse.

Narratives reflecting alternative realities were placed in two categories: (1) the respondent accepted alternatives ($n = 6$), or (2) the respondent rejected the notion of a real job altogether ($n = 1$). Of those accepting alternatives, five of the six held minority views about what constitutes a real job. In other words, if a student currently held that a real job need not fit with Adam Smith's criteria, then he or she was more likely to suggest that what is a real job for the participant might not be a real job for someone else. The person who rejected the notion entirely considered real jobs an "illusion."

The following respondent complained about her current employment situation and expressed an awareness of the social construction of work:

Even though I know in all actuality that my job is a "real" job, I often find myself complaining with two other co-workers that we need to get a "real" job. I work retail, [she] dislikes upper management's treatment of employees, long work weeks without any sort of return (especially monetary), and . . . rudeness of the consumer. I think it is very different for people who have not had the same experience and look at retailers as some sort of servants to the public.

The respondent acknowledged that the concept of a real job is "all a frame of mind," but also argued that society plays a major role in determining what work should be "glamorize[d]" and what work should be "belittle[d]." The respondent concluded by writing, "It is almost as if we are slaves to the whims of society."

Another respondent reported working at numerous jobs in "factories, nursing homes, fast food joints, and even a massage parlor" (to name only few of the jobs the respondent listed), but preferred "painting, wallpapering, and basic home remodeling" because it allowed her to "set my own hours," not pay taxes, and make excellent "money" while determining how long she would work as well as, what kind of work she would perform. She preferred not to work at another's "beck and call."

Another respondent questioned the dominant view of a real job when she said, "Getting a Real Job is not an aspiration of mine, at least not as far as a Real Job may be defined these days." She acknowledged the dominant discourse and selected an alternative view. Recently, she realized that she was attending college "to please my family." She added that some college classes were helpful, but not necessary to obtaining work-related goals, which included (1) to be "happy" and (2) to have a job "that I can deem as God's will for me, where I am helping others, (because I tend to look upon those in need and want desperately to make a change)." The respondent was currently employed at a home for disabled children. She found the pressure of holding a marginal, alternative view of a real job to be stressful and depressing:

[M]y work at [the children's hospital] . . . is a wonderful offering of myself, . . . but few appreciate it as that (even the kids!), few understand and even fewer could give a shit (excuse me) by their Real Job standards. Down comes my self worth again. My Real Job doesn't "measure up".

Another respondent explained how difficult it was for her to hold views that

challenged the dominant definition of a real job:

At the time I took this position, eight years ago, the women I knew in my "situation"—married, uppermiddle-class, with two kids—really didn't "have" to work. My then-husband lost his job. . . . I knew that we definitely could not make it if I didn't work. However, my friends assumed I was merely taking up another hobby [-] . . . mother hen to an aging priest. . . . I was constantly being asked . . . when I was going to get a "real" job.

She went on to say that she found the job "important" and "demanding" and that she became "very tired of defending" herself and "apologizing" for the work she did. The pressure eventually led her to get a real job (by society's standards) as a legal secretary for a large corporate law firm in a big industrial city. Yet, she found herself missing the "'real' contribution" she made at the "little church."

The respondent is currently working at a job she feels is a compromise between the dominant discourse of a real job and her own alternative view:

I now work in a two-man law firm, with a small office and multitudinous responsibilities. They treat me kindly and with respect, they seem to care about my opinions, and they even credit me with having a fairly good brain. So maybe I finally have it—a "real job."

This respondent considers her own views to be marginalized alternatives that she must defend. Her friends seem to support a more industrialized version of what constitutes a real job (i.e., a large law-firm in an industrial city).

Employment of a dubious nature was not supported under any formal rhetoric of work, nor was it promoted by the students. As one student suggested, her brother did not have a real job because he was "paid under the table, . . . never paid competitive wages . . . [and] my brother's employers looked like they were escaped convicts." The student tells a story of her mother's "frantically hiding all our valuables" because her brother's boss was coming to the house. Unethical or illegal work may represent some of the most marginalized jobs.

Artists and musicians are also placed at the periphery of society with respect to real jobs. The view of Adam Smith is quite clear, as he lists artists with buffoons and others who contribute only marginally to the production of goods. One student wrote about a friend of hers who did not have a real job. "All he ever wants to do is make up music & [sic] play it," she wrote.

Although isolating the characteristics that constitute a real job and determining the multiplicity of perspectives is useful, it fails to reveal the functions of the colloquialism in relation to work socialization. Earlier, I suggested that the colloquialism acts in a socializing capacity that may provide an understanding of work socialization that extends beyond the traditional stage model. Thus, the following interpretive analysis begins by addressing the colloquialism, a real job, as a means of socializing. How this extends beyond the stage model approach and its relation to the ontology/ideology of work are discussed at a later point.

DIRECTION OF THE SOCIALIZING MESSAGE

Looking at the author/listener aspects of the stories relayed in the students' essays demonstrates that socializing is not a simple linear activity, with the dominant group's telling those to be socialized what is a real job; rather, those to be socialized are also actively engaged in the socializing of self and others. However, the most prevalent relations demonstrated that others were telling the participants to get a real

job. For example, a student wrote:

I must look for that Real Job, with my degree and everything. It's scary, and I am pressured from peers, my parents, and myself, and somehow I just don't feel prepared.

Fathers were singled out as pointing out the value of having a real job, sometimes as early as adolescence. The following story depicts early socialization into what constitutes "a real job":

When I used to be a paper girl (ages 12-14), my father explained to me that soon I'd be getting a Real Job, and for my age (15) I did in fast food. My jobs afterwards progressed to waitressing, and again I discussed a Real Job (when I'd graduate from college someday).

Fathers continue to influence their children as they move into young adulthood, as the following story depicts:

My family and I were eating dinner in a restaurant, talking about school, graduation, future plans. My sister has her life mapped out to the letter. . . . She is in computers. . . . Then there is me, a liberal arts major, a senior, graduating soon with no clear plans. My father after listening to my sister, says [to me] "When are you going to limit down your career goals and decide on a real job?"

Friends also commonly engaged in the socializing tactic of telling students to get a real job. The following examples show how pervasive this communication activity is:

About five years ago a friend of mine asked me when was I going to get a real job. He did so because the job I had at the time was something enjoyable to him.

However, my "friends" assumed I was merely taking up another hobby.

We had gotten rather close and all was well until one day she asked me when I was going to get a real job.

Even current supervisors participated in telling the respondents to get a real job, as one essayist noted:

After having given me my performance appraisal, my supervisor asked me what my goals for the future were. I explained that at that time I was unsure of what I wanted to do. My supervisor then told me that she couldn't see me staying in the position I was presently in. I had too much potential and I was wasting it on a go nowhere job. She encouraged me to go back to school and get a Career instead of just a job.

Another respondent wrote that her supervisor was "dumbfounded" when she told her of her interest in joining the Peace Corp. The supervisor said:

You've put in four long years of hard work to become a successful business person out there in the corporate world. Why would you want to throw it all away to go live in Africa with a bunch of illiterate natives? You need to graduate and get a *real job*!

Coworkers also participated in the real job dialogue, as the following excerpts reveal.

This past summer I could not find an internship and so I was forced to work at a nursery up in Wisconsin. . . . One male employee who also worked at the nursery asked why, if I was a college student, didn't I have a real job for the summer.

Even though I know in all actuality that my job is a "real" job, I often find myself complaining along with other co-workers that we need to get a "real" job.

Sometimes the respondents seemed to be telling themselves to get a real job

before anyone else could. For instance:

I worked for . . . a landscaper. . . . I really enjoyed working outside. . . . In spite of my enjoyment for this job, when new employees would ask about my job history . . . I would tell them that I was only working here to finance my education and would only landscape until I got a "real job". . . .

I imagine it doesn't speak well of me since I remained with this company [the respondent describes a company with poorly run management] for some fourteen years before opting to take severance pay. I don't deny that I was hiding out in this position but at no time was I ever duped into believing that I had a real job.

Students were not always on the defensive with respect to their career or job choices; often they were advising someone else to get a real job or listening to friends who wanted a real job. Several examples illustrate the point:

I was talking to a manager who I used to work for [in a restaurant which is a] cross between dine in and fast food and has a somewhat better image than that of a typical fast food joint but is not as nice as most dine in restaurants. Anyway . . . I asked him how much longer he was going to be there. I immediately felt bad because . . . this was his "ultimate job" and he was happy with it.

A couple of summers ago I asked my best friend when he was going to get a real job. He was working at a [family owned] gas station and not making that much money.

The last time I had a conversation like this was with my friend Greg. All he ever wants to do is make up music & [sic] play it. I asked him when he was going to get a real job.

My friend Linda spent her summer this year working in a factory. . . . When I spoke to her on the phone . . . she kept repeating to me her need "to get a real job."

Sometime ago when a friend of mine worked at a Sohio station she was asked why she couldn't get a "real" job. . . . She answered, . . . "this job is as real as they come." [Although she] ignored the comment [at first], . . . she did think about changing her career expectations. She graduated from college and got a "real" job, she is currently not satisfied. She believes that a "real" job, is only an illusion mainly because there is so much more to life then [sic] a job.

After my brother's boss left, I had a [sic] argument with my brother. I told him I could not wait until he got a real job. . . .

I felt compelled to push this issue. . . . [I]t was my duty as his friend. . . . To a certain degree I was trying to make him feel guilty. . . . I was trying to motivate him to find a normal job. As John was leaving he told me since summer time was just around the corner that he was thinking of starting "a basketball shooting booth" at all the carnivals. . . . My mature response was "get a real job."

Essays on the colloquialism suggest that the socializing capacity of the phrase, "a real job," is not restricted to people in authority telling the respondents to get a real job. The respondents evidenced both author and listener roles. They participated in telling others to get a real job. Furthermore, the socializing influence of the colloquialism is neither static nor linear. The *dynamic socializing function* of the colloquialism is at times persuasive and at other times, or for other people, is a source of *tension and resistance*.

THE SOCIALIZING FUNCTIONS OF THE COLLOQUIALISM, A REAL JOB

The critical interpretation of the essays addresses two themes drawn from the preliminary analysis: (1) the dynamics of the colloquialism and (2) the tensions reflected in the narratives as well as resistance to the colloquialism as a socializing message.

Dynamics

Real jobs change in relation to context. That is, within the same socio-economic system, real jobs change over time for individuals. For example, several students

suggested the realness of the job changes with age (e.g., recall the paper-girl whose father told her she would have to get a real job as she grew older). Others suggested that a real job changed with education; for instance,

[A]s I became more and more educated I became more and more dissatisfied. . . . All the jobs that I have had in the past and at the present I wouldn't consider a real job, at this point in my life.

Some suggested that a real job changes with experience. The following example illustrates the point:

I hadn't thought about it, but I referred once to the drugstore as a "real job," now my next job (hopefully) after graduation, will be my "real job."

A real job evidences a sense of relativity, not only for the individual who views it changing over time, but also historically and across socio-economic systems. The construction of a real job, although relative, maintains a strong influence from the dominant ideology. That is, as a job's realness changes, for these college students, at least, it seems to move in a direction toward organizational, managerial, and more economically focused positions and away from part-time, seasonal, and unskilled positions.

Tensions and Resistance

The changing nature of a real job may be related to expressions of dissatisfaction with the current state of employment. This dissatisfaction may characterize the employed individual or others who want the individual to get a real job. In either case, tensions are apparent. For example, several students spoke of dissatisfaction as it relates to management:

Basically the upper management was looked upon as a joke because their policies or lack of as well as their mishandling of the personnel and their needs. The general manager . . . who would use street talk in most conversations and generally didn't appear to give a damn about the face of others. Consequently, he wasn't respected. . . . [T]his style had a rippling [sic] effect on the remainder of the management core.

It is this sort of incompetence [by management] that makes me think "I can hardly wait . . . until I get a real job."

A real job means . . . *not* on the bottom of the totem pole.

Dissatisfaction with a current job led several respondents to voice their desires for a real job. The concept of the real job waiting for them somewhere may serve as a coping mechanism for survival in a less than satisfactory position. A real job in this case provides a means to resist unpleasant working conditions. The expression reflects one's desire to acquire a more satisfying position and, thus, encourage people to explore other work alternatives. Another intriguing aspect of the expression, a real job, in coping with unsatisfactory conditions is that it defines the workplace and its problems as "unreal" and, therefore, as unchangeable. Defining one's job as not real allows employees to dismiss what they feel they cannot change.

Tensions produced by alienation are somewhat different from those produced by dissatisfaction. Alienated individuals are quite happy with their current employment but are ostracized in some way for those work choices. Resisting the dominant ideology can contribute to stress and depression. Furthermore, the depression induced by holding a marginalized job or wanting to hold a marginalized job can be nearly overwhelming. The student who works at the children's home continued her

personal narrative in the following way:

Oh, I've masked that aspiration by appearing to achieve what others expect, but in the process I've made my goal so much harder to reach. . . . I've neglected myself and my Real Job goal. Discouraged and lost, I don't know how long it will be before I achieve it, but when I do, perhaps I should add to my criteria . . . even though others may not agree . . . (one that takes more than a mere degree, one that says, "It's O.K. to be me. [sic])

The student is happy with her work but alienated by a society that frowns upon her choice of work activities.

Many students said that when they held jobs that were not considered real by society's standards, they felt compelled to justify why they were working in this type of position even though they often enjoyed the work. Examples of the justifications included telling people: "that I was only working here to finance my education," "I began to feel obligated to offer them explanations," and "that I have no choice" [and, this respondent added,] "deep-down I was really upset with myself because I did not tell them the truth." These students resist the dominant socialization but suffer the tension of living a lie.

Tension surrounding the colloquialism, a real job, was not isolated to one individual or one group of individuals. The tensions extended into class divisions as well. Class distinctions are evident in the use of the expression, a real job. Some of the respondents reported a fear of infringing on the real jobs of other people. For example, a student working as an assistant pharmacist wanted to continue college and get a real job. He said that he "had to be careful who I say this in front of because for many people working at the drugstore (clerks, . . .) this is their real job." Combined resentment from unskilled laborers and resulting diplomacy were evident in other accounts about working in factories, landscaping, and food service. One student said in referring to a fellow landscaper, "I guess he felt that I was in some way infringing on his job and he felt threatened by this." In reference to his co-workers, another said, "[They] would think I was stuck-up if I flaunted my hopes for a "real job" in front of them. I guess I don't really talk about my work future with them at all."

THE ORGANIZATION EMPHASIS

These narratives suggest that college educated individuals comprise a class whose members do not "belong" in unskilled labor positions and "should not" take jobs away from unskilled laborers. Thus, the colloquialism generally acts not only as a form of occupational socializing, but also in a specific way that reinforces class distinctions. Narratives imply that blue collar workers resist college educated individuals who participate in unskilled and semi-skilled positions.

Finally, it should be noted that most students sought positions with organizations and demonstrated little or no tension or resistance to the dominant view of a real job. For the college students participating in this study, the most common characteristic of a real job is money, followed by utilizing education, being enjoyable and working a standard 40-hour week, or 8-hour days, not including nights or weekends. Approximately 77% of the narratives alluded to working for organizations either explicitly (by name) or implicitly (e.g., wanting a bi-weekly pay check, advancement, or reporting to others). Together, these characteristics imply that a real job means working for an organization and being paid well for one's work. As such, the

opposite of a real job is not working for an organization. Nonorganization affiliated jobs ranged from artist/musician to solo-entrepreneur. These occupational choices were generally frowned on.

Even within the category of organizational job, distinctions of privilege and status surfaced. Some organizational jobs are considered less than real. For example, jobs that are performed during odd hours (second and third shift), unskilled and semiskilled labor, and most service oriented jobs (be it restaurant management, clerking, or caring for disabled children) are often devalued in the students' accounts of what constitutes a real job. Furthermore, the organization itself reflects on the realness of the job. Working for non-profit organizations, less reputable companies, smaller companies, or family-owned businesses affects the realness of the job and may contribute to tension surrounding issues of socialization. Recall, for example, the student who wanted to join the Peace Corps, but was persuaded not to because working for the Peace Corps does not represent a real job. The implications of this organization emphasis and its relation to challenges set forth concerning the stage models are discussed in the concluding comments that follow.

IDEOLOGY/ONTOLOGY OF WORK

The ubiquitous aspect of organizations has resulted in a proliferation of theory and research focusing on work as if it exists only *within* or *related to* "legitimized" organizations. Recent challenges to this view suggest that to privilege the organization unnecessarily confines the unit of analysis, restricts alternative modes of reasoning (Smith, 1990), and limits the research questions that we ask (Perrow, 1986). The pragmatic consequences of an organization approach to the study of socialization are twofold: (1) certain segments of the population (e.g., interest groups or individuals) and the work they perform are marginalized at best and negated at worst, and (2) communication disguises alternative work realities limiting the work choices of individuals. Thus, the narratives support two positions: (1) The ontology of labor is communicatively constructed, and (2) These communicative practices have implications for occupational choice and work socialization.

The results of this study suggest that most of the college students who participated in this project recognize a real job as organizationally bound and guided primarily by the criteria set forth in the ideology of work provided by Adam Smith. Although a few exceptions exist, students holding marginalized views in this study felt displaced. Most of the them have a uniformly fixed notion of what a real job is, and when alternatives exist, they described them as "crazy." Although this study was limited by a small selective sample, it provides a starting point for further analysis. Furthermore, it has several theoretical implications.

First, scholars have questioned the value of stage models to study the process of work socialization. Specifically, Bullis (1993) suggests that, "In socialization research, the organization is constructed as synonymous with society, the interactive tensions emphasized, and the broader societal implications of socialization are obscured" (p. 13). Bullis (1993) recommends that we challenge the assumptions of phasic approaches, the focus on outcomes, acceptance of limited boundaries of organizations, and the lack of investigating discursive formations in relation to socialization.

This study supports the criticisms, especially that an ideology is embedded within the stage-model approach (Cheney, 1987; Dunkerley, 1975; Giddens, 1979; McPhee,

1986) and that it relies on a container metaphor (Smith & Turner, 1993). The division of socialization into three stages (i.e., anticipatory, assimilation-encounter and metamorphosis, and exit) suggests that individuals *anticipate* real jobs, which implies that their current work activities are not real (e.g., being a student, paper-carrier, working part-time, etc.). Furthermore, work carried out in addition to an *organizational* job is marginalized. Consequently, the stage models argue that one cannot *enter into* a real job until he or she has participated in unreal jobs, which devalues the work activities of numerous people. Specifically, college students are placed into the anticipatory stage as defined by the traditional stage model.

Second, the results of this study suggest that relegating students to an anticipatory stage devalues their present work, whether that be their educational activities or other activities that require their active, sustained efforts. Furthermore, with respect to entering and exiting organizations, workers who are retired may be past their ability to participate in a real job, at least according to the prevailing student definitions of a real job. This devaluation of retired workers supports capitalist arguments, especially as defined by Adam Smith (i.e., individuals are not as important as the labor they perform). Their labor is easily evaluated in an industrial system, and if one is not working for an organization that is legitimated through capitalist discourse, then he or she is devalued in society. Without a doubt, we are living in an organizational society (Cheney, 1991). The stage model of socialization may be useful in understanding socialization *into organizations*, but it fails to provide a full picture of work socialization and promotes an organizationally driven ideology.

Third, the stage model leads researchers away from understanding work activities and occupational choice as communicative practices. It would be wise for organizational communication scholars to recognize "the organization" as only one aspect of organizational communication and the communicative organizing of work as another aspect. Smith (1990, 1993) argues that the relationship between organizing and communicating is co-productive. This study lends some support to that notion and suggests that socialization should be treated as complex expressive practices that include grand rhetorical arguments (e.g., the rhetoric of Adam Smith), as well as everyday discourse (e.g., the colloquialism).

ENDNOTES

¹The terms *labor*, *work*, and *job* are distinguished in the following way: Labor is defined as "hard work," work is defined as "expenditure of energy, striving, application of effort or exertion to a purpose," job in its noun form is defined as the "product of work," and in its verb form it is defined as to "do jobs" (see *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1982, 7th ed J.B. Sykes (Ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press). Nevertheless, I use the terms somewhat interchangeably and allow the reader to make his/her own assumptions as well as the students who re-express the colloquialism, a real job.

²Over 100 additional narratives have been collected from a variety of students, including students in Mexico City attending Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Campus Estado de México (my thanks to Prof. Giancarlo Soler Torrijos), including Lakota Indian women studying nursing in South Dakota (My thanks to Sr. Mary Thomas and Sr. Donata), as well as African-American college students in the midwestern United States (My thanks to Chrystal Struben). These narratives will be used in future studies exploring ethnicity and descriptions of a real job. In addition, numerous college classes participated in this project as part of a learning experience (My thanks to Tricia Hansen).

³This "preparation" has not gone without criticism (Anthony, 1977). As Deetz (1992) suggests: "The rather strange linguistic attribution of realness to the work world and abstraction to the educational one, inscribed in everyday talk and work experiences, performs clear political functions. . . . Rarely do such terms as *practical* or *real* signify anything other than employment concerns, [and these concerns] align extraordinarily well with corporate knowledge practices" (pp. 28-29). As such, college students represent a unique group of people being socialized and socializing others with respect to the dominant ideology concerning what constitutes a real job.

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