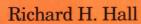


WORK

Perspectives, Analyses, and Issues

















Sociology of Work

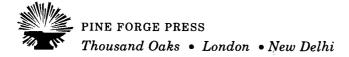
PERSPECTIVES, ANALYSES, AND ISSUES

Richard H. Hall

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, ALBANY

With contributions by Robert T. Buttram

A. B. FREEMAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, TULANE UNIVERSITY



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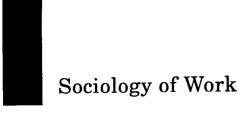
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This book is dedicated to my students

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Preface

In the United States and in other post-industrial societies (as sociologist Daniel Bell named them), few realms of human activity are more central to human existence than the work we, and others, do. Not only do most of us spend the majority of our time first preparing for work and then working, but the very meaning of our existences as well as the identities that we attach to ourselves are inextricably linked to our work. How many of us, for example, after meeting someone for the first time, seek to establish an identity for that person by asking "what do you do?" or "what's your major?" or some other work-related question? And how do our impressions of others change once we know their occupations and we interpret them through our own socially constructed view of the world?

The work of others is equally important to our lives. Even for the most independent among us, the way we live is dependent on the labor of thousands, even millions of others, not just in the workforce of our own society, but from many quarters of the globe. To cite one common example, think about the considerable workforce and the complex, interconnected tasks that are involved in bringing us a television program that we turn on and ordinarily take for granted. Actors, actresses, and stand-ins; directors and producers; camera crews and sound technicians; writers and editors; make-up artists and drama coaches; publicists and agents; lawyers and financiers all comprise a mere fraction of the complex labor network involved. Beyond the people creating and marketing the program, consider the other groups involved in bringing it to our attention. Who manufactured the various parts of our television set and where were the parts made? (Probably several

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countries). Where were the components of our television assembled and by whom? (Perhaps a different workforce in another country). Who was involved in shipping the television to its location of purchase? What people and organizations were involved in getting the program's electronic signal delivered to the set? Regardless of our stations or inclinations in life, our lives are inextricably bound to the activities and roles of the world's labor force.

The Sociological Perspective

Sociology assumes a constantly changing, reciprocal relationship between individuals and the society we have created. Sociological research into the nature of work, therefore, addresses a number of fundamental questions related to the ways in which individuals view and shape their labor and how the institution of work, in turn, shapes us and other aspects of our social lives. A random selection of a few of those questions include: Why do some organizations (be they schools, offices, or factories) create more value with less material resources at their disposal than others? Why are most physicians and dentists in Russia today women, whereas these medical professions are occupied primarily by men in the United States? Why, contrary to the principles of economics, do women earn less than men for the same work in almost all of the world's societies? Why does a high school or college diploma get a person a better job than someone with the same amount of education but no diploma? Why is the work in a society unequally distributed among its members along boundaries marked by gender, race, and social class? Are these inequalities changing and if so, how and in what directions? Under what conditions (if any) does the division of household work within a family become equally shared between couples? Are jobs becoming more routinized and less satisfying for the people who perform them or is the opposite taking place in our society? The process of finding reliable answers to these and other such questions is what makes the sociology of work so fascinating.

Problems in Teaching the Undergraduate Course

Research into such questions (produced by sociologists as well as labor economists, industrial psychologists, historians, anthropologists, and others) produces a vast and disparate literature and therein lies a dilemma in teaching the subject effectively to undergraduate students. On the one hand, most sociologists would like to teach a first course that fairly represents and introduces the field as a whole. But because the sociology of work is so broad and the types of questions asked are at such different levels of analysis, the textbooks currently available to support such an approach tend to be descriptive surveys of the various subfields and therefore have an unfortunate tendency to leave students with a forgettable assortment of facts about seemingly random topics. At the other end of the teaching spectrum, undergraduate students can get more explanatory power and acquaintance with theory from a sociology of work course by reading a variety of excellent research monographs such as Rosabeth Kanter's Men and Women of the Corporation, Arlie Hoschild's The Managed Heart or Robert Jackall's Moral Mazes. But this approach has its limitations as well. Undergraduates often have a difficult time mastering such works thoroughly and relating the ideas to the course as a whole. My own teaching experience suggests that assigning one or two of these monographs is highly worthwhile, but I still feel the need to accompany them with a text that provides my students with an effective foundation for the course as a whole. I want my students to have a view of the entire field (vast and jumbled though it may be), what the important perspectives are, and how these various "lenses" can often be profitably used in combination with one another to analyze and interpret.

Rationale for This Text

The content of this book is rooted in an earlier book, *Dimensions* of Work, that I wrote a number of years ago, but has been entirely

rewritten with the needs of the undergraduate sociology of work course in mind. I have specifically written this text so that instructors can adopt flexibly its use and steer their course in the direction of their choice. The book provides a current, clear, and representative account of the many important studies comprising the sociology of work field. At the same time, the book is sufficiently short and economically priced so that it can be used in addition to a variety of other monographs in the field. Moreover, the text is not merely descriptive; the various chapters of the book provide different dimensions or "lenses" that students can use to interpret and analyze the work issues that interest them most.

Chapter 3, for example, looks at work from the individual's perspective: how do people create meaning in their work and derive satisfaction from their jobs? Chapter 4 looks at the classic relationship between social status and work, and the various explanations for this relationship. Chapter 5 provides another interesting way to see how society values different forms of work by looking at job content and labor market perspectives. The next three chapters study age, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion and ways in which these socially constructed variables shape the structure of work and how we experience it. The final group of chapters on the organizational dimension of work, power, and work and family issues provide additional lenses at the macroscopic level that examine how work is structured and experienced. A concluding chapter explores the relationship between the book's various perspectives on work and the global, social forces that affect it as well as the workplaces and work issues that students are likely to experience early in our next century.

Sociological Interpretations of Work and Workplace Issues

In my experience, one of the most difficult teaching assignments in an undergraduate course is making the literature of the field (which is highly abstract and dry) meaningful to students. Throughout this book, I have tried to do this in the same way I do in my teaching, by turning the literature back onto students' personal experience of work and the concerns they have about their futures. To amplify this quality in my text, Robert T. Buttram from the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University has written special application essays at the end of each chapter. These are excellent extended examples illustrating how the dimensions or "lenses" in each of the chapters can be used to enrich our understanding of a work or workplace issue that concerns us all.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank a group of people who have made major contributions to this project. As noted, the applications at the end of each chapter were written by Robert T. Buttram of the A. B. Freeman School of Business, Tulane University. I thank him sincerely for his work. In addition, I hope that you find simple and direct writing in these chapters. My manuscript editor Becky Smith has gone over each page and clarified matters or forced me to clarify them. She has been completely helpful and supportive. Susan McKie and Chiara Huddleston of Pine Forge Press have been particularly helpful in the evolution of this book from first draft to finished chapters. I also owe particular thanks to Michelle "Missy" Tillapaugh for her willingness to pitch in at a moment's notice on some project that had nothing to do with her role as Secretary to the Dean. She has been great. Steve Rutter of Pine Forge Press has been the rudder for this entire operation. He has pushed and prodded and nudged and shoved toward revision and completion. He has always done it in a gracious and supportive way. I am grateful to him.

Finally, I want to thank my wife Sherry for her good cheer and support. I try very hard not to take my work home, but she can tell when I am worried and frustrated. She makes me the opposite.

Richard H. Hall

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